



SWASHBUCKLERS OF THE 7 SKIES

by Chad Underkoffler

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About the PDQ# System

The rules in this book have a foundation in the original *Prose Descriptive Qualities (PDQ) System*, the core game mechanics for previous Atomic Sock Monkey Press games like *Dead Inside: the Roleplaying Game of Loss & Redemption (DI)*; *Monkey, Ninja, Pirate, Robot: the Roleplaying Game (MNPR:RPG)*; *Truth & Justice (T&J)*; and *The Zorcerer of Zo (ZoZ)*. However, they have been extensively modified and redesigned for swashbuckling games.

PDQ Sharp (PDQ#) has been streamlined for simplicity, speed, and flexibility, while aiming for evocative, dramatic, and action-packed play. *PDQ#* is available as a free download of the core rules of *S7S*, with the setting-specific rules and material removed, making it a general swashbuckling game-engine. It can be downloaded from the following URLs:

<http://www.atomicsockmonkey.com/freebies/PDQ.pdf>

http://www.rpgnow.com/product_info.php?products_id=58424

About Atomic Sock Monkey Press

<http://www.atomicsockmonkey.com/>

Atomic Sock Monkey Press is dedicated to high-quality, off-kilter, imaginative fun. ASMP publishes tabletop roleplaying games (RPGs). Check out the following webpages on the site for *S7S* resources and downloads:

<http://www.7skies.net/>

<http://www.atomicsockmonkey.com/products/s7s.asp>

<http://www.atomicsockmonkey.com/freebies.asp>

About Evil Hat Productions

Evil Hat Productions believes that passion makes the best games.

This game is one of them.

<http://www.evilhat.com/>

Contents

Playtesters & Peer Reviewers	iii
<i>Local Playtesters</i>	iii
<i>S7S Yahoo Group Playtesters</i>	iii
<i>Dreamation 2008 Playtesters</i>	iii
<i>Gen Con 2008 Playtesters</i>	iii
<i>Peer Reviewers & Special Thanks</i>	iii
About the PDQ# System	iv
About Atomic Sock Monkey Press	iv
About Evil Hat Productions	iv
Introduction	viii
<i>Convuluted S7S History</i>	viii

CHAPTER 1

THE WORLD OF THE 7 SKIES

The World	.4
<i>The Layers of the Dome & the Winds</i>	5
<i>The Sun, the Moon, & the Stars</i>	6
<i>The Mysterious Blue</i>	6
The 7 Skies	.8
<i>The Mists</i>	9
<i>The Jungle Sky</i>	10
<i>The Sky of Thunder</i>	13
<i>The Sky of Stones</i>	15
<i>The Ghost Sky</i>	17
<i>The Sky of Frost</i>	18
<i>The Sky of Fire</i>	20
Cloud-Islands	21
<i>The Major Cloud-Islands, In Brief</i>	22
<i>Minor Cloud-Islands, In Brief</i>	24

CHAPTER 2

ISLAND NATIONS OF THE 7 SKIES

Barathi, The Empire Of Intrigue	27
<i>What Barathi Is Like</i>	27
<i>Barathi History in Brief</i>	29
<i>How Barathi Is Ruled</i>	29
<i>What the Barathi Are Like</i>	31
<i>What's Happening Now On Barathi?</i>	33
Viridia, The Alliance of the Mighty	34
<i>What Viridia Is Like</i>	34
<i>Viridia History in Brief</i>	36
<i>How Viridia Is Ruled</i>	37
<i>What the Viridese Are Like</i>	38

<i>What's Happening Now On Viridia?</i>	41
Colrona, The Island Of Love & Honor	42
<i>What Colrona Is Like</i>	42
<i>Colronan History in Brief</i>	43
The Kingdom of Colrona	44
<i>How the Kingdom of Colrona Is Ruled</i>	45
<i>What the Royalists Are Like</i>	46
<i>What's Happening Now In the Kingdom?</i>	48
The Zultanate of Colrona	49
<i>How the Zultanate of Colrona Is Ruled</i>	51
<i>What the Zultanistas Are Like</i>	52
<i>What's Happening Now In the Zultanate?</i>	54
Crail, the Crossroads of the World	57
<i>What Crail Is Like</i>	57
<i>Crailese History in Brief</i>	58
<i>How Crail Is Ruled</i>	59
<i>What the Crailese Are Like</i>	61
<i>What's Happening Now On Crail?</i>	63
Ilwuz, The Island Of Mystery	64
<i>What Ilwuz Is Like</i>	64
<i>Ilwuzi History in Brief</i>	66
<i>How Ilwuz Is Ruled</i>	66
<i>What the Ilwuzi Are Like</i>	68
<i>What's Happening Now On Ilwuz?</i>	70
Sha Ka Ruq, The Savage Island	71
<i>What Sha Ka Ruq Is Like</i>	71
<i>Sha-Ku History in Brief</i>	72
<i>How Sha Ka Ruq Is Ruled</i>	72
<i>What the Sha-Ku Are Like</i>	74
<i>What's Happening Now On Sha Ka Ruq?</i>	77
The Minor Cloud-Islands	78

CHAPTER 3

THE MYSTICAL & THE FAITHFUL

The Mystical	80
<i>Alchemy</i>	80
<i>The Gifted</i>	84
<i>The Koldun</i>	89
The Faithful	97
<i>The Church of Vaoz</i>	97
<i>Priestcraft</i>	99
<i>Popular Heresies of the World</i>	101

CHAPTER 4

SKYSHIPS, TRADE, & WARFARE

Skyships	104
<i>Skyships Proper</i>	104
<i>Cloudships</i>	108
<i>Gliders</i>	109
Skysailing	110
<i>Skysailing Maneuvers</i>	112
<i>Skysailors</i>	114
Travel Across the 7 Skies	117
<i>Surface Travel on a Cloud-Island</i>	117
<i>Inter-Island Travel Times</i>	117
<i>Making Port</i>	120
International Trade	122
Warfare in the 7 Skies	123
<i>Surface War</i>	123
<i>Sky War</i>	125
<i>Piracy & Privateering in the 7 Skies</i>	128

CHAPTER 5

S7S CHARACTERS

Elements of an S7S Character	132
<i>Fortes</i>	132
S7S Master Chart.	133
<i>Foibles</i>	137
<i>Techniques</i>	139
Common S7S Fortes.	142
<i>Acrobatics</i>	142
<i>Alchemy</i> *	142
<i>Aristocrat</i>	143
<i>Avokato</i> *	144
<i>Brethren of the Skull</i>	144
<i>Colronan Musketeer</i> §	145
<i>Colronan Sandman</i> §.	146
<i>Crailese Falcon</i>	146
<i>Fencing</i>	146
<i>Firearms</i>	148
<i>Gear: [X]</i>	149
<i>Gift: [X]</i> *	150
<i>Gunner</i>	151
<i>Imperial Spider</i> §	152
<i>Koldun</i> *	152
<i>Minions</i>	155
<i>Motivation</i> * †.	156
<i>Nationality: [X]</i> * †	157
<i>Organization: [X]</i>	158
<i>Past: [X]</i> †	158
<i>Pirate</i>	159

<i>Priest</i> *	159
<i>Profession: [X]</i>	160
<i>Repartee</i>	161
<i>Reputation</i>	161
<i>Rogue</i>	161
<i>Sanctum: [X]</i>	161
<i>Secret</i> *	162
<i>Sha-Ku Ruqrider</i> §	162
<i>Sidekick</i>	163
<i>Skysailor</i>	164
<i>Spy</i>	165
<i>Vehicle: [X]</i>	165
<i>Viridese Warmaster</i> §	168
<i>Wealthy</i>	168
<i>Wingman</i>	169
Style Dice	169
<i>Bowl vs. Box</i>	170
<i>Every Session</i>	170
<i>Good Form vs. Bad Form</i> (<i>Gaining Style Dice</i>)	171
<i>Changing the Odds (Using Style Dice)</i>	176
Training Points	180
<i>Gaining Training Points</i>	180
<i>Using Training Points</i>	180
<i>Ephemera</i>	183
Character Generation: Build an Adventurer	184
<i>Name</i>	185
<i>Core S7S Elements</i>	186
<i>Three Additional Fortes</i>	188
<i>Spend 5 “Technique Points” to Purchase</i> <i>Techniques</i>	190
<i>Style Dice & Training Points</i>	191
<i>Miscellany</i>	191
<i>Justifying Why the PCs are Together</i>	194
<i>Animals</i>	196
<i>Team Sanctums & Team Vehicles</i>	197

CHAPTER 6

CHALLENGES & DUELS

Challenges	200
<i>Difficulty Ranks</i>	204
<i>Challenge Results</i>	206
<i>Flashy Challenges</i>	208
Duels	209
<i>Duel Opponents</i>	210
<i>The Duel Itself</i>	211
Damage	222

<i>Failure Ranks</i>	222	Reminding PCs of Their Foibles	276
<i>Wound Ranks</i>	223	Modifying Player Narration	277
<i>Zeroing Out</i>	224	<i>For Rolls.</i>	277
<i>Recovering from Damage</i>	225	<i>For Style Dice Usage</i>	278
Vehicular Challenges & Duels	227	Awarding Style Dice,	
<i>Vehicular Challenges</i>	227	Training Points, & Ephemera.	279
<i>Vehicular Duels</i>	229	<i>Style Dice</i>	279
Story Hooks	240	<i>Training Points</i>	280
Example of Play	241	<i>Ephemera</i>	280
		Judging Bad Form.	281
		S7S Non-Player Characters (NPCs)	283
		<i>Minions</i>	283
		<i>Sidekicks</i>	284
		<i>Lieutenants.</i>	286
		<i>Heroes & Villains.</i>	288
		<i>Archvillains.</i>	294
		The Play's the Thing!	298
CHAPTER 7		CHAPTER 8	
GAMEMASTERING S7S		SWASHBUCKLING ADVENTURE	
<i>The Atomic Rule</i>	249	Swashbuckling Romances	300
Basic GMing Techniques	251	<i>Swashbuckling Settings</i>	301
Advanced GMing Techniques	252	Swashbuckling Tropes	303
<i>Only Roll When You Have To.</i>	252	<i>Action</i>	303
<i>Improvising.</i>	254	<i>Adventure</i>	305
Setting Details	258	<i>Heroism.</i>	307
<i>Focus Your Play</i>	258	<i>Intrigue</i>	310
Setting the Dials	261	<i>Romance</i>	311
Helping Players Create Characters	265	<i>Style</i>	312
<i>Talk About the Game Beforehand.</i>	265	<i>Villainy</i>	315
<i>Refining Choices During Character</i>		Bibliography	318
<i>Generation</i>	265	Filmography	320
<i>Using Story Hooks as Flashbacks</i>	266	Ludography.	322
Generating S7S NPCs	268		
Crafting S7S Scenes	269		
<i>Adventure Checklist</i>	269		
<i>Campaign Cartography (The Map of</i>			
<i>Scenes)</i>	270		
Assigning Difficulty Ranks to Challenges	273		
<i>Mystical Difficulty Ranks</i>	275		
Playing NPCs	276		

How to Use This Book

Chapters 1, 2, 3, and 4: *The 7 Skies Setting*, discussing the World, the major Cloud-Islands, the mystical and religious aspects of the World, and the details of skysailing.

Chapters 5 and 6: *Character Rules and Challenges & Duels*; the game mechanics of S7S.

Chapter 7: *Gamemastering S7S*, a wide-ranging discussion about how to run S7S games.

Chapter 8: *The Swashbuckling Genre*, a general discussion of what “swashbuckling” means, especially for RPGs.

Introduction

I love swashbuckling stories. Be they books or movies, I am *there*. Add in some mysticism, monsters, and magic, and I am even *more there*.

While I cut my teeth on Oz, Narnia, and Middle-Earth, when I hit my teens I was all about Neverland, Newhon, Melnibone, Florin & Guilder, and France (two flavors: *Sun King* and *Revolutionary*).

My tastes in swashbuckling action are fairly catholic—in that nearly any expression of stylish heroism gets filed in my mental rolodex as “swashbuckling.” D’Artagnan is swashbuckling. Luke Skywalker is swashbuckling. The Gray Mouser and Indiana Jones are swashbuckling. Sinbad and Wong Fei-hung are swashbuckling. Batman, Zorro, and Scaramouche are swashbuckling. Jack Burton and Flash Gordon are swashbuckling. And, yes, Malcolm Reynolds is swashbuckling.

Swashbuckling is all about style, drive, and wonder: swords flashing, witty quips tumbling from one’s lips, heroic and villainous actions on a large scale. Strike that: on a *widescreen* scale.

Swashbucklers of the 7 Skies (S7S) is my love-letter to every single book, film, or game that has given me that swashbuckling vibe. It’s a cinematic, storytelling game rather than a historical/reality-simulating game. It’s about the stories—the films and books. It is fat-packed with magical and exotic stuff. It is weird and wondrous and idiosyncratic.

I hope you dig it as much as I do.

ConvolutEd S7S History

The 7 Skies have been living in my head for a long time.

Swashbucklers of the 7 Skies (S7S) was intended to be the very first ASMP game published, as I dipped my toes into the small-press publishing pool. I started the playtesting of the first version of the game on the S7S Yahoo Group back in 2003 (not counting the proto-campaign that I ran under *GURPS* back in 1998), and started acquiring concept art.

Unfortunately, life intervened.

What was supposed to be the *first* ASMP game will now be the *fifth*.



Chapter 1

The World of the 7 Skies

Above the Blue, skyships ply the 7 Skies, soaring from cloud-island to cloud-island for adventure: conquest, espionage, trade, and piracy. Kingdoms clash, cultures collide, and secrets abound. Heroes and villains roam, both on and between islands, seeking wealth, power, revenge, and romance.

Will you be one of them?

Captain Pyotr Yvanson nodded as his crewman Otto finished lashing down the gigantic perch for his esteemed passenger's ruq. "That'll do, lad," he said after tugging on the crossbeam. "It's secure. Go below and get yourself a ration of grog."

"Aye, Cap'n," replied the skysailor, tugging at his forelock before he left.

Pyotr looked past the starboard rail of his skyship, *The Sparrow*, to see his passenger returning from exercising her gigantic flying mount. At first just a dot in the immense sky, the ruq quickly loomed larger. Soon, the ruqrider deftly brought her mount to a perfect landing on the new perch.

She leapt easily from the back of the ruq to land, barefooted, upon the deck. Xenia's clothing was all savage finery, brilliant colors, primitive, dangerous. She smiled, which only enhanced her beauty. "Is good, Captain Pyotr. Chimi like. This one am grateful."

"I am glad, Xenia. However, I am concerned that as we enter the Sky of Frost, your friend will be too cold. Are you sure the bird wouldn't be more comfortable belowdeck?"

"No, I think Chimi hate that. Better up in air, cold it be." Xenia pondered for a moment, then said, "Could you make tent, brazier of coals?"

Pyotr considered this. "I think that might be dangerous. Cloth, red-hot coals, and a pitching deck in a winter storm are not a good combination. However—" He looked forward, where his other passenger leaned against the figurehead, gazing into the distance. "Ho, wizard!" he cried.

Slowly, the other passenger turned to look back at him, the ruqrider, and the gigantic bird. Naku of the Dark's stare was decidedly unnerving. Shaking his head, the man made his way back to them as he spoke.

"Again, Captain, I must ask you to **not** refer to me as a 'wizard.' The correct term is koldun, a word of long history, spawned from an obscure Barathi dialect. I am not a village witch or hedge magician: I am koldun, many-blessed in the mystic arts." Naku turned to Xenia. "Greetings to you, ruqrider. Your flight went well?"

"Indeed!" laughed Xenia. "Chimi enjoys exercise. But Captain has concern."

"Yes," said Pyotr. "But first, my apologies, Naku. I meant no insult."

The koldun said, "...of the Dark. Do not neglect my epithet." But his manner indicated that Naku accepted the apology; he made a gesture indicating the captain should proceed.

Pyotr therefore proceeded. "I am concerned that our course takes us into the Sky of Frost, and since Xenia's pet will not go below, we were wondering if your arcane arts might protect the beast from the extreme chill that we will soon experience."

Naku rubbed his chin. "Intriguing." He walked around the ruq, peering this

way and that, making a full circle around the perching bird before speaking again. “An interesting application of my abilities. I believe I can keep him comfortable. But there is a price.”

“And what is that?” asked Xenia.

“Three feathers from his mighty person. Ruq feathers are useful in my arts.”

Xenia bit her lip. “Not cause him harm?”

Naku shook his head. “None, I assure you.”

“Done!” said Xenia.

“Capital!” said Naku. “I just need to get my chalks to mark the deck—that is acceptable, Captain?” he asked Pyotr.

Pyotr nodded. “So long as once we’re through the Frosts, I can get Fritz or Otto to clean up the deck.”

Naku said, “That shouldn’t be a problem. The chalk markings will be easily removed with the application of kelp oil, and a modicum of —”

In mid-sentence, the koldun’s voice died and his eyes went blank.

The skyship captain and the ruqrider looked at each other, puzzled, for the duration of the koldun’s distraction. It was only scant moments, but seemed somehow longer. The very air seemed to crackle, and then Naku cried out.

“Pirates! Sky-pirates have targeted us!” The koldun staggered to the port rail, shaking his head. “The Gift of the Merhorse permits sight beyond sight. And this sight has come upon me unbidden, indicating we are in great danger. Great danger from—” the koldun’s finger stabbed out, pointing high towards a wisp of cloud—“there!”

Pyotr whipped out the spyglass he kept in his belt, and studied the cloud that Naku had indicated. Through the powerful lenses, he detected a dark, moving object within its thin mists.

“Fritz, Otto!” Pyotr bellowed. “Battle stations!”

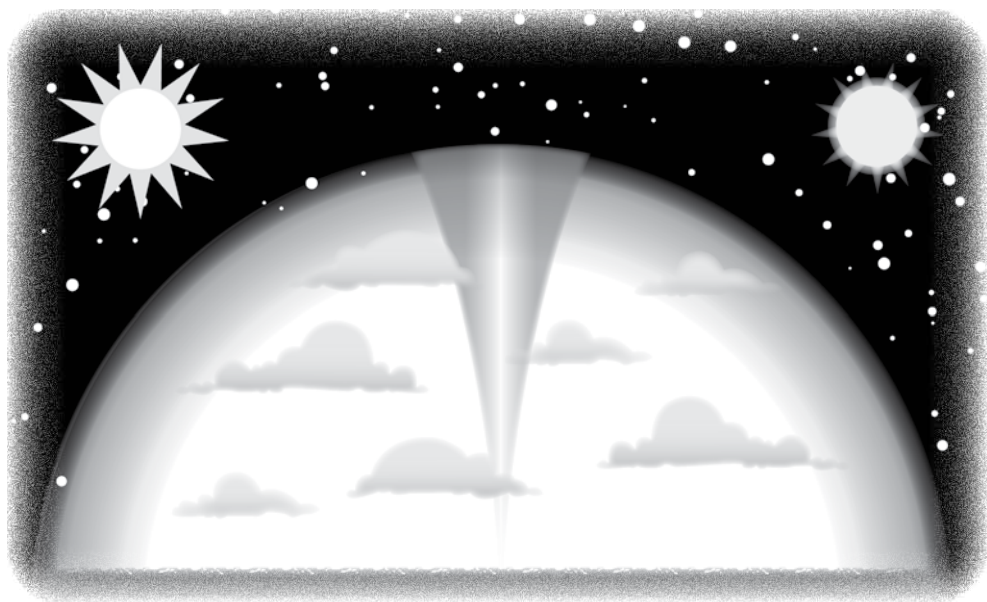
The two crewmembers scattered belowdecks at their captain’s order, to man The Sparrow’s cannon turrets.

Pyotr said to his passengers, “If it is pirates, we’d surely appreciate your help.”

“Yes! Fly to battle!” cried Xenia as she reached over to Chimi’s harness and retrieved a spear with a wickedly barbed head. Then she clambered up her ruq’s feathered side to remount.

Naku just nodded, and walked back to the figurehead of the ship, mystic energies crackling around him.

Pyotr smiled and bounded aft towards the wheelhouse. Those pirates had no idea what they were in for.



The World

The whole World is a hemisphere of sky called the *Dome of the Heavens*, with cloud-islands (and other things) floating within at varying levels (see *The Layers of the Dome & the Winds* below). In many ways, it is like a child's toy snowglobe, albeit one thousands of miles across.

No one has ever been able to cross the *Edge of the World* to enter the *Uttermost Night* that it floats in. Skyships, animals, plants, and objects simply. . . stop at the Edge (or so it is said). Many sages claim that the entire World is just one gigantic cloud-island floating in an even more titanic expanse of Sky.

The center of the Dome is filled with the conical vortex known as the *Sky of Fire*, a burning region of air difficult but not totally impossible to cross (for more details, see p. 20).

As a young lad, I left my family on Colrona and joined the crew of The Wishbird as cabin boy. It had always been my fondest dream to sail the Skies. More interesting than living and dying a peasant farmer on some aristocrat's land, I'll tell you.

For the three months, every day was a grueling litany- of tying knots, peeling potatoes, laundering the officer's clothes, scrubbing and holystoning the deck, repairing the sheets, climbing the shrouds, and learning some rudiments of

ship- and self-defense. But every night was a glory of stars, their names whispered to me by Old Griz, over the after-dinner songs of the daywatch crew as they relaxed and the conversations of the night watch as they kept The Wishbird flying her course.

— Captain Alexei Rostand, *Memoirs of a Sky Pirate*

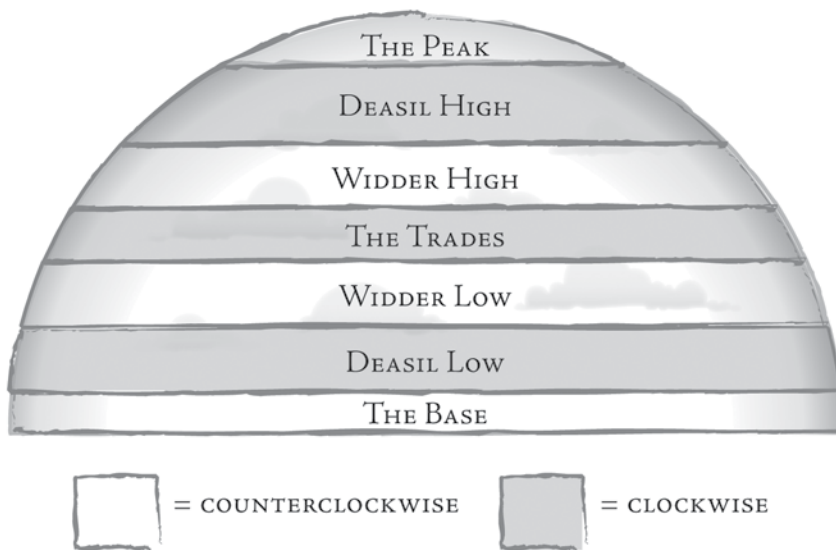


The Layers of the Dome & the Winds

The Dome of the Heavens has several *Layers* of winds stacked one atop the other; each Layer mostly blows in one direction, though the wind can shift for short periods of time. *The Base* and *the Peak* both blow counterclockwise, as do the *Widder Low* and the *Widder High*. *The Deasil Low* and the *Deasil High* blow clockwise. The boundary of wild winds between each Layer are called *cross-rips*.

Additionally, there are *sky-tides*, which are winds that blow from the center of the Dome to the Edge of the World and back. The tide that moves outward is called the *Fire Tide*; the tide that moves inward is called the *Utter Tide*.

For unknown reasons, the 7 Skies themselves move counterclockwise around the Dome. The individual Layers perturb these movements slightly within each Sky, but do not alter their stately procession.



The Sun, the Moon, & the Stars

The *Sun* and the *Moon* orbit the World. While they follow the perimeter of its Edge, they are definitely outside in the Uttermost Night. They travel different paths across the Dome, respectively called the *Solar Equator* and the *Lunar Equator*, and (seemingly) pass beneath the Blue every day. Both are thought to be about the size of one of the larger cloud-islands (some scholars claim they are cloud-islands in their own right, possibly with people living upon them!), and both give off light by unknown means. However, the Sun shines much brighter and hotter, while the Moon shines weak and cold. Furthermore the Moon waxes and wanes, brightening and dimming over a monthly cycle. When the Sun and the Moon are above the horizon, they have a dramatic effect on the Sky of Fire—causing it to become even hotter.

The *Stars* are small lights that twinkle far off in the Uttermost Night. (Sailors say the stars are gigantic gemstones set into the Edge of the World—but those are just yarns.) They are arranged into numerous constellations named after mystical beasts, aiding navigation for those who sail the Skies. The brightest star in the sky is *The Chameleon's Candle*—one of the eyes of the constellation of the Dragon—which cycles through the colors of the rainbow over a period of seven days.

As mentioned above, many of the deepest thinkers of the World—including the scholars of the Church and the mystical koldun—believe the stars to be other Worlds, with their own Suns and Moons, floating in the Uttermost Night.

The Chameleon's Candle is also known as "The Sailor's Friend" for two reasons. First, it is a steady and clear aid to navigation. Second, by tradition, the sailor who first sights a change in color and cries out "The Candle flickers!" is immediately entitled to an extra ration of grog, which is called "The Chameleon's Dram."

— **Jelissa Knott, First Mate of the Viridese trader *Black Turtle***

The Mysterious Blue

The bottom of the World—the base of the Dome—is the flat expanse of the mysterious *Blue*. The Blue is a soft, thick, viscous material—much like azure tar. Things (skyships, dead animals, detritus, castaways, even small islands) slowly sink into it, passing into the Unknown Skies (or the Uttermost Night?). Other things rise up out of the Blue into the 7 Skies: strange animals, weird plants, even new Cloud-islands.

Alchemists and koldun (see *Chapter 3*) gather this material, called *raw cerulean*, for their magical pursuits. Gathering it is a dangerous undertaking: sometimes

the mystical energies close to the Blue overwhelm them, their sorceries abandon them, strange beasts surface and attack them, or the Blue itself (so it is said) turns against them!

1

Below the Blue

Because of the Blue, exploration into the portion of the World below it (if there is any World below it!) has thus far proved impossible. Oh, sure, there are rumors of what lies beyond the Known Skies—verdant cloud-islands, lost civilizations, gems the size of a horse's head, and strange people—but no expedition into this mysterious region is known to have returned. (However, legends claim that airwhales pass between the two sides of the Blue regularly.)

Are there new Skies to be found Below the Blue? New islands? Nothing but the Uttermost Night?

Only a foolhardy, curious, or unlucky crew will know for sure, once they sink below the sticky cobalt haze.

Long ago—longer than any of you here have been alive—I watched the island of Dumaz vanish beneath the Blue. It had been a small island, colonized by the Barathi and covered with vineyards. My friend and lover, Melli—she who learned alongside me at my master's knee—remained, even after the rest of the colonists had fled. She wanted to see what lurked beneath the cerulean surface, and had wrought such tools and magics that she thought would protect her from the Blue if but for a few moments. She grinned as she asked me to wait for her return.

From my small skyship, I watched as Dumaz sank in the dawn light. I watched as Melli stood within her circles on the highest peak of the island. I watched as the Blue lapped up over her feet, her knees, her torso. I watched as she laughed, unconcerned. I watched her head leave a ripple as she descended. I watched her hand wave jauntily at me before it disappeared into the Blue.

I waited until sundown. She didn't return. I searched with all our arts—the Merhorse, the Basilisk, even the Dragon. The Blue itself lashed out at me, each time.

I waited a year, for naught.

Now the World is lacking the sweet wines of Dumaz and the tinkling laughter of my fair Melli.

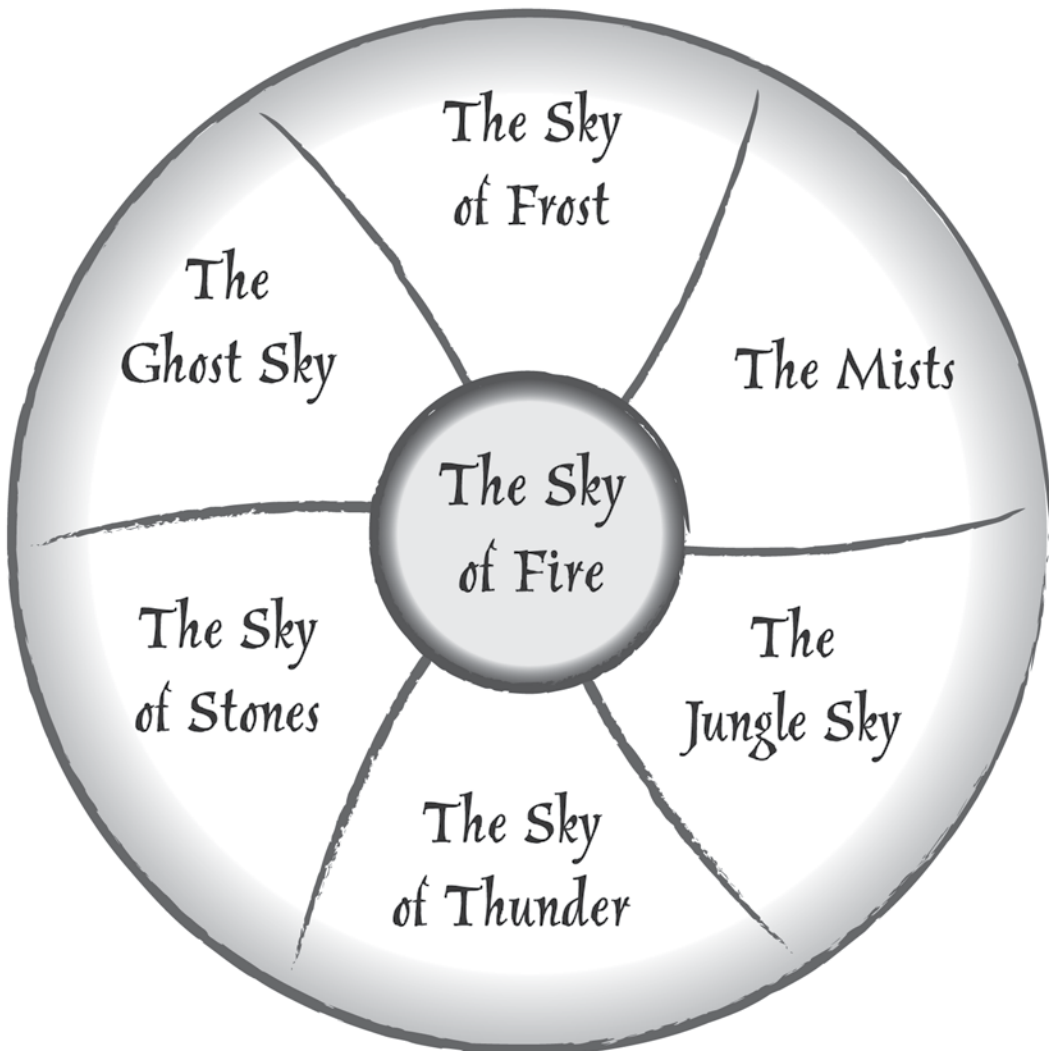
— Gold-Eyed Niko, Sha-Ku Koldun, before the Fraternity of Night

The 7 Skies

Within the Dome there are seven *Skies*, each with their own distinct nature. Each Sky marks a season of the year on the Cloud-Islands. Each Sky has strange flora, fauna, or inhabitants that are unique to them alone, rarely seen by the landbound. (Though there *are* aerial plants and animals that cross the borders of these Skies.)

The 7 Skies are fixed in position with regard to each other, but cycle counter-clock-wise across the various cloud-islands, giving rise to the four seasons of the year. It takes 60 days for a Sky to pass over an island. The Sky of Fire serves as the “hub” of this great wheel.

If standing on an island, a person will experience a long Spring (the Mists and the Jungle Sky), a short Summer (the Sky of Thunder), a long Autumn (the Sky of



Stones and the Ghost Sky), and a short Winter (The Sky of Frost) before the year starts anew. (In the 7 Skies, a year is 420 days.)



The skyships of many nations ply the 7 Skies, in peace and in war. Adventure traders haul desired goods from island to island, always seeking profit. Pirates haunt the common routes and are always a risk on a long journey. Strange beasts soar upon the winds, some dismissive of skyships, others slaving for the blood of skysailors.

The Mists

The Mists bring along the early spring. The warmer air of this Sky melts the snow and ice left behind by the Sky of Frost (see p. 18), creating thick, cottony fogs that never completely dissipate. However, vast clearings do appear in the Mists, huge cloudy bowls that are leagues across and deep, full of smaller clouds. Outside of these open spaces, travel through the Mists is slow and cautious, because its vapors cloak many hazards. These include:

- ◆ **Birds and Insects** familiar to island-dwellers.
- ◆ Varieties of **Balloon Flowers**, **Gold Vases**, and **Rainfish** similar to, but different from, those common to the Sky of Thunder (see p. 13).
- ◆ **Laments**: A type of wheeltree (see p. 10) like those in the Jungle Sky (see p. 10), laments are trees that have slim, flexible branches that form a sphere around its central trunk. (If one thinks of a wheeltree as being like an oak, then a lament is like a willow.) As it floats through the Mists, moisture beads along its slender branches and runs off in pattering streams (which skysailors call “the lament’s tears”). Laments usually are solitary, but sometimes appear in small globular groves of three to six entangled individuals. Bluewood (see textbox, p. 13) harvested from laments is thought (wrongly) to be inferior to that from proper wheeltrees due to the lament’s associations with sorrow and bad luck.
- ◆ **Misthopper**: Similar to the treehoppers of the Jungle Sky (see p. 10), misthoppers feed on the mats of vegetation known as zargazum (see below). They prefer humid air to dry air, and follow fogs and rain clouds. They make an eerie drone by rubbing their antennae together; scholars believe they use this buzzing to navigate through the Mists. Like treehoppers, they’re good eating, with a more subtle flavor.
- ◆ **Qilin**: It is said that the mythical qilin live within the Mists. If a skysailor manages to catch a glimpse of one before the creature vanishes, it is deemed

a sign of great good omen. Qilin are most often seen impossibly standing on the gauzy top of clouds, grazing on the vapors. Given their mystical ability to move without moving, traversing great distances in the blink of an eye, no qilin has ever been taken alive or dead.



◆ **Skysharks:** Horse-sized, arrow-shaped carnivores (little more than fanged mouths with wings), skysharks must constantly fly, hunt, kill, and consume prey (usually birds) to survive. They cannot land or perch on anything, as they have no legs. To a skysailor, a skyshark is proverbially fast, and is said to strike before one can hear the shriek of wind across their teeth.

◆ **Zargazum:** Drifting mats of tangled grasses that, like laments and wheeltrees, subsist on water, dust, or whatever they float into. Anything heavier than

a large bird or misthopper that attempts a landing on a mat—or attempts to push through one—risks becoming hopelessly entangled in the serrated blades and jagged thorns of zargazum. The plant is furthermore fire-resistant, and some alchemists and koldun collect it for this property.

I once came across a Barathi sloop completely snarled in a mat of zargazum. They'd befouled their masts, and most of their shrouds were completely entangled with the vines, so they were stuck fast, like a fly in a spider's web. And they'd been trapped like that from almost the moment they entered the Mists, two months ago.

It was the easiest prize I ever took—and the only one where they were dancing with joy as we boarded her.

— Captain Alexei Rostand, *Memoirs of a Sky Pirate*

The Jungle Sky

The Jungle Sky brings the increasing warmth of late spring.

Arguably, the Jungle Sky is the most important of the 7 Skies, because of the floating *wheeltrees* that give it its name. Wheeltrees are the primary source of the *bluewood* (see textbox) used to construct skyships.

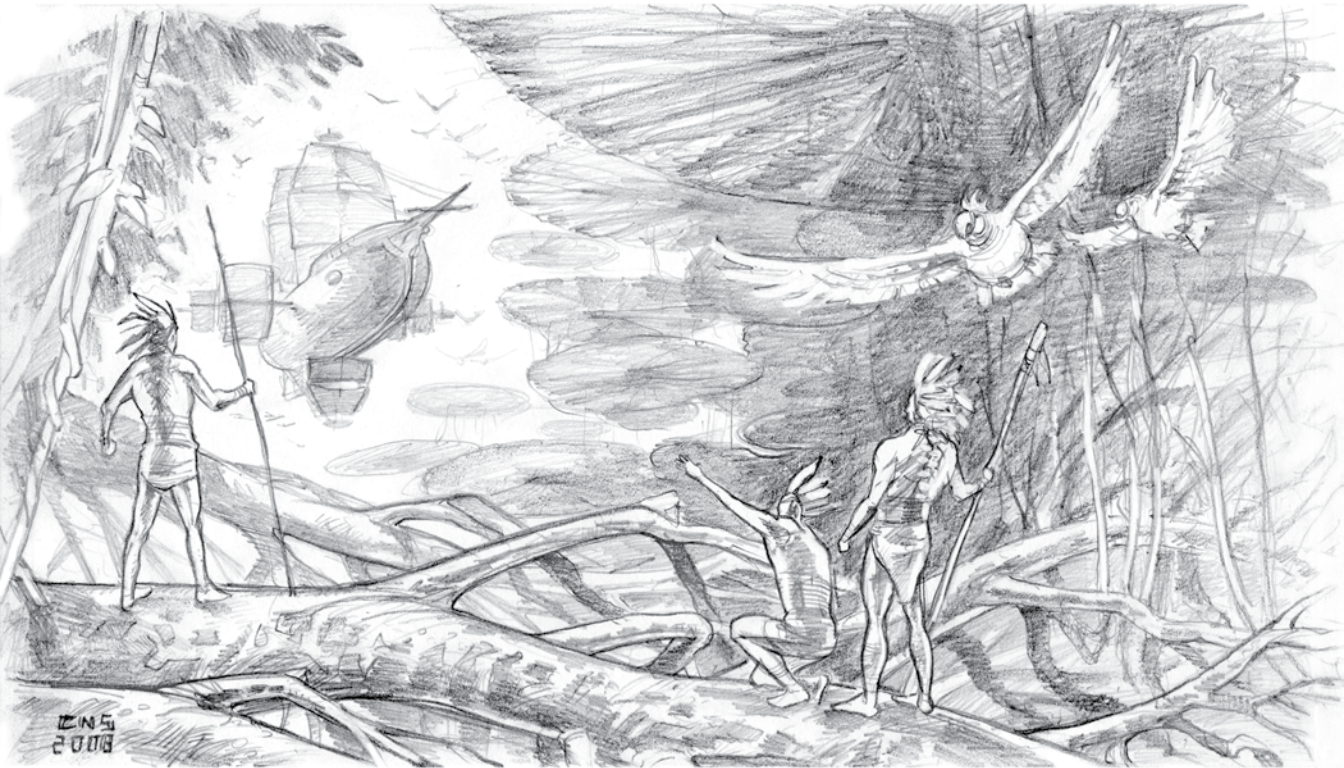
Composing much of the Jungle Sky, *wheeltrees* throw out numerous branches in a single plane from a central root node. They lazily spin, drawing in ambient moisture,

dust, debris, pollen, stray stones (and so forth); from this flotsam and jetsam they derive nutrition, and grow quickly from sprout to sapling. Some become the home of a perching animal, which adds the droppings and offal of these residents to their menu. Wheeltrees can grow extremely large, with yard-thick “spokes” stretching hundreds of feet.

Many varieties of wheeltree produce nuts or fruits; while both are edible, they often have interesting side-effects (such as indelible dyes, hallucinogenic properties, purgative qualities, completely stilling hunger, etc.). . . and are therefore much sought after by sybarites, apothecaries, alchemists, and koldun (see p. 89).

Wheeltrees often congregate into large “groves,” tangling with, feeding on, and growing into each other while collecting even more debris, other plants, pools or even small lakes of water, and varied sorts of animal life. There are many strange arboreal beasts that live within and between the oases of the drifting groves, including:

- ◆ **Birds, Bats, Cats, Insects, Rats, and Squirrels** familiar to island-dwellers.
- ◆ **Bluemen:** These savage people are thought to be barely more than beasts themselves, living a primitive lifestyle amongst the floating trees of the Jungle Sky. Their hair tends to be of bizarre colors—usually green or blue—though it is unknown if this is natural or a barbaric dyeing custom. They are always a nuisance, and often a threat, to travelers and lumbermen coming to harvest bluewood for their island’s shipyards. The bluemen are the reason there are few long-term logging camps situated in the Jungle Sky; eventually, they attack in force and drive off the lumbermen. Still, there are those who have found that the appropriate gifts of shiny beads and trinkets can go a long way with these arboreal aboriginals. (See also *Chapter 2, Sha Ka Ruq*, p. 71).
- ◆ **Kite-grubs:** While native to the Jungle Sky, these finger-length worms can be found in other Skies. They have a frilly “ruff” of membrane around their tails, which allows them to drift on the winds. When they come in contact with wood, they anchor themselves with their outer ring of sharp teeth, begin to grow a hard covering of horn, and start chewing away with their inner ring of teeth. They are a nuisance to skysailors (who must pry them off of their skyships’ hulls). Mature kite-grubs make the arduous journey to the Ghost Sky (see p. 17) to spawn.
- ◆ **Monkeysquids:** A small primate with five limbs, each strong, incredibly flexible, and with a small hand on the end of it. They eat fruit and insects, and are friendly and bright. Many skysailors prefer them as pets to island monkeys, housecats, or parrots.



- ◆ **Web Ivy:** A sticky-stemmed vine that lives on wheeltrees. It helps bind them together into groves. Many of the fauna of the Jungle Sky use them to traverse or swing from grove to grove. It can be pulverized, steeped in water, and pressed to extract a sort of glue.
- ◆ **Treehoppers:** Insects the size of a large housecat. Treehoppers feed on blue-wood leaves. A swarm can strip even a large grove bare in days. They can be roasted or boiled, and taste somewhat like lobster.
- ◆ **Wild Ruqs:** Gigantic, omnivorous parrots. The wild ruqs of the Jungle Sky are larger, untamed, and more violent than their smaller cousins that have been domesticated by the Sha-Ku (see *Chapter 2, Sha Ka Ruq*, p. 71).

Navigating a skyship through the Jungle Sky is challenging for numerous reasons—it is easy for a skyships’ masts, sails, or shrouds to get entangled in the branches, vines, or other vegetation. Luckily, vast “Channels” open up in the twisting, three-dimensional maze of wheeltree alleys and groves after the Jungle Sky passes around a cloud-island; while usually the island’s Fog (see p. 21) pushes many of the individual trees and groves out of the way, some few manage to pass through and fall to ground. These Channels have been mapped for each of the major islands and some minor ones, along with a timetable for when the winds and impacts and rebounds of grove upon grove will cause the Channels to fail. But be warned: both savage bluemen and skypirates lurk in the side passages of the Channels, ready to prey on the unsuspecting.

I always loved piloting Lazy Dog through the green tunnels of the Jungle Sky. She was a nimble little sky-junk, adept at weaving in and out along the narrowing Channels. Many years later, I had my own ship, Fever Dream, but she was a bit too clumsy to get the same effect. The Dream was a stout lass, but not a dancer like the Dog.

— Captain Alexei Rostand, *Memoirs of a Sky Pirate*

Bluewood

Timber from the wheeltree is known as *bluewood*. The name comes from its broad, dark blue-green leaves, and the pale, robin's-egg hue wheeltree lumber has after drying. It is sturdy, springy, and prized for its mysterious ability.

After leaving the environs of a cloud-island and entering one of the 7 Skies, rather than tumbling down to the Blue as all other things do, it does not fall—it *floats*. This special quality makes it a necessity in constructing skyships. All of the World's nations collect the lucky windfalls that crash upon their cloud-islands during late spring, though many also risk sending expeditions into the Jungle Sky to harvest bluewood from the source.

In all other ways, bluewood is simply a moderately hard wood. However, koldun prefer it over all island timber (except perhaps *tym*; see *Sha Ka Ruq*, p. 71) in the construction of their weird devices (see *Kolduncraft*, p. 93).

The Sky of Thunder

The warm summer rains of the Sky of Thunder are a mixed blessing for the World. While the water is needed on the cloud-islands, awesomely destructive lightning bolts accompany it. (Luckily, the Fog around an island abates much of the force of both water and lightning before they reach land; see p. 21).

A stable super-storm, the Sky of Thunder is difficult—but not impossible—to cross unscathed. It's just a question of navigating to calm (or at least calmer) spots, along predictable patterns. A skilled navigator and a brave captain can pile on as much sail as their ship can take, and make excellent time riding the gale-force winds of the Sky. Even so, it constantly flickers with electricity, which lashes out like a viper at unlucky objects floating within it. The risk of lightning is commensurate with the reward of speed. (Skysailor legend claims that the Sky of Thunder does so on purpose; that it has a mind and will just as a man does.)

Even so, there are creatures and even plants that live within this gigantic typhoon, including:

- ◆ **Airwhales:** Gigantic fleshy ovoids with tiny eyes and a wide mouth in one end. Since they are wingless, it is unknown how they maneuver through the Skies or what they feed upon. Rarely sighted, they are believed to mostly inhabit the Unexplored Skies—they have been seen “swimming” in the Blue, diving and surfacing, as no other creature can. While the largest specimens are the size of a respectable merchant skyship, these peaceable creatures are almost as fast as a skyshark (see p. 10). Rumor has it that those with the Gift of the Basilisk (see Gifts, p. 85) have heard airwhales communicating in strange, eerie thought images... but you know how rumor is.



- ◆ **Balloon Flowers:** These floating plants have a spherical “bloom” of silvery petals, folded tight around each other. An alchemical vapor fills this chamber, providing lift. Below, the flower bears a tangle of thorned “roots” which snag flying birds, rainfish (see below), and even the occasional skyshark (see p. 10). They are a threat to skyships, of course, and have a tendency to explode when struck by fire, lightning, cannonballs, or musket shot.
- ◆ **Gold Vases:** Another form of flying plant, a gold vase looks like a hollow golden cone, floating with its point aimed at the Blue below. It attracts the electrical bolts of the Sky of Thunder, and—immune to its fury—feeds on them. The inside of the fleshy cone is said to be full of a sweet nectar (made from collected rainwater and the plant’s exudations, which is then distilled by lightning) that grants cure from any disease or infirmity (though not injury). But the difficulty of collecting this nectar is an obstacle.
- ◆ **Rainfish:** These palm-sized “flying fish” seem to be kin to airwhales, swimming through the air with no other visible means of support. They feed on balloon flowers and gold vases, nibbling away at the floating plants. When grilled, their flesh takes on a pleasant tang much beloved by old sky-salts.
- ◆ **Thunderbirds:** It is said that the mythical thunderbirds live within the Sky of Thunder. Some even claim to have seen them: huge, eyeless birds, seemingly feathered in copper, their unopenable beaks sharp as a blade, crackling with blue-purple lightning. Yet no one has ever brought in a thunderbird’s carcass. No doubt there are many parties—koldun and alchemists, especially—that would pay a king’s ransom for one.

The Sky of Stones

The arrival of the Sky of Stones marks the early days of autumn.

The Sky of Stone is a vast field of floating rocks, ranging in size from pebble to mountain. The reason for their buoyancy over the Blue is a conundrum, but seems related to the odd streaks of red, orange, yellow, and brown that mars the surfaces of the floating Stones. Some sages claim that these streaks are a mystical ore (or rust/corrosion), others say it is a form of lichen or moss, but in either case, the streaks are apparently responsible for the levitation. The most brilliant alchemists and koldun have been studying pulverized material from the Sky of Stones—called *redpowder*—for centuries without unlocking all of its secrets. (Unlike cloud-islands, the Stones have neither uplifting *Cloud* nor protective *Fog*; see p. 21 for further details.)

Depending upon the winds, Stones can move about their Sky, sometimes slowly, sometimes swiftly. When a Stone slams into another at great speed, they either shatter into showers of smaller rocks or fuse into a gigantic mass. And, when a Stone cracks open, bizarre things fall out—showers of silver coins, flocks of unknown birds, faintly green water, orchestral music, tentacled monsters, and so on.

All this makes the Sky of Stones tricky to navigate through—the Stones can be static obstacles, or hurtling threats. A skyship can lose masts and crew from a Stone-strike, gain new holes in their hull, or have something horrible happen when strangeness escapes from a shattering Stone. Luckily, vast “Channels” open up in the twisting, three-dimensional maze of Stones after the Sky passes around a cloud-island; while usually the island’s Fog pushes many of the individual rocks out of the way, a few manage to pass through and fall to ground. These Channels have been mapped for each of the major islands and some minor ones, along with a timetable for when the winds and impacts and rebounds of Stone upon Stone will cause the Channels to fail.

The Sky of Stones is a source of valuable ores and gems—like copper, nickel, iron, silver, gold, rubies, sapphires, emeralds, and *duzha* crystals (see p. 82). Many of the nations of the 7 Skies have set up small, long-term mining colonies on—well, more accurately, *in*—the largest Stones. (Not to mention shards of the Lost Island of Kroy, containing who knows what sorts of treasures; see the textbox on p. 56 for further details.) There are also “gypsy miners” and “treasure hunters” unassociated with any

single nation (except maybe themselves), and a few nomadic groups that offer various services to the miners (tinkers, healers, entertainers, prostitutes, “judges,” duelists, priests, koldun, medicine shows, etc.). Ferrying supplies (water, food, clothing, luxuries, slave-labor, and so on) to these miners and returning with the materials they have gleaned is a profitable business for many adventure traders.

Unfortunately, pirates have also set up small shantytowns and hidden harbors from where they can launch raids upon the mining colonies, supply and treasure ships, and travelers just passing through. And sometimes nationalistic enmities between mining colonies spark their own violence—the Barathi and Viridese miners in the Sky of Stones have a habit of preying upon one another, for example. Whether it’s to steal food when one of their supply ships is late or goes missing, to take what the other has wrested from the ground, or a matter of revenge, etc., conflicts are common.

There are only a few types of animal that live in the Sky of Stones, and slightly more plants. These include:

- ◆ **Birds and Insects** familiar to island-dwellers often nest on the Stones.
- ◆ **Brush Apples and Scrub Pears:** While not much like the island fruits that give them their names, these soft-fleshed specimens are encased in a hard, gritty rind. The former are sweet and creamy, the latter are bitter and spicy.
- ◆ **Lamp Mushrooms:** Growing in Stone caverns, these fungi generate a dim, greenish glow. Though inedible to people, insects feed upon them. They can be pressed for a thin oil that, if properly prepared by an alchemist or koldun, burns with a clear white light.
- ◆ **Muye Moss:** A dense reddish plant that grows within and without Stones. Insects and some birds pry it off of the rocks to eat; people can consume it as well, but it’s not particularly tasty.
- ◆ **Orangethorns:** Barrel-sized umber plants with deep grooves in their flesh and long (up to a foot!) thorns. They grow wild on the surface of many Stones. The grooves collect rainwater, and siphon it into a large cavity in the center of the plant’s trunk. Some birds crack open orangethorns to get at this water during times of drought.
- ◆ **Rockmen:** The rockmen of the Sky of Stones are rarely seen, and then only in fleeting glimpses. The sages say they are primitive natives of the Sky (like the bluemen of the Jungle Sky; see p. 11), and their name comes from the brick-red coloration of their skin. Others claim that they are strange, alien beings— or monsters—actually made out of living stone. Every so often,

a scholar (usually a priest or a koldun) goes out searching for these beings; those that return give contradictory stories. Sometimes while raiding a mining outpost, pirates or other miners will disguise themselves as rockmen, in order to deny performing the attack—and occasionally, mining colonies are found empty of life, with nothing but broken weapons and flattened musketballs to hint at what happened.

Per the orders of The Ophidi, I was conveyed to the House's mining settlement in the Sky of Stones by The Cobra, leading four squads of wingmen meant to reinforce the miners against increased raider activity.

We arrived in the midst of an attack, apparently by red-skinned savages. These were actually miners from House Stephanos in disguise. Taking two of my squads of wingmen, I plunged into the attack. With sword and musket, we killed many of the raiders, and sent the remainder scurrying away back to their own Stone.

To my regret, I must inform the elders of the House that our cousin Lazlo died from wounds suffered in the attack; the House Avokato should be advised to review any morgani contracts dependent on our departed cousin's life. I must also inform the elders that I have sworn a personal Fifth Degree Vendetta against Count Markos Stephanos, the murderer of our cousin, and hope to fulfill obligations in this before being recalled by The Ophidi.

Lastly, I once again urge the elders and The Ophidi to consider Vendetta Absolute against House Stephanos. Their actions should not be allowed to stand, and they should be struck down like the rabid dogs they are.

— Markiz Caius Ophidi



The Ghost Sky

As the Ghost Sky approaches, the temperature starts dropping, heralding the beginning of late autumn.

The Ghost Sky is eerily barren. Save for the kite-grubs (see p. 11)—which come here to spawn, spewing out clouds of spores that create scintillating rainbows of color and light that are said to move even the most stoic to tears—and the random solitary wheeltree, airwhale, Stone, or other flotsam, there is very little to see here.

This lack of obstructions to navigation and line-of-sight, plus the strengthening winds, makes travel across this Sky quick, simple, and relatively safe from pirate depredations. . . but not exactly easy, thanks to the ghosts that dwell here.

Legend states that if someone is traveling in open sky and dies within the boundaries of this Sky, they are unable to pass on to their just reward in the afterlife, and are doomed to haunt the winds with their wails. Legend may be correct. Otherwise sober and trustworthy travelers have reported sightings by ghost-ships, crewed by phantom skysailors. Some have spoken of cases of possession by the unquiet dead. Others speak of spirits animating physical objects, which then attack.

There is a large body of skysailing superstitions, aimed at avoiding attracting the attention of the phantoms. So long as they are kept (it is said), the ghosts cannot harm a ship or its crew; yet if even a single stricture is broken, they will appear and harass the living mercilessly. Unfortunately, there are a tremendous number of such superstitions, all contradictory. In theory, it would be impossible to hold to every one of them; in practice, each skyship has a smaller set of taboos that they hold to. This works to keep the ship safe from menacing phantoms. . . usually.

Listen up, you swabs! This is the first transit through the Good Sky on the Turtle for some of you, so lend an ear—if you don't want it boxed by Big Olaf.

First, while we're flying here, it's "the Good Sky," not the other name. Second, no use of a knife within ten paces of the wheel or rudder chain. Third, when you come on deck the first time after dawn, you must spit over the starboard rail; when you come on deck the first time after dusk, it's the port rail. Fourth, if you eat any fruit, give the seeds—all the seeds!—to the Ship's Carpenter. Lastly, if you win the Chameleon's Dram, you cannot drink it yourself, but have to give it to one of your mates.

By order of the Captain, anyone breaking one of these restrictions will be keel-hauled for seven leagues. . . if we even survive what happens.

Remember: Good Sky; no whittling near the wheelhouse; dawn-spit starboard, dusk-spit port; seeds to Olaf; and the Dram for your mate.

Back to your stations.

— Jelissa Knott, First Mate of the Viridese trader *Black Turtle*

The Sky of Frost

As the Sky of Frost passes, it brings winter to each cloud-island in turn. The whiteness of this Sky is caused by the sheer amount of snow, hail, and sleet that writhes upon its winds. It is nearly as barren as the Ghost Sky. Few skysailors brave its frigid air, and those that do, do so cautiously and at need, because things freeze solid within it—schools of rainfish, mats of zargazum, even whole skyships and their crews have been found drifting.

Only by skirting the edge of Sky of Fire (see below) can a ship hope to survive the unimaginable chill. (This narrowing of travel routes, plus the general lack of visibility, makes this Sky an excellent place for ambushes by pirates.) Along this knife-edge of just bearable cold is where the life in the Sky of Frost is found. There are more animals here than plants, including:

- ◆ **Frostwings:** A relative of the skyshark (see p. 10), frostwings are large, flying, manta-like predators with a mottled white and grey skin. They feed on puffbirds and xedo (see below), and any warm-blooded mammals (like, say, people) that they can snatch out of the freezing air. Legend says that they are utterly immune to the soul-chilling cold, and jackets made from their tanned hides are much prized by skysailors.
- ◆ **Hailbees:** Small grayish insects, hailbees consume the interiors of icicle fish (see below), and construct hives within the hollowed-out stems, which they fill with a pearlescent honey. Due to the difficulty of collecting hailbee honey at all, much less in the amounts to make such collection worthwhile, it is an extremely expensive delicacy.
- ◆ **Icicle Fish:** Icicle fish aren't really fish at all, but a slim and pointy plant of pale blue, its irregular leaves looking much like fins. They hover in place, their finny leaves acting as rotors. Hailbees and puffbirds (see below) feed on them, but no one else has been able to find much of a use for icicle fish.
- ◆ **Puffbirds:** Puffbirds are small, round birds that feed primarily on the leaves of the icicle fish. Their thick, white, soft, bristly down is sought as an insulator for winter garb, as well as stuffing for mattresses and pillows.
- ◆ **Xedo:** Sharp-beaked, oval-bodied birds with large, flexible wings, xedo are black above and white below. They hunt hailbees and hailbee honey for sustenance. Skysailors familiar with the Sky of Frost consider their flesh a treat, but most other people find it too oily to be palatable.

A spurned lover's heart is colder than the Sky of Frost.

— Colronan Proverb



The Sky of Fire

Alone of the 7 Skies, the Sky of Fire does not move. It sits in the center of the World, a conical vortex of superheated air, whirling up from the Blue to the top of the Dome. The boundary appears as a wavy, heated wall of air; the difference in quality of Sky can be seen on either side.

When only the sun is above the horizon, any object entering the Sky of Fire bursts into flame within minutes; when only the moon is visible, this immolation takes longer—perhaps an hour before the flames appear. If both sun and moon are visible, anything crossing the boundary wall burns to ashes instantly. Travel through the Sky of Fire is only safe during the dark nights of the new moon. Those who have made this “Dragon’s Sprint” are notable among skysailors—though whether it’s for bravery, recklessness, or a bit of both is debatable.

Legend claims that there is a small cloud-island called *Telanrem* in the exact center of the Sky of Fire—and thus is the Center of the World—but few credit such tales. After all, there is almost no way that a skyship could make the journey to the center of this Sky in a single night—unless it had the help of the mystical powers of a koldun...

There are only two things said to live in the Sky of Fire, and one of them is mythical:

- ◆ **Dragons:** It is said that the legendary dragons live within the Sky of Fire (possibly on *Telanrem*). Only a few have even ever claimed to have seen these bat-winged and fire-breathing lizards. This may be due to a skysailor superstition, which claims that every false report of a dragon sighting makes the gunpowder in the skyship’s magazine more unstable. Repeated lies about dragons, then, will cause a skyship to explode.
- ◆ **Salamander Blooms:** These relatives of balloon flowers (see p. 14) are floating plants with a spherical “bloom” of reddish petals, folded tight around each other, with a vapor filling the sphere and providing lift. Below, the flower bears broad-leaved black fronds of unknown purpose. On dark nights of the new moon, some birds and other creatures from neighboring Skies swoop in to feast on the fronds of those salamander blooms drifting close to the boundary wall. Skysailors harvest nearby blooms on those nights as well; the dried and slivered frond is the most sought-after and expensive spice in the World. If a salamander bloom drifts through the boundary, it immediately shrivels up and dies, falling down to the Blue.

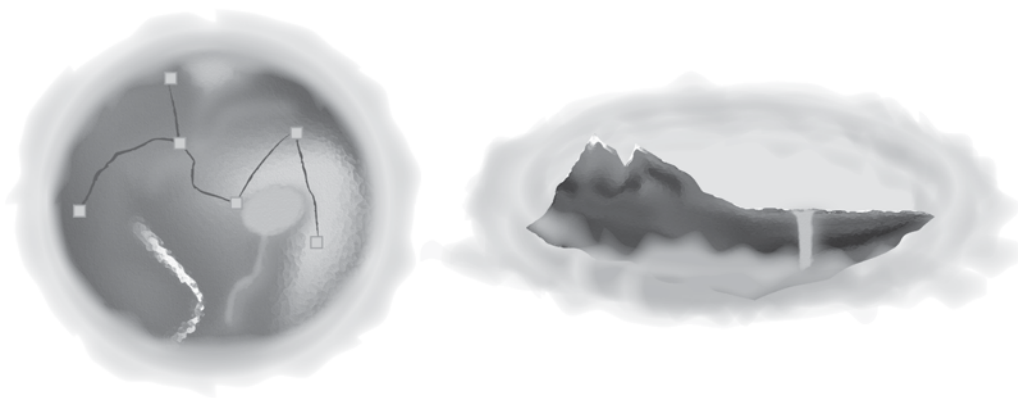
Compared to the wrath of Vaoz against the dishonorable, the Sky of Fire is as chill as the Sky of Frost.

— The First Prophet, *The Mirror of Honor*



Cloud-Islands

A cloud-island bobs like a feather upon the winds of the 7 Skies (see p. 5). They are more or less disc- or bowl-shaped pieces of land. Some hover only a short distance above the Blue (see p. 6), while others come close to the Edge of the World (see p. 4). Skyships and birds can pass completely below an island with no trouble. By mysterious means, islands tend to maintain the same relative position and altitude (except Ilwuz; see p. 64).



Each is veiled in a thin, almost transparent *Fog* above, and rests on an opaque gray-white *Cloud* below. The protective *Fog* shields the inhabitants of an island from the more extreme conditions of the 7 Skies. For example, when the Sky of Stones sweeps past an island during early Autumn, the majority of the hurtling rocks are deflected by the *Fog*. Only a very fast-moving stone, at the precise angle, can pierce through this defense to smash into the surface of the island. The Church (see p. 97) ascribes this protection to the benevolence of Vaoz, koldun (see p. 89) point to the collective will of all living things, and the scholars come up with even more abstruse theories. Still, aspects of each Sky do slip in quietly under this protection: while not as soul-freezing as the Sky of Frost, island winters are still cold. (An island's *Fog* also keeps most of the flora and fauna of the 7 Skies away, though the odd skyshark or airwhale has gotten through in the past.)

Skyships sail in, through the edges of Fog and Cloud, to reach the edge of an island. This can be tricky and requires skilled navigation. The buoyancy of bluewood (see p. 13) changes as it passes over the land of an island: gravity once again asserts itself. The easiest landings are those that involve sailing from open Sky through Cloud to water, though there are more complicated harbors in the 7 Skies.

While some islands have attempted to take advantage of their rocky undersides (by building hanging wharves or mining up into their underbelly for mineral wealth), the thick Cloud that supports an island makes such undertakings difficult at best.

On a cloud-island, “north” is directly towards the center of the Sky of Fire (see p. 20), and thus the center of the World.

Vaoz only stretches forth His Benevolent Hands (the Fogs that shield our islands) and His Uplifting Hands (the Clouds that elevate our islands) so long as there is more honor than dishonor on a cloud-island. If the balance tips, he may withdraw his Benevolent Hands and permit the 7 Skies to scour all life from an island, or he may release the land from his Uplifting Hands, sending it crashing down into the Blue.

Consider: is this not exactly what happened to Lost Kroy, after their dishonorable attack on poor Crailwuz?

— The First Prophet, *The Mirror of Honor*

The Major Cloud-Islands, In Brief

While the smallest cloud-islands are only a mile or so in diameter, the largest islands range in size from 10 miles across to 1000 miles across. These major islands bear powerful nations of people that sail the 7 Skies in trade and war. They include (in rough order of age):

- ◆ **Barathi:** A large cloud-island composed of an ocean sprinkled with archipelagoes, Barathi is home to the oldest nation in the 7 Skies: *the Empire*. A land of byzantine intrigue and revenge, the Barathi Noble Houses bicker and plot and duel amongst themselves, as well as against the peoples of other islands. It floats mid-way up the Dome, between the top of the World and the Blue.
- ◆ **Viridia:** A harsh, rocky cloud-island with limited animal and vegetable resources, Viridia has changed from its roots as an exile colony for Barathi radicals into an independent warrior nation. The alliance of *Viridese Freeholds*, led by their Warmasters, is an expansionistic and powerful people full of pragmatism and a certain rough honor. It sits high in the Dome, looking down at the other islands below.

- ◆ **Colrona:** An immense cloud-island, sitting lower than Barathi in the Dome, that shades from sandy desert through grassy plains and up to rolling wooded hills. Colrona was once the site of competing Barathi, Kroyu, and Viridese colonies. Eventually, it threw off the shackles of each parent stem and became its own nation. After the loss of Kroy (see p. 56), Colrona was the birthplace of the Church of Vaoz. It is the only island home to two distinct (if related) nations: the feudal *Kingdom* and the theocratic *Zultanate*. Colrona is a land of romance, religion, and honor—and the conflicts they engender.
- ◆ **Crail:** Once half of a fertile Cloud-Island and pirate haven—called *Crailwuz*, Crail was split off after a mystical attack by the fabled Lost Island of Kroy (and this dolorous stroke is what, ironically, caused Kroy to become Lost). The attack devastated the island, shattering off pieces of its land and damaging its protective Fog; over centuries, this has made much of it a desert. A small island at the crossing of several trade routes, mid-way up the Dome and close to the Sky of Fire, Crail has become an important meeting place for all of the nations of the World—ironically replacing Lost Kroy. Because of this important position, centuries ago a then-unified Colronan force pacified the remaining pirates and set up Crail's independent government. Today, it is the most cosmopolitan of all the islands; a crossroads of culture, trade, and intrigue.
- ◆ **Ilwuz:** Skull-shaped Ilwuz is the other half of the once-fertile cloud-island—and pirate haven—called *Crailwuz*, blasted off by the mystical attack of Lost Kroy. As a result of the powerful magic unleashed upon it during that attack, unlike all other cloud-islands it has no fixed position in the Dome. Every forty-nine days, it mystically shifts position. Further, native-born Ilwuzi always know which Sky their homeland lies in (no matter where in the World they are). Unlike Crail, it has remained a pirate haven. It is home to a freedom-loving, rambunctious, and unconventional population of nomads, transients, and buccaneers.
- ◆ **Sha Ka Ruq:** Sha Ka Ruq is the newest cloud-island to rise up out of the Blue. A little over a century ago, it breached up through the Jungle Sky and became home to a number of bluemen savages, explorers and colonists from a handful of islands... and of course pirates. It is rich in plant and animal life, but lacks minerals and metals. A large island low in the Dome and still close to the Blue, the majority of Sha Ka Ruq is still wilderness: mysterious and unexplored.

For further details on each of these major cloud-islands, see *Chapter 2*.



Minor Cloud-Islands, In Brief

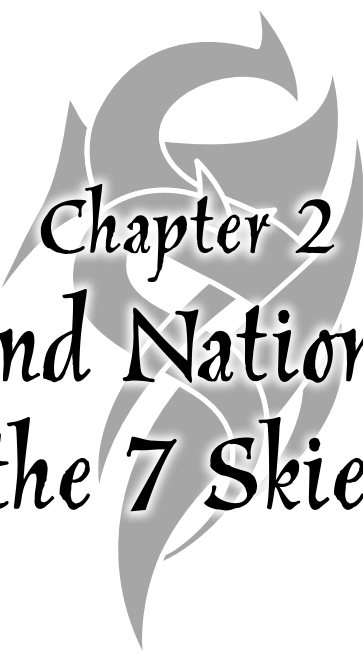
There are thousands of smaller cloud-islands floating in the Dome. Some are pristine and uninhabited. Others are inhabited by their own strange native cultures. Many have unique resources or characteristics too numerous to list here. Most of the Major Islands have appropriated a handful of Minor Islands as colonies, supply caches, protectorates, or the spoils of war.

However, the sheer number of Minor Islands means that there is plenty of the World left to explore, conquer, and interact with.

What makes the World an adventure is not the hazards of the 7 Skies, but its peoples.

— Gold-Eyed Niko, Sha-Ku Koldun

This, then, is the broad overview of the World. For more information on the cloud-islands, go to *Chapter 2*. For more information of the mystical and theological aspects of the World, go to *Chapter 3*. For further details on skyships and skysailing, see *Chapter 4*.



Chapter 2

Island Nations of the 7 Skies

The history of the World is the confluence of Wealth, Power, Revenge, and Honor.

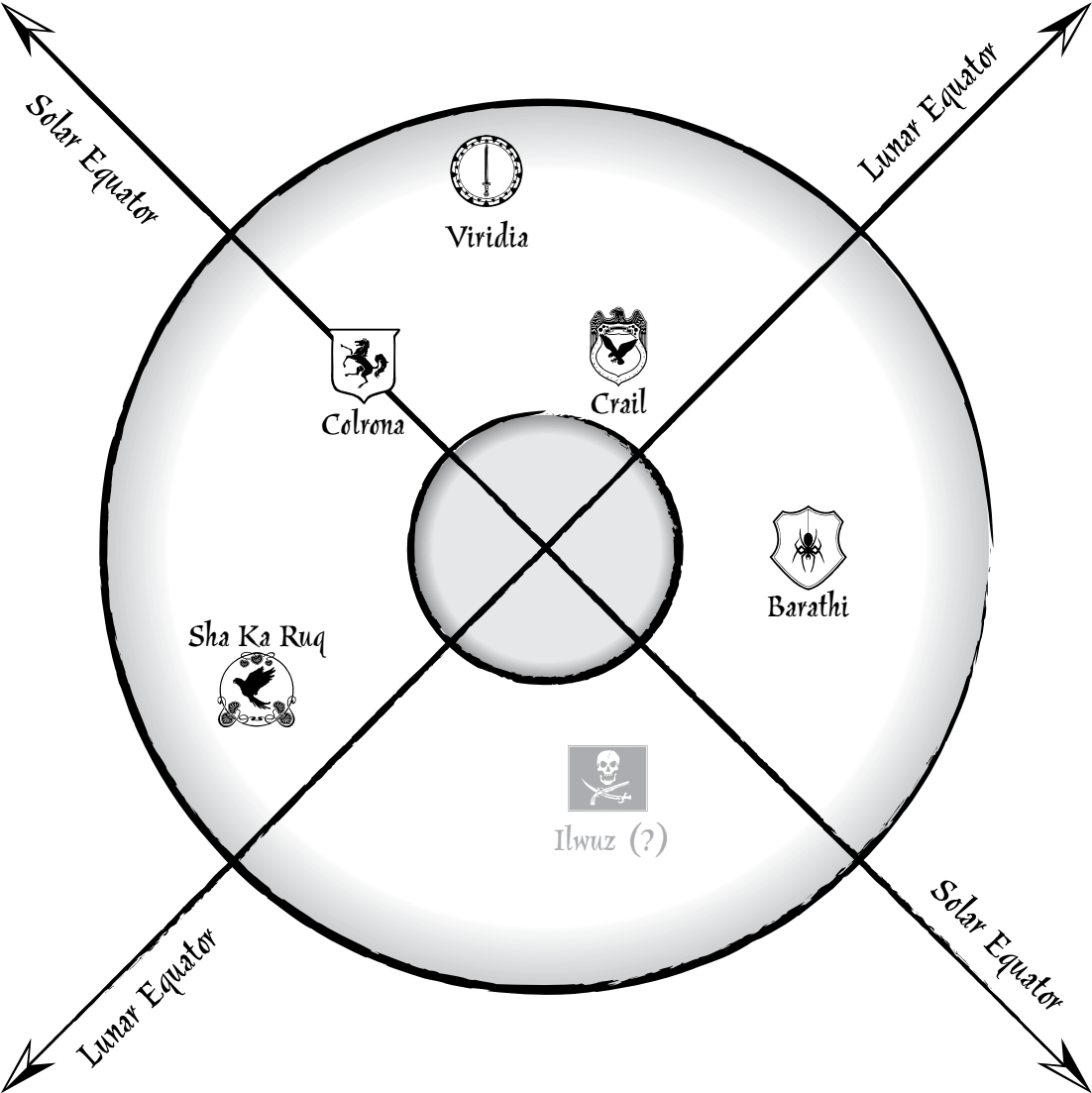
Wealth can be stolen or frittered away on meaningless pleasure, Power fades if it is not exercised, and Revenge twists the soul.

Honor shines out from the darkness of the World, the candle of the soul, a flickering flame created by the actions one takes—or does not take—in one's life.

Only Honor endures.

— The First Prophet, *The Mirror of Honor*

Seven major nations dominate the 7 Skies: the *Barathi Empire*, the *Viridese Alliance*, the *Kingdom of Colrona*, the *Colronan Zultanate*, the *Free Island of Crail*, the *Pirate Haven of Ilwuz*, and the *Confederated Tribes of the Sha Ka Ruq*.



I stood before the old man, Kristov Peregrino. The Peregrino. The highest—and the last—of the House that had destroyed my love. He looked terrified.

“Do not do this,” he cried. “It was not me. I did not order her death. I am not responsible for your pain.”

“You are House Peregrino, the source of my pain,” said I. Then I ran him through, my rapier piercing his heart just as his nephew’s had stabbed into Maria’s. “And now you are spitted like a fish.”

I watched, coldly, calmly, as he slumped to the deck, his life running out of the wound, and his eyes glazing over.

I lifted the falcon penstari from the altar behind him, and walked to the rail. “And now House Peregrino dies forever.” The splash the statue made as it hit the waves was music.

It was my seventh Vendetta, and it was glorious.

—Markiz Caius Ophidi

Barathi, The Empire Of Intrigue

What Barathi Is Like

Barathi is the largest cloud-island in the 7 Skies, floating mid-way up the Dome at the Trades layer (see p. 5).

Soon after sailing through its Fog and Cloud, after the slap of the island’s salty sea is heard on skyship hull, the first-time visitor to Barathi discovers that the entire cloud-island is surrounded by a prickly garland of cliffs and reefs—the *Crown of Hazard*. One of the few ways through this barrier is the *Fangs of Death*, called so because of the pair of steep rocky isles to either side. This leads to the Sea of Tears, dotted with the thousands of surface-islands (called *isla*) of the Empire.

Ahead and to port, one soon sees a large dark shape on the horizon. This is *Civdad Arachnos*, a multi-tiered city sprawling across a cluster of *isla*, the primary port of Barathi. Strung with the *Webs*—the cables of a funicular railway—its *spider-cars* grant access to all corners and levels of the vast metropolis. The lowest levels are given over to shipping (and criminal) interests; the middle levels are commercial regions, with residential zones for commoners and foreigners. Powerful Noble





Houses maintain estates on the upper levels; some of these mansions (especially along the precipice-edge of the city) have private *cloud-ship* towers and *glider* ramps (see p. 104).

The largest estate on the upper levels is still being constructed: a vast whale-shaped monstrosity. After weaving an intricate net of *morgani contracts* (see p. 30) and leaving a bloody trail of fallen enemies, House Zebulo managed to gain control of both *Isla del Huitra* (where the giant oyster breeds, producing pearls the size of an infant's head) and *Isla Akba* (site of *The Tree of Life*, a natural fountain of purest water, spouting fifty feet tall, which never slackens or flags; its waters are a renowned cure for poison). Access to these two isles of wonders has filled the coffers of House Zebulo with gold, but also made them scores of envious enemies.

The myriad isles of Barathi range from the tundra-covered to the jungle-ridden. The capital of this populous Empire is currently *Isla Vanadi*, home of the Empress.

A riot of kelp grows in the Sea of Tears. Everywhere on Barathi there is the salty, fishy smell of seaweed being processed. Different varieties can be eaten, pressed for oil, woven into sturdy cloth, manufactured into paper, boiled and distilled for drugs and poisons, dried and cured for smoking. . . to name just a few uses.

Funiket, the rope wound from silver-thread kelp, is respected by skysailors throughout the World. They praise it for its strength, flexibility, and more. . . *uncanny* aspects. In the Sky of Ghosts, the Ilwuzi pirate Rebbeka Rakehell captured a Barathi trade ship of House Tinyani. She took Paulos—the

youthful and handsome Scion of the House—as a pleasure-slave, and tied up Paulos’ co-husband and two co-wives in the brig with loops of the vaunted funiket. Captain Rakehell’s tragic mistake was not bringing her own: she used House Tinyani’s funiket, found in their holds. At midnight, the knots holding the co-spouses prisoner untied themselves, and the Tinyani brought Barathi justice to the Ilwuzi and her crew. Rakehell was garroted with the prisoners’ bonds, and afterwards, the funiket ropes could not be untangled from her dead, cold throat.



Barathi History in Brief

Barathi may very well be the homeland of human life above the Blue. From time immemorial, Noble Houses have ruled the isles of the Barathi Sea, warring and allying and marrying and murdering and intriguing against one another. Eventually, out of the chaos, one House (House Regaldo) climbed to the top of a mountain of interlocking morgani contracts (see textbox, p. 30), and thus the Empire was founded.

That was two thousand years ago.

How Barathi Is Ruled

The Barathi Empire is ruled with intrigue, marriage, poison, and blood, all overseen—directly or indirectly—by the Empress. Each Noble House rules a collection of isla, with the House Patriarch (or Matriarch) more or less autonomous in their own demesne. Even the weakest House has staggering resources to draw upon in their devilish pursuits.

However, the Houses are interconnected within a dense net of morgani contracts, making them inter-reliant. The Empress sits at the center of that web. The Empress is the head of her House, heads the College of Avokatos (see textbox, *Morgani Contracts*), and commands the *Imperial Spiders* (see textbox, p. 33). All this power allows her to tug the threads that bind the Noble Houses into an Empire.

Most Barathi are connected in some way to one of the Noble Houses, either as a *Scion* or as a peasant *Client*. At any time, a Barathi may be affected by a new morgani contract in some way; most extreme is to be taken into another House, and then one’s loyalties are supposed to be with *them*. Failure to realign one’s proprieties often leads to the offender being found “regrettably drowned” (i.e., poisoned, garroted, hacked to pieces, etc.).

The symbol of the Empire is a silver spider on a blue field; each Great House possesses its own device, placed under the Imperial Spider.

Morgani Contracts

Morgani contracts are the most important element of Barathi culture. A morgani contract is an agreement between two Barathi Noble Houses that joins their Scions in marriage. These agreements include (but are not limited to) transfer of money, goods, titles, deeds, and trade contracts; adoption of a spouse into one of the Houses; determination of the House alignment of one or more children of the union; initiation or cessation of vendettas; and more. The intricacies of morgani contracts have bred an special type of lawyer/arbitrator who specializes in arranging, researching, negotiating, and executing these pacts: the Advocate, or *Avokato*. (Avokatos also deal with the legal implications of vendetta; see p. 31.) All morgani contracts are filed in enough copies such that each affected House possesses one, as well as a copy for the College of Avokatos.

Because of morgani contracts, Barathi marriage rarely involves love-matches. Matrimony is a matter of business, diplomacy, intrigue. “Marrying for love” is a *radical* idea.

Furthermore, Barathi marriage is polygamous—multiple husbands and wives may be involved in a single marriage contract—and Barathi culture is polyamorous (an individual may take as many lovers as their contract allows). Relations between co-husbands and co-wives are similar to that of being members of the same scholastic fraternity or commercial company: at turns cordial and backstabbing.

Two hundred years ago, there was an infamous morgani contract known as *the Winefish Triad* that still lives in Avokato memory. It should never have occurred: three Houses came together, in a union of trade agreements that enabled them to corner the market on winefish (and related markets) over the next century and a half. Recently, their power finally grew too strong, and was affecting Imperial politics.

The Empress tasked her protégé, the **Markiz Donaldo Vanadi**, with fixing this situation. Leaving a murderous wake across the isles of Barathi, his operatives and machinations destroyed two of the Houses of the Winefish Triad and left him as the Patriarch of the remnants of the third. Over the past five years, he has returned the market to the traditional method of operation, and secured himself great status in the eyes of the Empress. Also, his name is now lent to issues that are resolved by the targeting of specific individuals, the resolution of whose fates causes a cascade effect that creates a massive realignment at fruition: a *Donaldo Solution*.

Barathi Aristocrats

The Empress: Rules the Empire (and her own House).

Patriarch/Matriarch: Rules a Noble House and all its holdings.

Markiz/Markiza: Lieutenants of the House Elder; may rule a House isla on Barathi or an off-Barathi outpost.

Cavalier/Lady: Ranking nobles of the House; various duties.

Scion: Member of the House.

Client/Peasant: Houseless Commoner.

Slave: Houseless Property that belongs to a Noble House.

An untraceable knife in the back is the best revenge.

—Barathi Proverb

What the Barathi Are Like

The Empire of Barathi is a breeding ground for *intrigue* and *vendetta*. A Barathi keeps a running tally of slights, injuries, offenses, and social snubs experienced, so as to heap reprisals and reckonings galore upon his enemies at a later date. In the pursuit of a *tour de force* revenge, a Barathi can outwait the erosion of mountains.

A Barathi trader was cheated early in his career, *once*, by a foreign merchant dealing in wheat. Over four decades, this Barathi married into a Noble House, arranged a second morgani contract with a koldun, worked with his co-spouses to develop a toxin, and had that toxin delivered by diverse and discreet channels (in the form of a loaf of bread) to the foreign merchant who had wronged him. After eating the bread, the foreign merchant acquired an embarrassing and debilitating allergy to wheat, meaning he could no longer deal in his stock in trade. . . and the victim *never* realized the cause of it all.

Ranging across many formal degrees, vendetta includes everything from the mild, affable competition of business rivals (First Degree Vendetta); through semi-violent romantic triangles, squares, octagons, etc., of lovers (Fourth Degree); up to Noble House blood-wars (Vendetta Absolute). The Avokatos of the House file appropriate “briefs” on new, current, and “closed” vendettas with the College of Avokatos.

In the Empire, women are thought to be better at internal, local, and concrete issues (including fields like health, medicine, defense, architecture, agriculture, mathematics, accounting, and science), while men are better at external, distant, and abstract issues (including trade, warfare, offense, arts & literature, philosophy, and communication). There is strong chauvinism and patronizing speech from each gender regarding their fields of interest.

2

The most important piece of Barathi clothing is the *mantle*: a short, sleeveless, hooded cloak. Mantles are weatherproof and embroidered with the symbols and colors of the owner's Great House. Brooches worn with the mantle indicate position within the Family.

Some Barathi Names

Male: Antoni, Bren, Caius, Donaldo, Er'ek, Franco, Gaius, Hauz, Imre, Junius, Kenshin, Lazlo, Marcus, Niko, Orvo, Paulos, Quirinus, Riko, Stanislav, Turhan, Ural, Vladimir, Wáchan, X'mez, Yuvan, Zoltar.

Female: Anna, Brenna, Calli, Deidre, Emma, F'cissa, Gemmi, Helen, Irina, Juliette, Kara, Livia, Martina, Nisha, Oribeth, Pauli, Q'tiria, Rennia, Suzan, Thea, Ursula, Vinya, Wendi, Xava, Y'linda, Zora.

Houses: Arogosta, Betanna, Caniz, Delgado, Erini, Fausti, Goldo, Helvi, Iolo, Jaqinto, Krakenni, Lupini, Merchaut, Nori, Ophidi, Petro, Regaldo, Stephanos, Tinyani, Uxoro, Vallimo, Whuloni, Xevian, Yoro, Zebulo.

Barathi & the Church

Most Barathi tolerate the Church, while being quietly hostile to it and its teachings. The Church's concept of *personal honor over all* conflicts with the Barathi affinity of submitting one's personal honor to the needs and collective honor of their Noble House. The Church sees this as mildly heretical—"heresy by omission"—in that personal honor should take precedence over collective honor. The Barathi habit of vendetta is also of some concern to the Church.

Intriguingly, a remnant of pre-Church paganism survives on Barathi: each Noble House is believed to have an associated guiding spirit known as a *penstari* that communicates with the House Elder, granting the wisdom and authority of all their predecessors. Penstari are often represented within a House's symbology and décor as a motif; there is also usually an elaborate and costly statue that resides and travels with the House Elder. The statues are regularly given sacrifices of food, drink, and trinkets.

Barathi & the Mystical

The Barathi make great use of the Gifted, alchemists, and koldun in their daily lives. Indeed, Barathi often secretly consult with koldun on matters regarding revenge and vendetta, almost as a parody of the way Colronans seek the advice of the Church's *Virtutoirs* (see p. 100).

Opinions of the Other Nations Regarding Barathi

The rest of the World sees Barathi as cold-blooded and poisonous. When the Barathi aren't actively weaving traps for the unwary, they're lying in wait for the briefest moment of weakness—or so it's believed.

Take **Doctor Irina d'Arachnos**, a talented Barathi physician. She travels the 7 Skies, cataloguing all known medicinal plants above the Blue. On Crail, a Falcon indelicately demanded a bribe to overlook her unlicensed laboratory. With a quick jab of a lancet smeared with tincture of lockweed, she paralyzed him, and extorted money—and protection!—from *him*.

(It's whispered that Irina is also the Mistress of Poisons for the Imperial Spiders, but that's probably just a rumor. Probably.)

Imperial Spiders

The Imperial Spiders are the Empire's spies and assassins. They are adept at stealth, espionage, sabotage, fencing, daggerplay, unarmed combat, reconnaissance, and poisons. While they are commanded by the Empress, their loyalty is to the Empire itself, even above the person of the ruler or even—gasp!—their own House. All Imperial agents have a discreet tattoo of a black spider, somewhere on their body.

What's Happening Now On Barathi?

Her Imperial Majesty **Juliette Vanadi**, Empress of Barathi, is a cunning operator who worked her way up from a second-rate marriage to a minor Baron of House Octavi to the Throne through the skillful utilization of her assets and the judicious use of poison. Today, with those challenges behind her, the Empress is *bored*, leading her to seek an ever-widening array of amusements, and causing her to see an ever-widening field of shadowy conspiracies. For example, she is increasingly concerned about vague rumors of the Priests of Vaoz conspiring with the Viridese for an unknown purpose.

2 The Empress' Heir, **Markiz Donaldo Vanadi**, has a rival in **Markiz Caius Ophidi**, a deadly blade and a subtle plotter. Ophidi is smart enough to aim his intrigues solely at Donaldo, and not House Vanadi or the Empire. (Three of Donaldo's off-contract lovers have been found "regrettably drowned," and a number of his mercantile endeavors have suffered losses due to "the inexplicable presence of acid.") Since House Ophidi has been a staunch ally of House Vanadi—and the Empress—for generations, the Empress simply watches with a wry smile. If Donaldo is to be Emperor, he must handle these intrigues himself.

The full force of Goraash Freehold's warriors had chased my small raiding party into the box canyon of Dugrex, where there was no food, no water, and no escape.

No escape for them, I should say.

The remainder of my warband had been waiting there on the cliffs above for a half-day, and already had the winches, arms and armor caches, mounts, and koldun healers prepared, all according to my plan. Their strong arms worked the winches, and my raiding party and I flew up the unscalable walls like peregrine falcons. We armed ourselves in our war-gear, received treatment for our wounds and fatigue, mounted our Colronan horses, and galloped down around to the valley floor.

We easily outflanked the Goraash warband, and drove them into the Dugrex, where they were trapped.

I defeated six warriors that day myself, to serve as year-slaves, until they were ransomed at the Conclave, or managed to escape (as is proper).

— **Ram Snakemind, Warmaster of Helkirk Freehold**

Viridia, The Alliance of the Mighty

What Viridia Is Like

Viridia is a large cloud-island in the 7 Skies, high in the Dome (in the Peak Layer), covered in fen-choked moors, scrubby forests, rocky mountains, and volcanoes.

It is a harsh land. The spear-like mountains of Viridia are abundant with metals (especially gold and iron), useful minerals (coal and sulfur), and gemstones. What is more, the ore for the famed Viridese steel—*wix*—is only found in the



hell-mines drilled into Viridia's active volcanoes. Wix is a miracle metal: the balance of all its aspects (weight, tensile strength, hardness, mystical properties) means it is highly desired for use in weaponry, skyship components, and kolduncraft (see p. 93). A common saying is "only a wix knife can make a shadow bleed." The largest volcano on Viridia is *Wixtal Mount*, "the Mother of Wix," and all fear being sent to its hell-mine as year-slaves.

Alas, Viridia lacks diversity in its plant and animal life. Other than oats and a few varieties of bean, the primary plant on Viridia is the *eggfruit*, a tart and salty plum-like fruit used to make preserves, pickles, and green wine. The eggfruit trees that border the *Bonemoor* (a vast region, whitish-gray from the powdered bones of all the warriors who have fallen in battle there) are most highly regarded for winemaking. It is said that the ghosts floating through the groves change the flavor of the fruit.

Then there is the *fek*, the giant venomous tortoise of Viridia. Naturally solitary and mean-tempered, these huge reptiles are immensely strong, with serrated beaks that can snip clean through an iron bar. Their diamond-hard shells are prized as material for shields, utensils, and jewelry; their meat is tough, but sweet. Fek are used as draft animals in agriculture and for pulling "turtle-carts" along the triple-rail roadways connecting the major Freeholds to *Magnusport*, the only safe harbor for launching and landing of skyships on Viridia.

A day west of Magnusport, along a well-guarded railway, is *The Varlok's Citadel*, a nigh-impregnable fortress. It stands empty until the *Council of the Sword* is in session. Until then,



only the *Castellan* walks its dusty halls, a lone Warmaster chosen for self-reliance and strength of mind and body. Unfortunately, the current Castellan, **Xidi Threepistols**, has gone mad from the solitude, and dropped the Citadel's Grand Portcullis across the rails, blocking turtle-cart traffic.

A week east of Magnusport is *Sunseer Freehold*, by far the most devout community on Viridia. It boasts the only cathedral of the Church of Vaoz on the island. Here, Viridese Virtutoirs (see p. 100) are drawn into thorny questions, dealing with the intersection of honor and power, like: *What is strength, what is weakness, and why and when can one turn into the other?* Consider: love. Sometimes it's a strength—binding people together, offering motivation for great deeds—and sometimes it's a weakness—providing openings in physical or emotional defenses for a foe to attack, distracting people from the task at hand.

Viridia History in Brief

A millennium ago, Barathi dumped a large group of romantic radicals and political exiles on harsh, resource-poor Viridia rather than having them all “regrettably drowned.” The exiles did the best they could, starting a new and different life in a barren land. At least now they could live as they chose!

Then came the *Year of the Maelstrom*, when the uncanny fury of the Sky of Thunder sent tremendous lighting bolts to pierce the Fogs of all the islands of the World. The Maelstrom affected Viridia the worst, causing apocalyptic devastation and burning half of its already scanty forests.

Exile society broke down; the Civil War began. The colonists broke into smaller groups, retreated from the cities, built their own strongholds, and took up raiding one another. Any skyships that landed were taken by these nascent Freeholds in battle.

For sixscore years, all contact with the rest of the World was lost. The nature of the Viridese greatly changed during this time. Only after the construction of Magnusport (under the direction of the First Varlok) did Viridia rejoin the international community.

Viridese Education

At age seven, all Viridese children enter the local Freehold School. They are taught the rudiments of reading, writing, arithmetic, self-defense, survival skills, local knowledge, and gamesmanship. They travel to the annual Conclave each year with one Freehold, and leave with another. After seven years of School, students are tested (physically, mentally, and psychically) to see if they have the potential to become a Warmaster or koldun (see p. 89). Those that have military potential join the Academy at the next Conclave, those that have mystical potential are apprenticed to established koldun, and those that do not have talent for war or magic return to their mother's Freehold to become apprentices in a Paxjan trade, a soldier in the Freehold's Paxjan garrison, or join the Church.

This separation from the parents and siblings during youth attenuates the family bonds of Viridese. While a source of pride, one's mother-clan is less important than one's own abilities and one's relationships with peers.

How Viridia Is Ruled

Viridia is composed of thousands of autonomous *Freeholds*, each composed of related clans of families. Freeholds are independent city-states—they fight amongst themselves (usually raiding parties), serve as mercenaries for other Freeholds (or even other islands), and organize their own diplomatic and trade concerns.

The *Conclave* holds this patchwork together. All Freeholds in a region meet annually in the middle of spring, at a traditional site. Major trading, legal arbitrations, and elections happen at a Conclave. Schools (see the *Viridese Education* textbox) leave one Freehold to move to the next. It's a general time of community, fellowship, romance, and celebration. No war may be practiced during the ten days of Conclave.

In Viridese society, there are two castes: the *Warmasters* and the *Paxjen* (see below, *What the Viridese Are Like*, for more details). Only Warmasters may be elected as Orl or Varlud. In times of crisis, all Varludi travel to the Citadel, assemble into the *Council of the Sword*, and elect a Varlok. The Varlok serves as the Supreme Commander of Viridia until the crisis is over. When there is a Varlok on Viridia, the Viridese Freeholds move and fight as one—something to be reckoned with.

The symbol of Viridia is a black sword, point up, on a silver field. (Note that each Freehold possesses its own symbol, typically placed to the left of the Sword.)

Viridese Aristocrats

A Viridese's social mobility is related to the combination of their martial and tactical skills, the ratio of victories to losses in conflict, and whether or not they are a Warmaster.

Varlok: The Supreme Commander of the alliance of Viridese Freeholds; leader of the Council of the Sword.

Varlud: The leader of a very large singular Freehold, or a region comprising several smaller Freeholds.

Orl: The leader of a Freehold.

Thex: The head of a family, clan, faction, or trade guild within a Freehold; the highest social rank a Paxjan can hold.

Xorga/Axma: The standard rank for a Viridese Warmaster/Paxjan.

Slave: A person who must serve as a slave until they are ransomed (usually at the annual Conclave by their home Freehold) or manage to escape (if a slave can make it to another Freehold or off Viridia, they are considered to have been freed).

One must have power over oneself to have power over anything else.

—Viridese Proverb

What the Viridese Are Like

The Viridese are a fiercely independent and pragmatic people who value self-reliance strongly, as well as the ability of the self-reliant to join together in common purpose. Above all, a Viridese respects strength of body, mind, or spirit.

Centuries ago, the Varlok Sigrun Wixsinger said, “Victory through killing your enemy is hard, but sometimes necessary. Humbling the foe, beating them without unnecessary bloodshed, is better—unless they will not accept the loss. Making an enemy come around to your perspective, becoming your shieldjan and ally, is the *best* sort of victory.”

Viridese seek power over everything: themselves, their environment, other beings, and the universe itself (in roughly that order). They tend to keep their feelings private, opting for a stoic demeanor. They regard those unable to control their emotions (like Colronans with their high passion and Barathi with their irrational need for revenge) with disdain—though few Viridese would lower themselves to show this contempt outwardly.

As noted above, there are two “castes” in Viridese society: the Warmasters and the Paxjen. A Warmaster **leads**, and a Paxjan **does**. Though Warmasters are by definition the Paxjen’s social superiors, they are aware that Paxjen possess strengths that they do not, especially in non-martial fields. One caste is not necessarily held up as unilaterally “better” than the other: each is “better” in specific situations.

A story is told of how Warmaster Hesta Eggwine slighted Paxjan Avan Stonetiller severely enough that a formal duel was called at Conclave. The swaggering warrior laughed in anticipation of it, until she heard the terms of the contest: cultivating four acres of land and harvesting the oats; the winner would be the one who brought the most bushels of oats to the next Conclave. Chastened, she conceded immediately. (Subsequent “duels” between these two became even more complex and strange, finally culminating in their marriage and the destruction of Blackeagle Freehold. . . but that is another tale.)

The most important aspect of personal fashion for a Viridese is his or her *hairstyle*. Males tend to wear their hair long—either loose or in one long braid—and cultivate mustaches and beards; women tend to wear their hair as they choose: short, long, or in two long braids. Tattoos are common among both sexes, often related to their Freehold or clan. Excessive ornamentation is seen as gauche.

Viridese Language

On Viridia, men and women are considered to be equal in all things but one: women can bear children.

The Viridese language uses gender neutral nouns and pronouns, except for a specific set used only to refer to a pregnant or breastfeeding woman. For the burden of pregnancy and childbirth, women are honored through matrilineal descent (all clan relationships are traced through one’s mother) and matrilocal residency (children live in the mother’s Freehold). While marriage is not unknown, it is uncommon; however, both parents of a child are expected to help provide for its basic necessities and education.

Jan: Human being.

Je, jun, jas: he/she, him/her, his/hers.

Tal: Pregnant or breastfeeding female.

Te, tun, tas: she, her, hers.

Some Viridese Names

Viridese style is Name and Epithet. Individual clans and Freeholds are usually unimportant to non-Viridese.

Male: Avan, Boris, Chin, Dakkar, Evin, Freyn, Gar, Henrik, Ietan, Karlo, Lem, Magnus, Narx, Odhin, Pehn, Ram, Sigur, Thur, Ulaz, Vamon, Wilan, Xidi, Yvan, Zor.

Female: Amily, Berta, Cenna, Dura, Evina, Fila, Gudrun, Hesta, Idun, Katya, Lin, Magna, Nell, Olga, Pini, Rika, Siva, Tonza, Ulazi, Vexi, Wolanda, Xaada, Ygran, Zenna.

Epithet: Arrowhawk, Boldface, Catfooted, Darkminded, Eyebright, Feksinger, Godsjan, Huntwalker, the Imaginative, Kelpsmoker, Longseer, Moorwalker, the Nasty, Oldsjan, Prettyspeaker, Ragedancer, the Serpent, Talklistener, the Unbecoming, Vinegrower, the Whale, Xenogogue, Yellowface, the Zetetic.

Viridia & the Church

The Church's emphasis on Honor (and its related rules) has a powerful resonance with Viridese. However, a Viridese's pragmatism and need to *win* often conflicts with the Church's teachings.

A Church priest has the same status in society as a Koldun: a priest is considered a Paxjan during war, and a Warmaster during peace. This equivalence of status between the priestly and the mystic is the cause of friction between the Church and the Freeholds.

Viridia & the Mystical

On Viridia, the koldun are respected for their knowledge and power. They are considered a Paxjan during war, and a Warmaster during peace on Viridia (much as a priest is). A Warmaster who is also Gifted or koldun is a high-prestige individual indeed, due to wide-ranging strength.

Opinions of the Other Nations Regarding Viridese

The rest of the World sees Viridese as dangerous foes that need to be accounted for when they appear. They are sought-after mercenaries known for being reasonably honorable about their contracts.

What's Happening Now On Viridia?

Currently, there is no Varlok, and the Council of the Sword has not met in decades.

Many Freeholds are *extremely* interested in recovering Kroyu vaults and artifacts, especially from the era of the Last Kroyu War, and they are *extremely* quiet about doing it. They pay high prices, take on dangerous jobs, make lightning-strike raids, dabble in intrigue, capture foreign skyships, delve into the mystical, and more in search of Kroy's legacy.

A romantic triangle: **Logi Eyebright** (a koldun of Skaramark Freehold) and **Thorin Godsjan** (a priest of the Church from Sunseer Freehold) are courting the same Warmaster: **Inda Axehand**, who is the Orl of Magnusport. The two lovestruck fools are participating in an extensive ongoing contest to prove not only which of them is the stronger (in all respects), but which of them has the stronger love for sweet Inda. This contest has thus far involved raids, duels, and covert off-island activities. Inda, for her part, is mildly amused, but otherwise ignores it (though some say she is engaging her own agents to bring an end to it all).

Viridese Warmasters

The Warmasters are fighters, born and bred. They are adept in all aspects of conflict, from the game-board to the battlefield. Their training at the Academy begins at an early age, and encompasses tactics, logistics, military history, swordplay, firearm use, siege engineering, artillery, hunting, unarmed combat, soldiery, skyship combat, wingcloak use, politics, mystical resource use, wilderness survival, and games.

While the Barathi are the best surface sailors in the World (and along with the Ilwuzi considered the best skysailors), the Colronans are the best soldiers and horsemen, the Crailese the best at urban combat, and the Sha-Ku at aerial combat, the Viridese Warmasters are adept at all of these, by far the most versatile, and the best at joint operations combining these aspects.

Those who graduate from the Academy bear a brand on their dominant arm in the shape of a sword (often further decorated with tattoo work). Warmasters are the chieftains of the Freeholds, and Viridese will not follow those individuals who are not Warmasters. Warmasters are loyal to their social superiors—if those superiors can convince them of the soundness of their plans and goals.

A Warmaster is a doughty foe—an elite trooper, a commando, a wizard of war—equally at home on a skyship, under ambush, attacking a fortress, defending a fortress, in a tavern brawl, fighting off a back-alley assassin, or playing cards with the King of Colrona. They know the rules, and know when to break them.

Colrona, The Island Of Love & Honor

What Colrona Is Like

Colrona is a large cloud-island, lower than Barathi in the Dome (in the Widder Low Layer; see p. 5). The half that faces the islands of Barathi, Viridia, and Crail is the *Kingdom of Colrona*, covered in old-growth hardwood forests, rolling hills, finger lakes, and grassy plains. The half that faces the far-off island of Sha Ka Ruq is the *Zultanate of Colrona*, speckled with steep mountains that collapse into foothills, savannah, and desert.

The two nations are divided by *The Sun Line*, a band of flat plain that reaches from one edge of the island to the other, sitting directly under the Solar Equator. Most of the wars between the Kingdom and Zultanate are fought here. *The Sea of Glass* is a large lake that interrupts the Sun Line. The villages of *Nivers* (in the Kingdom) and *Orbatz* (in the Zultanate) face each other across the Sea; each is the closest civilized point to the neighboring nation; thus, much trade passes through them. One of the most famous tales of Colrona, *Ragazar & Jeannette*, is a story of star-crossed lovers—one a Zultanista and one a Royalist—who lived and loved here during the *War of Mirrors* (note that the story is told differently, and has different endings, in each nation). It is said that once a year, on Midsummer Night, the *Isla del Corazon* rises from the depths, and the ghosts of the lovers return as they had promised for a night of passion.



Both the Kingdom and the Zultanate grow *trigo*. Trigo is a variety of wheat, which—depending upon how it is prepared—has unique properties in cooking; it can serve as either cake or bread flour. Also, Colronan horses are the best above the Blue, known for their speed, endurance, and intelligence. Anyone who appreciates a good mount carefully studies the numerous breeds from both nations.

Colronan History in Brief



Seven hundred years ago, the island of Colrona rose from the Blue. Quickly, the major powers of the World (Barathi, Kroy, and Viridia) placed colonies on this new land. Five hundred years ago, the *War of the Three Colonies* (now called the *War of Colronan Independence*) began. After 26 years of war (featuring battles like *The Ambush of Nivers* and *The Dragon's Retreat*), the native-born faction surprised everyone by coming out on top, winning independence from all three mother nations.

During the Last Kroyu War, the shattering of Crailwuz (see p. 57) led a holy man living in the wastes of the island to a revelation. After the Sundering, the man known to history as *the First Prophet* founded the *Church of Vaoz* (see p. 97). The Church, with its emphasis on Honor, served as a beacon to the war-weary and destruction-shocked people of the World. Growing by leaps and bounds, its message was welcome to those who had tired of bloodshed and intrigue and fear. The Church grew in power and reach, and eventually the Zultanate coalesced, across the Sun Line in the desert scrublands. Their secession from the Kingdom began the *Colronan Civil War*.

The Civil War raged thirteen years, far bloodier and more personal than the War for Colronan Independence, as most family squabbles are. At the end, Colrona was split into the Kingdom and the Zultanate.

For the past two hundred years, the Kingdom and the Zultanate have alternately been at war and at peace; enemies, rivals, allies, friends, there and back again. There have been at least two major wars between the two nations in that time—the *War of Mirrors* and the *War of the Sun and Moon*—as well as innumerable minor conflicts. However, against outsiders, the two countries stand together as one.

I had become embroiled in a duel with Baron Estevan Theodoreson over a woman of high birth who enjoyed both of our acquaintances. The Baron had the temerity to aver that his passion for my mistress was greater than mine! So you can see, I had no recourse than to prove my love for her upon his body with my sword.

As we were crossing blades in the courtyard behind the Church of the City of Light, one of my subordinates came up running. He called a halt to the duel, informing me that a Zultanate agent had entered the home of my mistress, and was threatening her. I, of course, begged the Baron's pardon for delaying our mutual satisfaction due to matters of state. He concurred with a will, then offered to accompany me and my men to face the Zultanista.

I, of course, readily accepted. We ran down the streets of Chansonville to the home of our mutual friend.

— **Leftenant Victor Armandson,**
King's Musketeer, Knight of Grande Dellaluna

The Kingdom of Colrona



Access to the 7 Skies from the Kingdom is easy: from the royal city of Vosquindon in the Highlands, simply sail down the central River to Heaven and—at the river's mouth—watch the buildings of Port Paradise slip by on either bank as you enter Paradise Harbor. From there, sail into the island's Cloud and then into the Dome of the Heavens.

The Citadel of Xava huddles in a remote mountain valley of the Kingdom. This is where the native Colronan army headquartered during the War for Colronan Independence. It is the only fortress in the entire World never to have fallen by any means, fair or foul. Legend tells of a secret room in the heart of the Citadel where Crown Princes of the Kingdom are taken the night before their coronation. There, mysterious voices whisper secrets to them that enable them to rule wisely.

The best alcoholic beverages, books, art, songs, and entertainers in the World come from the Kingdom. Throughout the World, taverners and innkeepers get into duels over a single cask of Colronan *fest-ale*, and swains court their beloveds with Colronan love songs.

How the Kingdom of Colrona Is Ruled

Colrona is a feudal monarchy: the King is absolute ruler (though advised by the *Council of Dukes* and the *Privy Cabinet*). He sits atop a pyramid of Dukes, Barons, and Knights, each lord over a number of lesser Freeman and Peasants.

One of the biggest differences between the Kingdom and the Zultanate is the relationship between Church and State. While the Zultanistas believe in the unification of the two, the Kingdom believes that religion—while it may **influence** policy—should not **drive** policy. Furthermore, there are distinct differences in the ways the Kingdom and the Zultanate view the role of women and koldun in society (below).

The symbol of the Kingdom of Colrona is a silver horse rampant on a crimson field.

Royalist Aristocrats

King/Queen: Ruler of the Kingdom of Colrona.

Duke/Duchess: The very height of the aristocracy of the Kingdom; part of the Council of Dukes that advises the monarch; responsible for Barons, Knights, Freeman, and Peasants associated with his lands, person, or titles; owes fealty to the King.

Baron/Baroness: The vast bulk of the aristocracy of the Kingdom; responsible for Knights, Freeman, and Peasants associated with his lands, person, or titles; owes fealty to a Duke or Duchess.

Knight/Dame: The lowest rank of noble in the Kingdom; responsible for Freeman and Peasants associated with his lands, person, or titles; owes fealty to a Baron or Baroness.

Freeman: A non-noble citizen of the Kingdom; usually styled “Goodman,” “Goodmiss,” or “Goodwife.”

Peasant: Peasantry in the Kingdom is a form of indentured, inheritable servitude. A peasant (and his heirs) bind themselves to a parcel of land, a particular person (and his or her heirs), or a particular title, in return for some sort of boon or aid. They work off the debt (usually sizable) over the course of years; when it is paid, they are returned to Freeman status.

*While it is a great thing to die for love, it is a greater thing to **live** for love.*

—Colronan Proverb

What the Royalists Are Like

Colronans Royalists are a mixture of the Barathi, Viridese, and Kroyu colonists who initially settled their island. This has given rise to a people caught between passion, pragmatism, and honor. Royalists are *fond* of allowing passion to carry their concerns away. A Royalist is excitable, passionate, and very romantic (in all senses of the word).

2

Ask the average Royalist what he lives for, and he will surely respond “Love.” An emotional people, they are “in love with love”—not just the experience, but the very concept. They openly show their feelings, often to the scorn or disbelief of foreigners. Royalists respect and revel in displays of passion, both their own and that of others. They are like a couple who slowly and methodically build a house of cards for the simple joy of knocking it down so as to make love on the table.

A story is told of a simple apprentice tailor who enlisted as a soldier during the War of Mirrors. Because of his valor on the field, he was knighted. He immediately entered the King’s Musketeers, and there distinguished himself further. He died a Baron, far above his original station in life, due to his dedication to the King.

Royalist Women

The women of the Kingdom of Colrona are certainly treated as second-class citizens in the Royalist culture. This limits their options in holding power outright.

The first major way for a Royalist woman to gain power is to be the widow of a man with no other heir. Only in this way can they serve in their late husband’s role in society. The second most popular method is to intrigue behind the scenes, manipulating husbands, lovers, children—or all three!—to work one’s will upon policy and society. Another method is to join the Church. Since advancement in the Church of Vaoz is based on merit without any consideration for gender or quality of birth, a woman can rise very high indeed in the clergy. The last, and most dangerous, method is for a Royalist woman to disguise herself as a man.

The most famous example of a woman in disguise was the Duke Victor Edoardson (actually, Victoria Marcsdar, daughter of a minor Knight). A century ago, she disguised herself as a boy, and worked her way up to the very Council of Dukes through martial skill and devotion to the King and Crown. Her gender was revealed due to court intrigue after the War of the Sun and Moon, but she became the King’s mistress—and quietly maintained her power.

The society of the Kingdom is male-dominated: in good ways (chivalrous) and bad ones (chauvinistic). Most Colronans claim to respect women who break from the “fainting damsel” stereotype (bless their little hearts!)—but in practice, such women are viewed askance.

The most important piece of Royalist attire is their *boots*. The status of a Royalist can often be told by the quality and style of their footwear. Fanciful stitching, selection of materials, cavalier flaps, heels, spurs, inlaid jewels, practicality vs. impracticality, the pointed toe vs. the rounded toe vs. the squared toe—all tell a story about the person wearing them.

A wealthy Royalist went to visit a courtesan he desired to patronize. However, when he saw the ornate boots sitting in a line outside her inner salon (for she had embraced a bizarre custom of the Sha-Ku savages), he knew his boots were not fine enough to sit outside her door. So he stole a pair (a duke’s, by the by) and rushed to the best cobbler in the city. Paying an enormous sum of money to the shoemaker, he had a duplicate pair of boots made that would not embarrass him—or the courtesan—if they were seen outside her salon door.

Some Royalist Names

Male: Alexei, Bernardo, Claude, Diego, Edoard, Francisco, Garrick, Henri, Ignacio, Jerome, Karlo, Loren, Marc, Nero, Oliver, Paz, Ramon, Sebastian, Timofei, Uri, Victor, William, Xavier, Yvan, Zakari.

Female: Alaina, Betta, Chantal, Dina, Esperanza, Flor, Garrick, Helene, Izolda, Josephina, Karlinda, Lizaveta, Marjurite, Nina, Odet, Paulina, Raisa, Sabine, Tereza, Ulianca, Veronika, Wanda, Xenia, Yana, Zoe.

Colronan Royalist descent is traced through the father, with a patronymic: the child takes the father’s name, plus a suffix (-son for a male, -sdar for a female); thus, “Etienne Yvanson” is the son of Yvan, and “Zora Karlosdar” is the daughter of Karlo.

The Kingdom & the Church

The Church is a big part of the daily life of most Colronans. Most Royalists attend regular services (if nothing else, it is a good place to see one’s paramour), and regularly consult Virtutoirs (see p. 100) when they feel a crisis of honor.

The Kingdom & the Mystical

The Kingdom openly welcomes alchemists and the Gifted. (After all, someone has to produce the gunpowder necessary for the King's Musketeers.) Unlike their neighbors, however, the Royalists do not seem to have as much of a problem with koldun. . . so long as they are *quiet*, they are tolerated. (Reliable rumor says that the Crown has a number of covert koldun on its payroll.)

For its part, the Kingdom imposes harsh penalties upon people found to have used their alchemy, Gift, or koldun powers when committing crimes against others.

Opinions of the Other Nations Regarding the Kingdom

Most of the people of other islands find the Royalists to be mawkish, soft-hearted, romantic fools. While their skills in land-war are respected, many find them faintly ridiculous for favoring the randomness of one's birth over one's nature, deeds, or ability.

Colronan Musketeers

The Colronan Musketeers are the elite force of the Kingdom, trained in athletics, soldiery, swordplay, musket use, tactics, artillery, fortress defense, horsemanship, and logistics. One must be a male noble Colronan to join; male peasants are sent to the regular army, and women are simply turned away.

The Colronan Musketeers serve His Majesty as bodyguards, military advisors, keepers of the peace, and support-fire units (and some say as spies, too). They are the best surface soldiers in the World, known for their fanatic loyalty to the King himself, their penchant for dueling at the drop of an idle word, and their brilliant crimson cloaks and feather-plumed hats. They may be dispatched on a moment's notice on dangerous missions (singly or en masse) and are often required to stand guard, watch, or patrol duty.

What's Happening Now In the Kingdom?

The major question of the day is which of the sons of **King Gyorg Gyorgson** should be confirmed as Crown Prince. As the elder, **Prince Yvan** (stubborn, arrogant, and obnoxious, but loyal unto death and more often right than wrong) would seem to fill the role, but Yvan's fiery personality has distanced the King. Then there is **Prince Tomas**, a dreamy and placid young man, given to philosophy—but still waters run deep, some say: indeed, under his serene visage lurks a devious mind. The King's

right hand, **Duke Franqos** (some say a secret koldun), has made no public show of support for either prince.

The Royalist pirate **Captain Alexei Rostand** (formerly known as Alexei Xavierson) has retired from his career, and published his *Memoirs of a Sky Pirate*. The book has caught on like wildfire—all Royalists, high and low, are reading it and discussing it. Some claim that Rostand has left clues to a vast treasure from his pirating days, a rumor that Rostand has made no attempt to denounce.



Baron Ramon Pazson is a renowned gambler, skilled at all sorts of games of chance, be they dice, cards, or proposition. However, for the past six months, he has lost every single bet he has made. He suspects a koldun's curse, and is seeking doughty agents to help change his luck back to gold.

*She looked at me, but it was not fear in her eyes, it was **anger**. Anger at someone in her private chambers.*

I felt the witch attempt to use her sorcery upon me, upon my mind. But Vaoz has blessed me with the Gift of the Griffin, and her mind-twisting had no effect. I grinned, and doffed my hat, before I spoke.

“My lady, you are Baroness Izolda Lorendar, widow of Baron Karlo Karloson, and the effective ruler of this town of Chansonville. You traveled into the Zultanate last autumn on pilgrimage to the Great Cathedral; on your return through Orbatz, your agents delivered unto you a book, which you will return to me now.” I replaced my hat. “You are also a koldun, and your powers have no effect on me.” That is when I drew my blade.

Anger fled her eyes, replaced by fear. Finally.

— Sandman Rahimat

The Zultanate of Colrona

From the Zultanate, entry to the 7 Skies is difficult. It has no water coastline facing the island's Cloud; instead, the Cloud edges the incredibly flat desert of the *Spaar Oom*. For a skyship to land at the Zultanate, they must approach the *Grand Wharf*. An amazing construction of bluewood and boulders harvested from the Sky of Stones, the Wharf provides a place for skyships to tie-up, offload cargo and passengers, and load new cargo and passengers. A triple-railway, inspired by those of Viridia (see p. 34), carries people and goods from the Wharf to the port city of *Alakaam*.



The Great Cathedral of the First Prophet is located in *Mekaaba*, the capital city of the Zultanate, home of the Church of Vaoz (see p. 97). The Cathedral's central pulpit sits atop a crypt containing the cottage of the First Prophet. Gigantic, beautiful, a wonder of the World, its dome of blue glass can entirely cover a small village. Golden and silver statues line the niches of the marble walls. Thousands of passages—some well-trod, others

secrets known to only one or two in a generation—riddle it. Deep inside is the *Bar-Huz-Azziz*, the palace of the Zultan, a fortress within a fortress.

The Zultanate produces the best cheeses, glass, pottery, educators, and drugs. Skysailors across the World swear by the quality of Zultanista spyglasses and telescopes; some refuse to use anything else.

The Mirror of Honor

What is *The Mirror of Honor*? The words that quelled a war, started a religion, and created a new nation.

Simply, the First Prophet spoke of Honor, how it was the basis for all interactions between people. He spoke of the driving need for those who were dedicated to Honor above all, who could be trusted to offer the right advice, perform the right actions, and—above all—to be objective in matters of importance.

Then, he preached on how Honor is created, maintained, and lost, and the consequences of Honor unsullied and sullied. He offered ideas and exercises to aid people to pursue Honor. All his words were gathered and published as a small book titled *The Mirror of Honor*.

In short, *The Mirror of Honor* is a handbook for the establishment, preservation, repair, and recognition of value, worth, and quality. It started a revolution in philosophy, diplomacy, and inter-island relations that is still being felt today in the 7 Skies.

How the Zultanate of Colrona Is Ruled

The Colronan Zultanate is a theocratic meritocracy, administered by the *Mirrored Bureaucracy* (composed of the most honorable and qualified citizens), and directed by the will of Vaoz as transmitted through the *Zultan*. The Zultan (may he reign with Honor!) is the head of both the nation of The Zultanate as well as the Church of Vaoz. The *College of Viziers* advises the Zultan (may he reign with Honor!) and runs the Mirrored Bureaucracy. The *Colronan Sandmen* (see p. 54) are the Zultan's bodyguards and agents.

One of the biggest differences between the Zultanate and the Kingdom is the relationship between Church and State. While the Kingdom believes that religion should be separate from policy, the Zultanate believes that religion *must* dictate policy. Furthermore, there are distinct differences between the way the Zultanistas and the Royalists view the role of women and koldun in society (see below).

The symbol of the Zultanate is the same as that of the Church: a golden eye within a golden solar circle upon a sky blue field.

Zultanista Aristocrats

Zultan: The ruler of the Zultanate and head of the Church of Vaoz. To become Zultan, a priest (of any rank) must pass the Ultimate Examination, and then win a majority vote in the College of Viziers.

Amir: A citizen of the Zultanate who has passed the advanced Examinations, is part of the priesthood, and has been appointed by the Zultan (may he reign with Honor!) to the rank. To be a Vizier of the Mirrored Bureaucracy or a regional governor, a Zultanista must be at least an Amir.

Houzi: A citizen of the Zultanate who has passed the expert Examinations and has been appointed by the local Amir to the rank. To be a regional director of the Mirrored Bureaucracy, a Zultanista must be at least a Houzi.

Zirdar: A citizen of the Zultanate who has passed the basic Examinations. To be part of the Mirrored Bureaucracy, a Zultanista must be at least a Zirdar.

Rafi: A citizen of the Zultanate who has not taken or passed the Examinations.

Slave: Slaves are indentured servants who must work off a debt of honor. Indeed, they are closer to "prisoners" than "peasants." Under Zultanista law, they have a number of rights, and are not considered property.

*The honorable man walks fearlessly in
the sight of Vaoz.*

—Colronan Proverb

What the Zultanistas Are Like

Honor motivates most Zultanistas. Concerned about their own integrity, they struggle to polish the brightness of their soul, as well as sharpen and test the souls of those around them. They offer respect and deference to those superior to them, and protection and guidance to those inferior to them. “A perfect Zultanista” always keeps his word, even unto death. They respect intelligence and learning, perhaps more than any other people of the World.

However, Zultanista are very class-conscious, given their merit-based caste system. In general, men and women are seen to be equals in honor and intellect, provided that they are in the same merit-caste. Any Zultanista can improve their merit caste by passing the *Examinations* that test loyalty, integrity, courage, and intelligence.

In the early days of the Zultanate, the *Vizier of the Western Sands* decided to marry. He announced this publicly, saying he would only marry the most accomplished, the most skilled, the most honorable woman—caste be damned. From far and wide, women came to his scandalized village—traders, bureaucrats, swordswomen, scholars, even a Sandman or two. When all was said and done, the woman he chose was a low-caste fisherwoman named *Bahiti* from the shores of the Sea of Glass. He married her, horrifying the populace. However, with access to the opportunities



granted by her husband's wealth and position, and drawing on her own native intelligence and industry, Bahiti studied. Rapidly passing several Examinations, she became the first female *Grand Vizier*, second only to the Zultan. The people who had once scorned the poor fisherwoman now knelt before her in the Great Cathedral.

The most important item of clothing in the Zultanate is the *hat*. Secular Zultanista men wear wide-brimmed, low-crowned hats, adorned with metal or feathered accoutrements. Secular Zultanista Women wear narrow-brimmed hats equipped with a veil or scarf, bedecked in colored glass, mirrors, or jewels. Priestly hats for both sexes are more modestly adorned, and usually wide-brimmed and high-crowned; as status increases, the shape and roll of the brim changes.

Some Zultanista Names

Male: Anka, Bomani, Cadi, Duman, Ebo, Fahd, Geb, Hazad, Ibrim, Jafar, Kerem, Lukman, Muktar, Nazor, Osman, Qadir, Pramik, Rahimat, Sebi, Terik, Umit, Vakimota, Wazim, Xeki, Yafeu, Zafri.

Female: Azya, Bahiti, Cantara, Demet, Eshi, Fatima, Gamza, Heqet, Inya, Julida, Kadara, Layla, Mona, Nese, Olufemi, Payya, Qalimeta, Rabia, Suma, Thurya, Ulku, Vamaya, Widad, Xilda, Yazmin, Zahrah.

The Zultanate & the Church

The majority of Zultanista culture is so tied into that of the Church, it is hard to separate them. The Church is a *huge* part of life for a Zultanista. Almost all attend and participate in weekly services—plus longer monthly celebrations and the seasonal holy days and festivals—and regularly patronize a Virtutoir (see p. 100) to advise them on matters of honor.

The Zultanate & the Mystical

In the Zultanate, alchemists and the Gifted are openly welcomed, just as in the Kingdom.

However, the Zultanistas and the Church do not tolerate koldun, feeling that a koldun has *too much mystical power* to live honorably; the temptation to abuse that power is too great. Zultanista who have the talent to become a koldun are offered *the Choice*: be exiled from the Zultanate or become one of the *Fettered*—people who have had a fetter (see p. 94) permanently locked around one of their wrists, making most uses of their powers extremely painful.

The Zultanate imposes exceedingly harsh penalties upon people who use alchemy, Gift, or koldun powers dishonorably (especially in the commission of crimes). Indeed, “crimes of sorcery” merit a death penalty.

Opinions of the Other Nations Regarding the Zultanate

Most of the other nations view the people of the Zultanate to be stuck-up intellectuals, full of strange and confusing ideas, often dry as dust, dull, and passionless. But they are honorable sorts, almost proverbially so. “As constant as a Zultanista” is a common phrase (though sometimes “constant” is replaced with “boring” or “snotty.”) They are also known as doughty soldiers, well-matched against their Royalist neighbors/rivals.

Colronan Sandmen

The Zultanista Sandmen believe in death before dishonor. They are trained in fencing (scimitars preferred), athletics, firearms, horsemanship, tactics, field medicine, survival skills, manners, and diplomacy. They are loyal to Vaoz, the ideal of Honor, the Zultan (may he reign with Honor!), and the Church, in that order. They serve as elite troops and police for the Zultanate. Many are also priests. Zultanistas with mystical Gifts are strongly encouraged to join the Sandmen. Sandmen wear an ornate sash (either shoulder to hip or as a belt), embroidered with hundreds of golden eyes.

What's Happening Now In the Zultanate?

There has never been a female Zultan (may she reign with Honor, if she ever takes the Throne!) thus far in history.

However, with the Zultan (may he reign with Honor!) growing weak from age, there are three priestesses who are considering the Ultimate Examination: **Amir Cantara**, the Vizier of Roads and Railways; **Sandman Yazmin the Unseen**, a skilled fencer and bodyguard (and also the lover of the current Zultan); and **Priestess Heqet the Mad**, a hermit living deep in the Spaar Oom.

The Zultanate is outfitting a pair of unique skyships. The first is *Vaoz's Arrow*, built to pierce the Edge of the World and explore the Uttermost Dark. The second is *The Salamander*, constructed to resist the flames of the Sky of Fire. There are whispers that these are not exploratory vessels, but prototype warships to “punish the

dishonorable and teach them the lessons of Vaoz.” Alas, the Zultanate is hampered in its efforts to construct these ships, due to the Church’s opposition to koldun, relying instead on the Gifted and alchemists.

Arrested for a crime of dishonor—cutting down an unarmed foe (**Ptamik the Brave**) from behind—**Amir Umit the Dashing** denied the charge. He spoke of his friendship with Ptamik, his spotless honor, and the fact that he’d been on Crail at the time of Ptamik’s death. Yet **Judge Vakimota** still found against him, sentencing him to a decade of slavery. Umit escaped, vowing to find who framed him to prove the corruption of Vakimota. Some say he is a desert bandit, with a band of men, preying on caravans on the trade routes; others think that he’s in the Kingdom, working with the Royalists, planning an invasion of the Zultanate; still others claim that he’s gone pirate or is living a quiet life on Crail. There is a substantial reward for Umit’s return, in chains, offered by Ptamik’s widow **Azya the Lovely**.



The other night, I was playing in the Broken Lock with my regular combo: Yvan, a Royalist horn player; Marco, a Barathi virtuoso of the concertina; and this crazy little Sha-Ku drummer we all called Tako.

As is my wont, I watched the crowd. Merchant traders mingled with gamblers, stylish Inner-towners slummed with the grubbier Edge-towners, and a couple of cutpurses worked the rest, while trying to avoid the off-duty (and a few on-duty) Blackbirds. It was a typical weeknight.

Or, rather, it was a typical weeknight until I saw Shirtless Beppo showing a scrap of paper to a Viridese skysailor. It was a map, I’m sure, of the region around Fortaleza Verde. The Kroyu symbol for “vault” was quite distinct—I apprenticed in a counting house before taking up music, so I am quite sure it was that.

The two of them slipped away as we finished our set. I do not know where they went.

But I knew where I was going: to sell the information that Beppo knew the location of a Kroyu vault, packed with who knows what treasures, traps, and mysteries. The only question in my mind was who to sell the information to.

And that is what has brought me to you, Ambassador.

— **Rikaard Ayemson, King of the Mandolin**

Lost Kroy

Everything has a price, and prices are negotiable.

— Kroyu Proverb

2

Before it was lost, Kroy was a major nation of the World: a crossroads of the 7 Skies, it was **the** nexus of international trade. The government (a plutocratic corporate republic) was run as a business, for a profit.

The only sin on Kroy was theft, and many crimes were framed in that idiom. Murder was “theft of life”; vandalism was “theft of the capital that will be required to repair the damage”; and running from a guardsman was “theft of effort that could have been used in a more profitable way.”

The pursuit of profit over all on Kroy led to intense *competition*—and this spurred a golden age of advancement in many crafts. Legend says that the Kroyu invented gunpowder and cannon, changed the way that people looked at the koldun, refined commerce to a high art, and encouraged technologies and mystical explorations to heights as yet still unknown. This great advancement had a darker side for the Kroyu, alas: *hubris*.

During the Last Kroyu War, the Merchant Princes of Kroy decided to strike a blow against their primary enemy: Barathi. Kroyu koldun created an *Island-Killer* weapon, and when it was finally ready, they decided to *test* it on the pirate haven of Crailwuz before they turned it on their sworn enemy.

The test went awry: Crailwuz was blasted into two smaller islands (Crail and Ilwuz; see p. 57 and p. 64), but Kroy’s protective Fog was shredded and it began spinning towards the Sky of Fire. Thousands of refugees escaped, crowding onto all available skyships, before their island was burned to a cinder.

Though the cloud-island of Kroy is gone, its legacy remains: Kroyu is the common tongue throughout the World, their system of numbers and written glyphs is the gold standard for trade and accountancy, their insights still influence the mystical pursuits of the koldun. Any merchant or traveler worth his salt can read the Kroyu script—handy when lost Kroyu vaults are found (as they sometimes are), stuffed with traps and treasure.

Most of the surviving Kroyu have eventually blended into the peoples of the other nations. There are some few, isolated pockets of ethnic Kroyu—with their own small neighborhoods in the big cities of the Major Islands, or tiny settlements on Minor Islands. These “Lost People” are sometimes viewed with scorn and disdain, sometimes with pity and compassion, and sometimes with reverence and awe.

Crail, the Crossroads of the World

What Crail Is Like

Crail is one of the smallest of the Major Islands of the 7 Skies, but is by no means the least of them. It sits at the heart of several trade routes of the World, in the Widder Low Layer. Its proximity to the Sky of Fire makes it a warm island, even during the winter.

Once, it was half of the island known as *Crailwuz*. During the Last Kroyu War, Kroy unleashed a terrible mystical weapon against *Crailwuz*, shattering it and making half of it vanish. The Kroyu paid for this, though—their weapon also caused the destruction of Kroy itself.



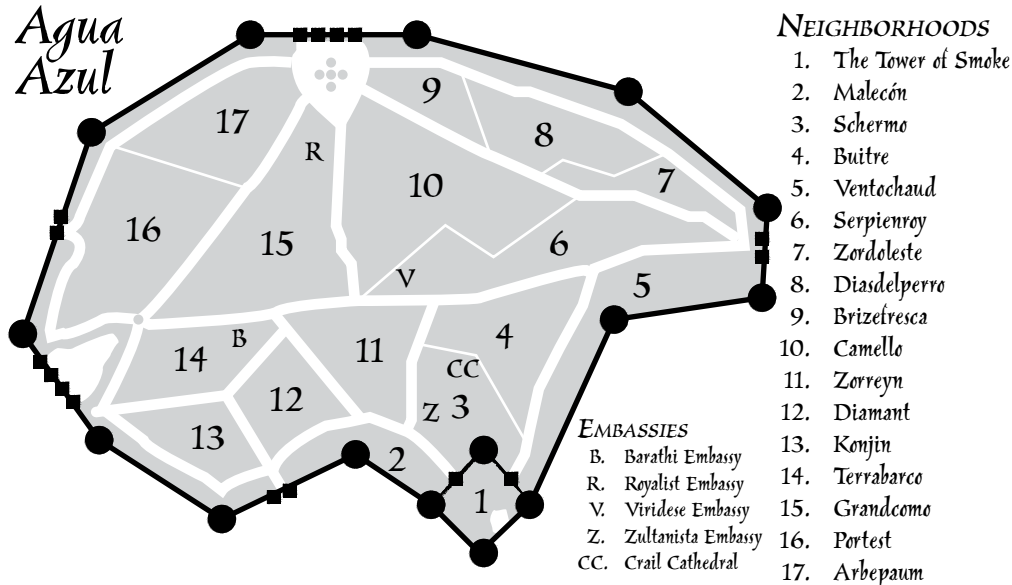
In the aftermath of *the Sundering*, the remaining fragment of cloud-island became known as *Crail*. The Sundering killed thousands and weakened the island's Fog: over much of Crail, the Fog is only half as strong as that of other cloud-islands (except over the part of the island that holds *Agua Azul*). This means that the “shards-end” of Crail is pounded by the fury of the Skies throughout the year—thus, the *Windfall Desert*, a barren and cratered landscape that is uninhabitable, but collects great amounts of interesting things from the 7 Skies—Stones, wheeltrees, ghosts, wrecked skyships, and more.

Agua Azul—or, more commonly, simply “The City”—is the greatest and most cosmopolitan city in the entire World. A vast amount of goods, and vast numbers of people, flow through it; it is the port at the center of the Skies, well-suited for trade, diplomacy, and intrigue. The City's *Sweetwater Wells*, full of fresh, clean water, are the method of control the *Commandant of the Falcons* applies. From the seven story *Tower of Smoke* the Commandant rules; the Tower also contains the *Halls of Justice*, the *Council Chamber*, and seven levels of dungeons below.

A three-day journey from the City sits *Fortaleza Verde*, a ruined Barathi castle from the days of *Crailwuz*. Damaged by wars and elements, secrets and wonders yet hide in its crumbling chambers and deep vaults. Unfortunately, these treasures are guarded by ghosts and mummies.

Agua
Azul

2



The *Rugged Tribes* are Crailese who spurn City-living, instead choosing to dwell in the wastes in small tribes. Mostly nomadic herders, farmers, and prospector-miners, they sell their produce, spices, milk, cheese, meat, hides, ores, and crafts to the traders of Agua Azul. While they believe in Vaoz, they hold to strange, heretical beliefs (see p. 102). None of the Rugged Tribes claim the *Cavern Oasis* (a grove of palm trees around a clear pool of water, deep inside a mountain), seeing it as a gift from Vaoz. By tradition, it is sanctuary for anyone who enters it.

Crailese *blackcotton* is sought after for its ease of processing and fineness, especially by alchemists and koldun, because of its mystical properties: it stiffens and softens as needed. Wingcloaks of the highest quality use blackcotton cloth. Crail also produces a variety of citrus fruits, giving Agua Azul one of its nicknames: “The City of Seven Sours” (orange, lemon, lime, bergamot, grapefruit, kumquat, and yuzu).

Crailese History in Brief

Three hundred and seventy-seven years ago, the koldun of Kroy unleashed a mystical weapon against Crailwuz—a test before turning it towards Barathi. The weapon cracked Crailwuz in half, killing thousands, destroying much. (Legend states that a hundred koldun sacrificed their very souls to help shelter the island from the full force of the attack; these *Centurions* are honored as Crailese culture heroes.)

For the next few centuries, the surviving half of Crailwuz, now called Crail, struggled to survive. When the *War of the Skull* began, many people thought that the Crailese were responsible. The Colronans came in force to pacify Crail, under the assumption

that the Skull Pirates were Crailese. They weren't—they were *Ilwuzi* (see p. 64).

Luckily, with the aid of the new Church, Crail became recognized as a new nation.

How Crail Is Ruled

Crail is a constitutional military dictatorship, with a large body of laws to protect trade, civil rights, and safety. These laws are enforced by the *Falcons of Crail* (see p. 63), led by the Commandant. The Falcons keep the peace, defend the City and its citizens, and enact the orders of the Council, Judges, and the Commandant (in that order).

The *Halls of Justice* are made up of 17 individual *Judges* who run the legal system of Crail: hearing cases, passing judgments, and managing the prison system. Only Falcons who have retired honorably can become Judges.

The *Council* is made up of 17 *Deraads* elected from each of the neighborhoods of Agua Azul. Deraads make and change the laws, and advise the Commandant on economic and diplomatic issues. The Commandant, the Judges, and the Council all administer the water system that brings life to Agua Azul and the surrounding countryside. When a new Commandant is needed (either from death, abdication, impeachment, etc.), the Judges and the Council elect a new Commandant (usually, from the ranks of the Judges).

While the Crailese system is solid enough, the amount of money and influence flowing



through Crail means that it is often corrupt. Elections can be bought, Judges can be suborned through bribery or blackmail, and the Falcon on the beat is often not much better than the gangsters they are supposed to protect citizens from. Crailese *accept* a certain level of corruption in the works, and only get upset when bribes get too high.

The symbol of the Falcons is a black falcon on a crimson field.

2

Crailese Social Status

Not a lot of formal nobility, per se—especially not an inherited aristocracy. Instead, status in Crailese society is predominantly related to rank in the Falcons, political position, or simply great wealth and influence.

The Commandant: Leader of the Falcons, enforcer of the laws, ruler of the City, nominally the Governor of all Crail (though traditionally, the Commandant leaves the Rugged Tribes alone).

Judge/Deraad: Judges run the legal system; Deraads create/change the laws, and advise on trade and diplomacy. They are the highest status positions on Crail after the Commandant.

Falcon: Falcons are the soldiers and police of Crail; they work for the Commandant (or are sometimes seconded to the Judges). Each squad of Falcons —composed of anywhere from 3 to 10 individuals—essentially manage a neighborhood of Agua Azul. Falcons have ranks amongst themselves as well; from highest to lowest: Captain, Lieutenant, Sergeant, and Officer.

Citizen: The average native of Crail.

Foreign Resident: A foreigner who takes up long-term residency in the City is of slightly less status than a native-born Crailese.

Traveler: People just passing through Crail are mostly ignored.

Tribesmen/Criminals: At the bottom of the social ladder are the Rugged Tribesmen, who eschew the City of the Seven Sours, and those who are caught actively engaging in crime.

The City is more than the sum of its people.

—Crailese Proverb

What the Crailese Are Like

A Crailese native is sophisticated, cosmopolitan, hurried, and busy. Due to the urban sprawl, there is always crime, business, intrigue, romance, diplomacy, music, gang-war, police action, laughter, and sorrow happening somewhere, every hour of the day and night. Thousands come to Crail every year to lose themselves in the heaving bulk of the City of the Seven Sours; Agua Azul chews up many and spits them out. To the unready, the pulse of the City drowns out one's soul.

The synthesis of the many cultures of the World is seen in Crailese cuisine. A meal consisting of Colronan beef, braised in Barathi kelp stock flavored with native Crailese lemons and spices, accompanied by a salad of native olives and Sha-Ku herbs, all set off by a Viridese green wine, is not an uncommon dinner for the well-to-do (or even the less well-to-do on special occasions).

The people of Crail have strong ties of duty to one another. However, unlike the Barathi House, the Colronan family, or the Zultanate Church, Crailese have the strongest sense of duty to those they consider part of their "family of choice." Whether that is a Falcon squad, a street gang, a mercantile house, or a Rugged Tribe is irrelevant. The Crailese throws his loyalty and support to those he cares about, over and above any outside organizational structure.

In the City, men and women are considered to be more or less equal in most things, though it is mildly chauvinistic. However, there are a plentiful number of capable women who have risen to positions of power and wealth on Crail. Indeed, the last Commandant was a woman who'd started life as a stowaway on a trader, who jumped ship at Agua Azul and came up through the streets (some say as a prostitute, others say as a gambler), joined the Falcons, became a Judge, and was eventually elected Commandant.

With Crailese clothing, the most important aspect is the length, fabric, weave, color, and cut of their *cape*. As a citizen of Crail rises in social rank and their wealth increases, the length and quality of their cape increases. The Commandant's formal cape of office is actually faintly ridiculous, requiring a squad of Falcons to carry it in train. "By the Commandant's cape!" is thus a common oath or curse. . . but don't let a Falcon hear you say it.

Some Crailese Names

The cosmopolitan nature of Crail, and its long history of competing colonies from multiple nations, means that a native Crailese can have any sort of name or mixed-up combination of names popular on the other major islands. However, the Crailese usually opt for an alternative spelling.

2

For example, *Caiuz Dokkarson the Devout* is a perfectly acceptable name for a Crailese man, and *Lisabeth Yazmi Arogusta* is acceptable for a Crailese woman—both combine elements of Barathi, Viridese, and Colronan naming.

Crailese & the Church

There is a wide range of devoutness amongst the Crailese and transient population. For the most part, though, most Crailese only go to Church services when there is something weighing on their mind or if they wish to beg assistance from Vaoz in their extremity. (Also, the Rugged Tribes of Crail harbor heretical beliefs counter to those of the Church.)

Crailese & the Mystical

Every practitioner of the mystic arts (the alchemists, the Gifted, and the koldun) is welcome on Crail—though, given the Sundering, koldun are viewed with mixed feelings. (While Kroyu koldun were responsible for the catastrophe that split Crailwuz, most Crailese place blame on the “Kroyu” aspect rather than the “koldun” one. Also, legend says that the Centurions saved the island, and they were koldun.)

Crailese law doesn’t distinguish between mundane crimes and mystical ones: assault is assault, whether it’s done with fists or blasts of fire. However, there are a number of laws that specifically deal with mystical crimes like mind invasion, unethical uses of foresight, and so forth.

Lastly, Crail is the only place that those with the Gift of the Merhorse (see p. 87) or a koldun—one who is not Ilwuzi—can use their arts to detect the current location of Ilwuz (see p. 64); this is easier to do the closer one is to shards-end.

Opinions of the Other Nations Regarding Crailese

Most of the World sees Crailese as arrogant city-slickers, pretentious and corrupt. But there will always be the discontented who see the City as an escape from their drudgery, a jewel glowing in the Dome of the Heavens, an adventure around every corner. And both perspectives are *one hundred percent right*.

What's Happening Now On Crail?

The last passage of the Sky of Stones deposited a number of Kroyu artifacts on the Windfall Desert. Currently, a mad dash of treasure hunters, scholars, and koldun are running out to the wastes to search for a big, big score. **Commandant Tren Vye** is displeased: opportunists traveling out of the City are certain to rile up the Rugged Tribes—especially the chieftain **Cizko the Iron-handed**, who hates foreigners almost as much as he hates people of the City.



At the *House of Sour Kisses* (a fancy gambling house and bordello), there is a regular, weekly card game, involving **Shien of the Thunders** (an enigmatic koldun), **Deraad Kate Fokker** (a powerful financier), and **the Drunkard** (a bibbling Barathi, more dangerous than he looks). On occasion, the Commandant has even sat in for a hand or three. Rumor says that the game is just a front for secrets and intrigue; the dance of cards spells out a hidden message for the economics of the City.

The head of the Falcons in the *Camello* district is **Captain Armand Martel**, a native Crailese. He is incorruptible, and does not tolerate corruption under his watch. However, **Lieutenant Viktor the Handsome**, the head of the squad in Brizefresca (an adjacent district), is as dirty as they come. Armand and Viktor have met in three duels (Armand winning two of them). Despite Armand's demands to the Commandant, Vye will not remove Viktor from command. . . and Armand is starting to wonder why.

The Barathi Ambassador **Niko Caniz** has been seen meeting **Marjora Alnimi**, the Ambassador of the Zultanate, in the *Crail Cathedral*. They are obviously up to something... but what?

The Falcons of Crail

The Falcons of Crail are the consummate urban fighters of the World, trained in close-quarter fighting, urban survival, tracking, and tactics suitable for narrow streets. They are skilled at athletics, unarmed combat, the use of clubs and truncheons, firearms, law, forensics, fencing, and a modicum of diplomacy. They are often called “Blackbirds” both for their badge (the falcon symbol of Crail) and their black capes.

The Falcons permit non-natives to join; a substantial number of Falcons are usually foreigners who have taken up semi-permanent residence in the City. After a decade of service, foreign Falcons are considered by law to be “native Crailese” if they choose to accept citizenship. Only honorably retired Falcons can become Crailese Judges.

The Blue Hawk was closing on us, full of Barathi cannon, sailors, and wingmen who'd like nothing better than to send us screaming down to the Blue in return for the last few months we'd been preying on their fat merchant ships. According to my Ilwuzi navigator, Mr. Scissors, they wouldn't have the chance: our sanctuary was at hand, right past the boundary of the Sky of Stones.

"Cap'n, according to my home-sense and our charts, Ilwuz should be coming into view... now!"

"Land ho! To starboard!" came the cry from the crow's nest, and I ran to the rail. There it was, floating like a jeweled skull wrapped in finest cotton: the pirate haven of Ilwuz.

The wheel spun, the rudder responded, and we set course for Port Gulliver.

That's when a bell tolled.

The color drained from Mr. Scissors' face.

"What?" I asked him.

"It's the Clocklight, Cap'n! We need to pour on all sail, now! The island's about to transit."

"How long?"

"An hour at most."

If Ilwuz disappeared now, we'd be up a creek without a certain instrument. The idea did not bode well.

"All sail, you lubbers!" I screamed. "Dorsal, ventral, and wing! Mr. Gunn, cut the anchors and cast off two of the long cannon!"

"Sir?" My Master-at-Guns asked.

I drew my pistol and pointed it at his head. "That's an order Mr. Gunn. Now."

His eyes widened. "Aye-aye, sir!" and he leapt to it smartly.

— Captain Alexei Rostand, *Memoirs of a Sky Pirate*

Ilwuz, The Island Of Mystery



What Ilwuz Is Like

Populated by the pirates, criminals, and radicals from many nations, the cloud-island of Ilwuz is a wretched hive of scum and villainy. It also has some most curious properties:

It is tough—the Fog around Ilwuz withstands the fury of the 7 Skies twice as well as most islands' Fogs (even to

being able to permit the island to survive in the heart of the Sky of Fire!).

It is *hidden*—the supercharged Fog surrounding it blends into whichever Sky it floats in, making the island difficult to discern, unless within a league of port.

It is in the *shape of a skull*—no doubt due to its mystical origin, but still unnerving to see.

It *moves without moving* (every 49 days), disappearing from one place and suddenly appearing in another. (It does leave debris as it exchanges places, which means that observers have a chance to figure out that Ilwuz is now in the Jungle Sky when several wheeltrees replace it after transit.)

Ilwuz may be located at Deasil High in the Sky of Ghosts today, low near the Base in the Sky of Stone next season, in two different places and altitudes in the Mists for the next two seasons, and at the Trades in the Sky of Frost the season after that. Even koldun have problems locating the cloud-island. Interestingly, native-born Ilwuz *always* know in which Sky their home lies.

Port Gulliver is the only “real” city on Ilwuz. Full of taverns, chandlers, docks, bordellos, gambling dens, provisioners, warehouses, pawnshops, shipwrights, Port Gulliver has all the captain of a pirate ship needs to work his trade. A load of pickled kelp that would bring a pittance anywhere else in the World might command an impressive return in Port Gulliver. *The Clocklight*, a huge clock-tower-lighthouse within Port Gulliver, guides Ilwuzi skyships back to port; it also warns when *the Transition* nears. (It is best to be indoors, lying down—with a tankard of ale or something stronger to hand!—when Ilwuz transits.)



Around *Sinister Eye Lake* (a volcanic lake that is the “left eye” of the skull of Ilwuz) is the best farming and grazing land on Ilwuz. The Ilwuzi grow maize, beans, and some gourds, including the *scarletjack*—well-regarded for its flavor and its supposed ability to repel ghosts when carved into a lantern.

A few types of escaped pets and shipboard animals of skypirates have formed small breeding communities on Ilwuz, like parrots, cats, rats, and monkeys.

2

Ilwuzi History in Brief

Originally, Ilwuz was part of the larger cloud-island of *Crailwuz* (see p. 57). In the Last Kroyu War, Ilwuz was carved off of *Crailwuz*, and *changed* in the process.

For the next few decades, simple survival was the most important thing for the Ilwuzi. Some escaped when they could, some tried to make the best of it. Eventually, the Ilwuzi learned to enjoy the benefits of their home.

“The Pirate King”

Some beleaguered merchants or skyship passengers, upset at their treatment at the hands of Ilwuz pirates, often complain. Grievances are always met with a rejoinder in the form of “Well, you’ll have to take that up with the Pirate King” or something much like it.

The joke, of course, is that there is no Pirate King. (Or, from another perspective, there are a *multitude* of Pirate Kings.)

Depending upon the attitude of the speaker, the phrase is used either as the equivalent of “What do you want me to do about it?” or “Go soak your head, buddy.” Suffice to say, most foreigners are quite put out when they make this discovery while they are being held for ransom or sale as a slave.

The Ilwuzi think it’s hilarious.

How Ilwuz Is Ruled

Ilwuz has no formal government. Ilwuzi believe in one guiding principle, best summed up in the aphorism “The freedom you possess to swing your arm ends at my nose.” Each commands their own destiny; free to follow their desires wherever they choose, but aware that in following those desires that they may tread on another’s freedom to do (or not do) something. It’s more or less anarchy, supported by reputation, relationships, social approbation, strength, fear, and quid pro quo.

That being said, in times of import, a large public meeting called a *Congress* is held to argue the issue at hand. The *Clockminder* serves as the President of Congress. (In addition to making sure the Clocklight is in good repair and operation, it is one of their duties.).

Everyone present votes in an Ilwuzi Congress, under the following scheme (all votes are additive):

- ◆ *Is the person in the room?* = 1 vote.
- ◆ *Is the person armed with a bladed weapon?* = +1 vote.
- ◆ *Is the person armed with a gun?* = +2 votes.
- ◆ *Is the person an Ilwuzi native?* = +1 vote.
- ◆ *Is the person a pirate?* = +1 vote.
- ◆ *Is the person a captain?* = +1 vote.
- ◆ *Is the person a member of the Brethren of the Skull?* = +1 vote.
- ◆ *Is the person the Clockminder?* = +1 vote.
- ◆ *Is the person the Dread Pirate Radu?* = +1 vote.

For example, a native Ilwuzi pirate, armed with a cutlass, has 4 votes.

A person's votes can be split however they wish—even on opposed sides of an issue. (Madness!)

Bribery, extortion, and threats of physical violence are rife in the voting process. A simple majority wins the vote. While those who vote against whatever measure succeeded are not forced to support or implement it (they are free to leave port and go their own way for a time), most Brethren will grudgingly respect the decision of their peers (pirates, whores, pimps, fences, tavern keepers, shipwrights, and drunkards).

A story is told of a Congress where one of the attending members was shot dead immediately before a vote. His votes *still* counted—he was present, a pirate, and armed with a cutlass. This unfortunate's three votes would have gone to the position he had supported before being regrettably shot in the face at close range (intriguingly, two merhorses averred that this voter's ghost changed his mind after death).

This is the nature of Ilwuzi politics.

The identifying symbol of Ilwuz is a silver skull over crossed pistol and cutlass, on a purple field. Called “the Pirate King’s Flag,” it is almost never used alone by Ilwuzi, except by ships empowered by a Congress for a particular task. Individual Ilwuzi pirate captains use their own personal symbols and flags, but may additionally fly an Ilwuzi flag as a symbol of nationalistic pride.

2

Ilwuzi Social Status

The Clockminder & The Dread Pirate: Generally, the person who takes care of the Clocklight, and the leader of the Brethren of the Skull, are the most respected people on Ilwuz.

After that, social status is accorded to **Captains of the Brethren**, members of the **Brethren**, native **Ilwuzi**, and then everybody else.

Otherwise, rely on *Reputation*.

Every man is a pirate, and every pirate is a king.

—Ilwuzi Proverb

What the Ilwuzi Are Like

Ilwuzi desire the freedom to do what they want, say what they want, act how they want, and love who they want. Personal liberty is the highest good: anything that interferes with that must be avoided or destroyed. While a respect for the freedom of others is encouraged, many situations really come down to the relevant parties duking it out.

On Ilwuz, women have all the rights and choices that men do. For every female whore in Port Gulliver, there’s a male one; for every male pirate, there’s a female one. Ilwuzi men and women dress in piecemeal fashion, fusing styles from all the nations of the World. (However, Ilwuzi style is a riot of patchwork, unlike the smooth and classy syntheses of Crailese fashion.) Jewelry, tattoos, cosmetics, masks, and bizarre hairstyles are common.

On the whole, Ilwuz does not trade: they *take*. Still, some enterprising pirates have “gone off account” and set up homes, farms, and businesses near Port Gulliver; they sometimes do a little legitimate trading, when the opportunity presents itself.

Some Ilwuzi Names

The piratical nature of Ilwuz, and its history of welcoming criminals and outcasts from many nations (often not operating under the names they were born with), means that a native Ilwuzi can have any sort of name or mixed-up combination of names popular on the other major islands. It should be noted, however, that the Ilwuzi sincerely appreciate euphonious or impressive nomenclature.

For example, *Reynaldo the Deadly* is a perfectly acceptable name for an Ilwuzi man, and *Two-Musket Sally* is acceptable for an Ilwuzi woman.

2

Ilwuzi & the Church

Most Ilwuzi welcome Peregrinator clergy in Port Gulliver (if they can manage to get there in one piece), so long as they're just passing through. Then again, some Ilwuzi beat up the faithful—clerical or secular—and take their stuff.

Ilwuzi & the Mystical

The typical Ilwuzi response to the Gifted, alchemists, and koldun is "So long as they don't use their freaky powers on me, who cares?"

That being said, koldun are respected on Ilwuz; they are ridiculously useful in effecting skyship repairs, offer speedy healing, and help food and other supplies stretch over the long months when skyships may be unable to leave Ilwuz safely. Koldun are invariably fascinated by the island's ability to transit.

The Ilwuzi Brethren of the Skull

The closest thing to an "military" for Ilwuz is the Brethren of the Skull, a piratical fraternity dedicated to preserving the freedom-cum-anarchy of Ilwuz. Currently, the Brethren is composed of a fleet of seven pirate ships under the overall command of the Dread Pirate Radu. Only the most wild, cunning, and dangerous of pirates (preferably Ilwuzi natives, but this is not a requirement) are asked to join the Brethren. All are adept at sailing, piracy, and fencing and completely dedicated to the Ilwuzi ideal of "Freedom over all" and are *still* willing to take orders from the Dread Pirate Radu. The Brethren wear a purple "blood-stripe" along the outside seam of their trousers, breeches, or pantaloons; have a tattoo of the Ilwuzi flag sigil somewhere on their bodies; and carry a knife with a skull-shaped pommel.

Opinions of the Other Nations Regarding Ilwuzi

The other major islands consider the Ilwuzi dangerous, criminal lunatics.

What's Happening Now On Ilwuz?

2

The **Dread Pirate Radu** is missing, lost in a cyclone in the Sky of Thunder. A Congress is due to convene, called by two captains of the Brethren of the Skull to form a search and rescue mission. But two other Brethren captains have refused outright to attend. What is going on with the Brethren?

One-Eyed Johnny—a koldun with an eyepatch *and* a glass eye—has constructed a skyship of bizarre design that he calls the *Quiet Qilin*. This special ship channels One-Eyed Johnny's mystical powers, allowing him to *jump* it from place to place. At least, that's the theory. He's looking for trustworthy sorts to sign on as crew/security guards for it.

Famed duelist **Alma Fulkesdar** and her comrade, the heretical priest **Fehrad Djezuni** (both Ilwuzi natives), have opened a strange establishment called *Vaoz's Chalice*—a combination tavern and chapel. (In the argot of the locals, the Chalice is known as the “Puke 'n' Pray”—or, if they're slightly more devout, the “Pray 'n' Puke.”) The citizens of Port Gulliver are in an uproar over this, for a host of reasons. A Congress may be called to resolve the issue.

Why am I up in this tree?

The piece of craft I am contemplating requires the heart of a ruq, taken on the wing, ripped beating from its living chest, by magic.

Now: go away. Before I turn you into a fish or something equally unpleasant.

— **Gold-Eyed Niko, Sha-Ku Koldun**

Sha Ka Ruq, The Savage Island

What Sha Ka Ruq Is Like

Sha Ka Ruq is a gigantic cloud-island hovering low in the Base Layer of the Dome. It is covered in noisome swamps, grassy meadows, rolling hills, primeval forests, and trackless jungles. There is one large body of water, called the *Rozzo Sea*, which is clear and blue, with a white sand bottom. Most Sha-Ku live in allied villages, though some tribes live in the depths of the wilderness (harmless until provoked).



From the ruins of the *Horsetown* (part of an abandoned Colronan colony) to *Quespy* (the capital of Sha Ka Ruq), the *Confederated Tribes* control most of Sha Ka Ruq. They are reasonably friendly, in the sense that they don't kill strangers and stuff the corpses into hollow trees.

Sitting on the jungle coast, *Quespy* is full of vast plazas, carefully-tended gardens, and some of the only stone buildings on Sha Ka Ruq. In the center of *Quespy* is *Raku Spider*, a ruined Barathi tower nearly overgrown with jungle vines. No Sha-Ku ever pays attention to it, looks at it, or mentions its name aloud—not even the ring of Sha-Ku Ruqriders who guard it.

Urru Chen Vamizaa is a small village at the mouth of the *Great River Saanda*, which stretches from the southern coast deep into the heart of the forests of the uplands. For Sha-Ku, it is taboo to journey upon it unless accompanied by priest or koldun.

Sha Ka Ruq has an abundance of plant and animal species (especially birds). Lumber made from the *tym* is the best-quality wood that can be found: fine-grained, luxuriant and deeply colored, resistant to water and rot. Keeping a piece of *tym* close to one's skin is said to promote longevity and youthfulness. (While bluewood is very fine, and has other important qualities, *tym* is the *ne plus ultra* of ornamental wood.)

Animals thrive on the island—insects, amphibians, rodents, other small mammals, wild boars, jaguars, monkeys, and Sha Ka Ruq's largest creature: the *ruq*. A *ruq* is a titanic parrot possessing a thirty-foot wingspan, wickedly jagged beak, and razor-sharp talons. Omnivorous, it hunts on the wing, plucks fruit from the colossal trees,

and gnaws on shrubs. The Sha Ka Ruq have domesticated the ruq, training them as flying mounts.

Sha Ka Ruq is metal-poor; tools and weapons are of alchemically or mystically treated tym. To the Sha-Ku, blacksmithing is a mysterious art, worthy of respect.

Sha-Ku History in Brief

Seven hundred and twenty seasons ago, Sha Ka Ruq rose with great velocity from the Blue. The new island smashed through the Jungle Sky above it. Dozens of tribes of savage blumen somehow survived the impact, and slowly adjusted over the years to their new home.

How Sha Ka Ruq Is Ruled

The Sha-Ku style of government—in the Confederated Tribes, at least—is a political game of snakes and ladders, depending upon individual status. The *opinions others hold of an individual*—especially those of a leader—are more important than the *opinions held by that individual*. In this rigid but always changing class system, Sha-Ku will usually defer to a superior without thought or complaint.

At the beginning of every fourth season, the three-day *Festival of Face* is held in Qepsy. On the second day of the Festival, the person who possesses the highest status—determined by their personal fame and possession of *tzushen*, becomes the new *Cynosure*. The results are tallied by the counting and weighing of *tzushen*, with the calculations figured by an ex-Cynosure. Many Sha-Ku leave their local villages to travel to Qepsy on these occasions, in search of social elevation; in doing so, they of course risk their position at home.

The Cynosure is therefore the most popular, famous, and well-connected person on Sha Ka Ruq. Along with the power of highest prestige, the most “face,” and holding the highest number of *tzushen*, the Cynosure also directly commands the *Sha-Ku Ruqriders* (see p. 77).

The symbol of Sha Ka Ruq is a purple parrot volant on a green field.

Facetrading & Tzushen

While most of the trade of the World involves the exchange of goods or services for currency, a remarkable amount of trade on Sha Ka Ruq occurs as barter. Furthermore, publicly showing deference, friendship, or respect to another Sha-Ku is a **commodity**, with a value depending upon the social rank of the giver and the measure of the esteem given. This system is called *facetrading*. In practical terms, this means that a Sha-Ku of some status can “purchase” a tankard of ale with a smile and a nod, a higher-status individual could trade her avowal of friendship for a fresh chicken or could receive a horse for prostrating himself before a trader, and a very high-status person could “buy” a house by inviting the seller to go hunting. However, high status individuals must give many of these “gifts of regard” (in addition to more tangible ones) or lose face.

Status and prestige is gained by fame—whether it be for valor, cowardice, cleverness, stupidity, beauty, ugliness, generosity, or rudeness. It is lost when people stop talking about the subject or treating them as they “ought” to be treated. Social ostracism on Sha Ka Ruq is poverty.

Since facetrading transactions increase the stature of the receiver (without decreasing the status of the giver), but may not be witnessed by an audience, they are often attested to by small sculptures called *tzushen*, purchased from koldun (see p. 89). While amongst the lower classes, *tzushen* are usually rude wooden carvings or shards of pottery, the upper ranks prefer small, mystically-charged bone or metal markers. These markers instantly react to changes in the giver’s social rank by mystically increasing in perceived weight. The higher the prestige of the giver, the heavier and more valuable the *tzushen*.

A hunter on the trail from Quespy, in return for sharing his waterskin, took the *tzushen* of a beggar traveling in the opposite direction. Where the potsherd *tzushen* was light as a ruq’s feather that evening, by the following dawn, it was as heavy as a boulder. The beggar had just become Cynosure.

Because of their nature, *tzushen* are inherently valuable, especially because they can serve as “markers” indicating a personal tie between two individuals that must be respected, or else the “violator” will suffer a loss of face. The gathering—and trading—of the *tzushen* of family, friends, and even enemies is a mania for social-climbing Sha-Ku. The combination of the systems of barter, gift-giving, and *tzushen* is the basis of the internal economy of Sha Ka Ruq.

Foreign visitors are often mystified by *tzushen*—it is like a coin that fluctuates in value from moment to moment, day to day.

Sha-Ku Aristocrats

Cynosure: The leader of the Confederated Tribes; commander of the Ruqriders; the most famous and connected person on Sha Ka Ruq.

Kashaku: Chieftain of chieftains; the most illustrious member of a group of villages.

Shi'huna: Head of the village; the most important person in an entire neighborhood or district.

Hakuteka: The most famous and prestigious person in one's cluster (a dozen or less) of huts.

Maka'huna: Head of household; the most important and famous person in a family.

Kawa: Literally, "the nobodies." Kawa are the least regarded, and perform the most noisome tasks on Sha Ka Ruq. They are also the prime victims for suicide missions, dangerous deeds, risky endeavors, and human sacrifice, because only through great valor and elegance can they hope to cause a re-evaluation of their status.

He whose game is the ruq takes no heed of the robin.

—Sha-Ku Proverb

What the Sha-Ku Are Like

Most of the inhabitants of the 7 Skies write the Sha-Ku off as ignorant savages and barbarians. Not so. They have a surprisingly complex and advanced civilization, despite their island's relative youth and its deficit in metal tools and weapons.

A Sha-Ku is driven by status—fame, popularity, prestige. He places tremendous value on the way he appears in the eyes of peers: their regard grants great power—social, economic, and temporal. To a Sha-Ku, fame and infamy are *equally good*, so long as people know who you are. Being known as the biggest failure on Sha Ka Ruq is actually a positive thing.

Sha-Ku are obsequious to those above them in society, and pushy to those beneath. They individualize themselves just enough to be conspicuous, but not so odd to pass outside of the boundaries of the accepted. Indeed, at times, Sha-Ku can turn on the nonconformist en masse, crushing him into a bloody pulp for daring to be *too* different.

On Sha Ka Ruq, ostracism is a real danger. Since one's status is strongly influenced by the type of people with whom one associates, those on the bottom of the social

heap (the *Kawa*; see p. 74) become untouchable. If anyone is seen being too friendly, kind, or helpful to a social inferior regularly, they have lowered their rank.

Sha-Ku revel in wit and wordplay; the native dialect is full of flowery effusion. One interesting quirk is the use of circumlocutions when speaking of oneself or one's social betters (that is, "this one," "a certain person," "a noted individual," etc.). Also, it is good form to invent appropriate epithets or titles when speaking to another. For example, if someone needed to speak to a spice merchant who was of higher status, she might salute him thus: "O most aromatic one, whose shrewd understanding of the subtleties of odor and flavor is beyond reproach, this humble one, she comes to beg a moment of your time." Boasting of one's strengths and superiority and ridiculing the weaknesses and inferiority of one's enemies is common, no matter the occasion.

The relative power between men and women depends on the sex of the current *Cynosure*. When the *Cynosure* is female, women are judged to be the stronger, smarter, more elegant sex; when the *Cynosure* is male, men are.

With the need of the individual to constantly interact only with those near his station and the regular shifting of political power between the sexes, marriage is rare. After all, who would want to be permanently tied to a person who was no longer *chic*? "I'm sorry, light of my yesterdays, but red hair has gone out of style. This humble one has her position to think about, you know." Sha-Ku form intense, short relationships, and break them off quickly.



Most native Sha Ka Ruq clothing comes from plant-based fibers, tinted with a rainbow of color-fast vegetable dyes. Feathers and quills ornament these goods; most jewelry is made of wood. Animal-based cloth and materials (leather, wool, fur, shells, and especially silk) are flashy and expensive; metal and gemstone accoutrements denote a high-status individual (or a foreigner).

2

Some Sha-Ku Names

A proper Sha-Ku name is tribal name first, then epithet, then personal name (for example, *Iata the Jungle Dancer Manzo*: read as “Of the Iata tribe, the Jungle Dancer named Manzo”). Epithets usually describe the “claim to fame” of the named. On Sha Ka Ruq, sometimes the use of the tribal name falls out of fashion. Sha-Ku who travel the 7 Skies often rearrange this order to personal name, tribal name, and then epithet (for example, *Manzo Iata, the Jungle Dancer*).

Male: Akio, Banei, Chero, Dai, Elu, Fu, Guro, Helaku, Inalo, Jomei, Kuruk, Lan, Manzo, Niko, Orio, Patamon, Reko, Sekio, Tadoka, Ulano, Venn, Wyo, Xelo, Yuri, Zum.

Female: Anda, Binqasha, Chelena, Dana, Erikei, Faima, Gana, Halona, Iolana, Jana, Kiona, Leilani, Mei, Neka, Orei, Pei, Rolani, Suzu, Tehya, Unika, Vazu, Wyanet, Xela, Yuko, Zei.

Tribal: Ailoi, Bunei, Calo, Daikana, Edoshu, Fai’lani, Goraan, Hinji, Iata, Juun, Kuwana, Lotu, Moro, Norziku, Opaana, Pelipeli, Qano, Rora, Shaan, Tuqba, Urru, Vanamai, Wuzu, Xaa, Yoruta, Zoolu.

Sha-Ku & the Church

Sha-Ku frankly pay little attention to the Church, its priests, or the tenets of its faith. They already have a belief (see p. 102) in the inherent divinity of all things—every rock, every tree, every bird in the sky. . . all are gods (or God, depending upon whom you’re talking to). The only thing they find interesting about the faith of Vaoz are the admonitions regarding how people of different ranks should interact honorably. They find these social rules limited, of course, but quite sound.

Sha-Ku & the Mystical

Koldun are necessary for the creation of tzushen, the fundamental unit of society and commerce on Sha Ka Ruq. Therefore, they are not just welcome on Sha Ka Ruq, but they automatically possess a modicum of prestige.

Opinions of the Other Nations Regarding Sha-Ku

The majority of the World views the Sha-Ku as weird, backward primitives. Some idealize them as noble savages, while others see them as barbarians.



Sha-Ku Ruqridders

The Sha-Ku Ruqridders are elite air cavalry troops. Each has extensive training in wing-cloak use, spear fighting, fencing, animal handling (riding, care, training), mounted combat, archery, and acrobatics. A ruqrider has a ruq as a mount, and has a close relationship with the bird.

Ruqridders are loyal to the Throne (the Cynosure commands them), but there is no personal loyalty to the holder of that position. They wear fine flying leathers, enhanced with the colorful quills and feathers of ruqs.

What's Happening Now On Sha Ka Ruq?

Yuri Edoshu, a koldun, is quickly climbing the social ranks of Sha Ka Ruq. Some say this is because of his excellent understanding of facetrading, others point to the high quality of tzushen he creates, and some few whisper about abuse of his wizardly gifts. But he is an up-and-comer, and the current Cynosure, **Mei Moro**, doesn't like it one bit.

Rumor says that there is a "Kroyu temple" deep within the Sha-Ku wilderness. Impossible, scoff the sages, for Kroy was lost many centuries *before* Sha Ka Ruq rose from the Blue. And yet: strange Kroyu artifacts have found their way out of the Sha-Ku jungles. Who knows what is, or is not, possible?

A *twig*. That is all that **Gemma Hurana**, a Barathi alchemist, has as proof. This twig floats in mid-air, *even over a cloud-island*. From her analysis, Gemma has determined that the wood comes from a Sha-Ku crossbreed of bluewood and tym. She is looking for explorers (and investors) to help her find this very special tree.

The Minor Cloud-Islands

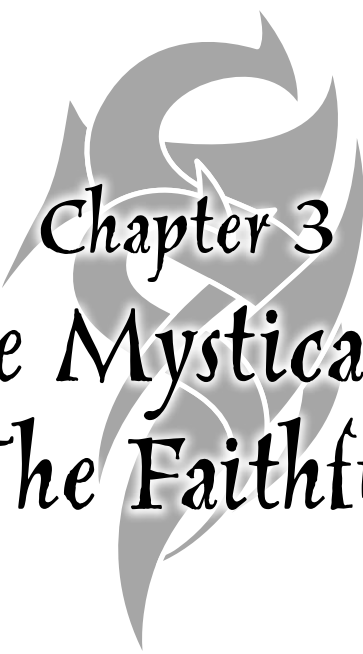
There are scores of smaller cloud-islands floating in the 7 Skies. Many are entirely uninhabited. Others bear colonies from the Major Islands, and a few have small, distinct cultures of their own. Some bear valuable—or even unique—resources.

Here are a few examples:

2 *F'chmelch*: (pronounced “fishmilk”) One of the main sources of duzha crystals used in alchemy and kolduncraft. The usually argumentative koldun regularly unite to keep it from falling under the sway of other islands. This has led to F'chmelch being the *de facto* home of the koldun Fraternity.

Hekuba: A matriarchal and female-chauvinist Queendom, known especially for their hunting packs of *empusa*, a type of large mantis. *Queen Ofelia* is attempting to breed larger *empusa* for use as flying mounts (much like the ruqs of the Sha-Ku), and is seeking alchemists and koldun to aid her in this.

Molnar: A Barathi farming colony. It is notable for the *Grand Mill*, a gigantic flour-mill that is powered by a tremendous waterwheel positioned at the top of a four thousand foot waterfall.



Chapter 3

The Mystical & The Faithful



The impulse to the spiritual unites the soul of the World.
In the 7 Skies, there are two currents to that spirituality:
that of the *mystical* and that of the *faithful*.

A dram of hailbee honey,
Some zest of lime,
And a drop of Crailese sand-snail slime,
Mixed in with tea, with the hair of a goat,
Is a sovereign remedy for pains of the throat.

— Francisco Verrera's *Formulary of Alchemical Cures*

The Mystical



Alchemy

Alchemy is the process of transmuting combinations of various substances—usually those with special natures (see textbox, *Materia Mystica*, p. 81)—by arcane formulae into a substance of great value or magical potency.

Alchemists (and koldun, for that matter) know the secrets of the *Materia Mystica* and how to bring these together effectively. Combining them is not simply a question of dumping stuff into a bubbling cauldron, stirring, and simmering for an hour.

Real alchemy requires long periods of personal meditation, adding the ingredients in precise order, with exhaustive and tedious procedures to be followed throughout. At the end of the process, the alchemist is usually (if they followed the recipe correctly) rewarded with a preparation—potion, paste, pill, etc.—that, when consumed or applied, permits the target to evoke an immediate mystical effect; for example, a potion that mimics one of the Gifts (see below). One example would be an elixir that gives visions of the future (as the Gift of the Merhorse does).

In theory, anyone can learn alchemy—no special mystical talent is required (though koldun seem to simply be *better* at it). However, it is an exacting pursuit, often requiring long years of study to master. Alchemy is in widespread use throughout the World, and practicing it is in almost always considered an honorable profession. In small, backwater hamlets, alchemists are often called *herbalists* (or *Wisewoman/Wiseman*). Indeed, most villages have at least one alchemist producing remedies for family, friends, and neighbors.

Alchemists can also produce *alchemicraft* items (see below).

Alchemicraft

Alchemicraft items are physical objects constructed to generate a mystical effect. They are generally considered to be of a lesser grade than those device made with *kolduncraft* (see p. 93), because alchemicraft tends to be single use, unstable, or more limited in duration or scope. This means they break down more often, burn out faster, and go boom at the drop of a fancy hat.

On the other hand, alchemicraft is more readily available and less expensive than kolduncraft. Sometimes beggars cannot be choosers! Given the choice flying across the 7 Skies with a magazine full of alchemicraft gunpowder or no gunpowder at all, most canny skyship captains would load the Cheap Stuff and just fly... really... carefully....

Materia Mystica

There are many materials in the world that react strongly to thoughts, emotions, and mystical energy. Nearly every Major Island has a special product, and many minor ones do as well. The list below is not exhaustive, but shows some of the more “common” of these unusual and rare materials, where they are found, what they are, and even what they are said to be good for.

Airwhale Ambergris: (anywhere; from old/sick or beached airwhales) A grey-green waxy substance, found filling the cavities of old and sick airwhales—younger ones do not seem to have much ambergris. It has no smell, and actually removes other odors from the air. In alchemical symbology, airwhale ambergris connotes “communication.”

Blackcotton: (Crail) An easy-to-process form of cotton; it looks like black puffs after harvesting. Primarily used in wingcloak and skyship sail production, it is very fine, yet extremely tough. In alchemical symbology, blackcotton connotes “strength.”

Blackglass: (anywhere, in small amounts) Blackglass is a black, translucent crystal, usually found in chunks smaller than a fist in size. Rarer even than duzha crystals (see below), it holds great mystical power and spiritual potential. In alchemical symbology, blackglass connotes “enthusiasm.”

Bluewood: (anywhere, especially the Jungle Sky) Harvested from wheeltrees, bluewood is the primary material used in the construction of skyships (see p. 13 and *laments*, p. 9). In alchemical symbology, bluewood connotes “freedom.”

Colronan Horsehide: (Colrona) The hides of the finest horses in the World are often used by alchemists when creating items requiring sturdy yet flexible components. In alchemical symbology, Colronan horsehide connotes “passion.”

Cerulean: (sometimes, *raw cerulean*; the Blue) The very material of the Base of the World, cerulean is a tricky substance to acquire and hold onto. In alchemical symbology, cerulean connotes “change.”

Duzha Crystals: (anywhere, in small amounts; larger amounts on Lost Kroy and the Minor Island of F’chmelch) Duzha crystals are rare, clear, transparent crystals, found in “spear-blossoms” (much like some types of quartz). They store and release mystical energies. In alchemical symbology, duzha crystals connote “power.”

Fek Venom: (Viridia) “Milked” from the giant turtles of Viridia at great risk, fek venom is a yellowish-clear, slightly viscous fluid. In alchemical symbology, fek venom connotes “endurance.”

Funiket: (Barathi) Rope made from a specific species of kelp (silver-thread) found in the Barathi Sea. This kelp is treated with lobster oil, dried, beaten, and wound into long cords. Thin, strong, and flexible, funiket seems to respond to the intentions of the user, knotting fast or unknotting easily at their desire. In alchemical symbology, funiket connotes “flexibility.”

Gold Vase Nectar: (the Sky of Thunder and the Mists) Clear, sticky, and sweet, gold vase nectar is regarded as a cure for any disease or weakness. In alchemical symbology, gold vase nectar connotes “clarity.”

Hailbee Honey: (The Sky of Frost) A whitish-blue, very viscous, intensely sweet fluid that has a pearlescent sheen, hailbee honey is a sought-after delicacy amongst gourmands of the 7 Skies. Alchemists seek it for its other properties. In alchemical symbology, hailbee honey connotes “beauty.”

Lamentwood: (the Mists) A variety of wheeltree, laments are another source of blue-wood. However, alchemists appreciate it for its other connotations. In alchemical symbology, lamentwood connotes “sorrow.”

Lamp Mushrooms: (the Sky of Stones) Found in caverns within the floating boulders of the Sky of Stones, lamp mushrooms can be pressed and refined into a clear, thin oil that burns very well. In alchemical symbology, lamp mushrooms connote “brilliance.”

Misthopper Antennae: (the Mists) Misthoppers rub their antennae together, it is thought, to find their way through the Mists. These antennae are about the size and shape of an alchemical match, rough in texture, and grayish-green in color. In alchemical symbology, misthopper antennae connote “perception.”

Pearls from Isla del Huitra: (Barathi) The gigantic pearls harvested from the oysters surrounding the Isla del Huitra are used throughout the world for ornamentation. In

alchemical symbology, these pearls connote “truth.”

Redpowder: (the Sky of Stones) The pulverized material that apparently keeps the rocks in the Sky of Stones from falling to the Blue, redpowder is a reddish-orange powder. In alchemical symbology, redpowder connotes “resistance.”

Ruq Hearts: (Sha Ka Ruq) The heart of the gigantic parrot known as the ruq is difficult to acquire, but eagerly sought after. In alchemical symbology, ruq hearts connote “force.”

Scarletjacks: (Ilwuz) The scarletjack is a pumpkin native to Ilwuz. It is firm, flavorful, and keeps well when properly prepared; its seeds are a tasty snack for pirate crews everywhere in the 7 Skies. When carved into a lantern, the scarletjack gourd is said to repel ghosts. In alchemical symbology, the scarletjack connotes “protection.”

Trigo: (Colrona) Colronan trigo is a grain that makes a flour sought after by all of the bakers of the 7 Skies. Its stalks, grains, and flour are used in numerous alchemical preparations. In alchemical symbology, trigo connotes “(loving) care.”

Tym: (Sha Ka Ruq) A type of wood, tym is dark brown (with other deep colors included), and fine-grained. In alchemical symbology, tym connotes “youthfulness” and “longevity.”

Water from the Tree of Life: (Barathi) While regarded on Barathi as a sovereign cure for poison, the waters of the Tree of Life has a different meaning for the World’s alchemists. In alchemical symbology, this water connotes “return.”

Wheeltree Fruit & Nuts: (anywhere, especially the Jungle Sky) The various fruits and nuts of different sub-species of wheeltree all have different mundane uses: as dyes, drugs, purgatives, preventatives, and so on. In alchemical symbology, wheeltree fruit and nuts connote “inspiration.”

Wix: (Viridia) As ore, wix is a dull grey, but when refined into metal it is a shining chrome, often with a faint sheen of another color (depending upon what it is alloyed with). It is sought throughout the World for its usefulness. In alchemical symbology, wix connotes “utility.”

When in a hurry or a bind—say, if there is not applicable recipe for a specific effect that is desired—alchemists often work from the symbolic meanings of the *Materia Mystica* (and more mundane substances), attempting to throw relevant aspects into a potion or item, trusting to their instinct, knowledge, and experience. These slapdash efforts either explode violently or work *remarkably* well.

The Gifted

Vaoz the Creator has blessed some of the people of the World with amazing abilities; these are *the Gifted*. Gifts are usually discovered at birth or in one's youth, but sometimes they appear when people are under duress or after long study. The mystical Gifts are uncommon, but not so rare that they cannot be found with a little searching. Perhaps one out of one hundred—at worst, two hundred—people in the World has a Gift. For the Gifted, employing their talent is as natural as breathing, though complicated effects requires intense concentration.

Each Gift is associated with a mythological animal, and possessors of a power are often called by that name, as a description of who they are, what they can do, and what they are like. A person with the Gift of the Dragon is not just someone who can control and create fire: they *are* Fire; they *are* Dragon. Passionate, destructive, warm, inspiring, dangerous—everything that Fire is. Those with a Gift are intense personalities.

The Gifted are usually embraced on the Major Islands because of the usefulness of their inherent talents—though some people fear what they can do (especially if one is not Gifted and trying to face a Gifted down over something). It is really up to the individual. For example, many people fear the incredible abilities granted by the Griffin's Gift or the Basilisk's Gift. Luckily, the target of the malevolent use of a Gift *can* resist its effects somewhat; their level of success depends entirely upon the victim's strength of will. The Gifted themselves can draw on their own special strengths to resist the mystical influences of other Gifted.

There are plenty of employment opportunities for the Gifted. Who would not want a griffin bodyguard? What skyship would not appreciate having a thunderbird crewman, able to predict the weather and call up a wind if the ship is becalmed? If someone receives a grievous injury, why would they not throw coins at a unicorn to fix it up, good as new?

Some very rare people possess *multiple* Gifts without being koldun (see p. 89).



Sometimes, I just know things—see things.

Things that happened, things that are happening, things that will happen. Like the time I just knew Cap'n Imre had been jumped by guardsmen in Arbol Port.

Melee concentrates your attention, bringing it down to the point of your sword. That's how it is for most people.

For me, blessed with the Gift of the Merhorse, I can sometimes see past the point of my sword, and can look at the point of yours. I can see where your blade will be, and adjust my attacks and feints and parries to best take advantage of that.

It's an edge in dueling. . . but I can't rely on it. There are those that can block my sight—other Merhorses, Basilisks, Griffins. And if I look forward too often, everything gets cloudy.

But, when death is on the line, it's nice to have an edge.

— Alma Fulkeddar, Merhorse and Duelist



The Gifts

BASILISK

Using their Gift, basilisks can hear the silent thoughts of others and send their own thoughts into another's mind. Skilled basilisks can also subtly influence the thinking of a target, creating illusory images, embedding suggestions,

or evoking emotions. By mentally sending a welter of random images, thoughts, and sensations, a basilisk can sometimes temporarily “paralyze” a weak-willed victim. However, direct and long-term control of another's mind is usually beyond the scope of this Gift. Familiarity with the target helps tremendously.

For obvious reasons, most people are wary of those with the Gift of the Basilisk. This concern, along with fears about the Gifts of the Merhorse and the Manticore, is one of the primary drivers for the sale of alchemicraft and kolduncraft Wards (see p. 96) to protect one's thoughts. Furthermore, if a basilisk is trying to read the thoughts of someone who is suffering great pain (physical, mental, emotional), they are forced to share that agony.



DRAGON

The intensity of concentration a person with the Dragon's Gift possesses can cause things—and people—within a few yards to smolder, smoke, and burst into flame. More powerful dragons can quench a fire, make it move at their whim, and even avoid being harmed by it. Some can even speak through flame to others far distant, see the future in the heart of the fire, or step *through* a conflagration and emerge from another.

Occasionally, things light on fire around dragons who cannot control their emotions. This means that few with the

Dragon's Gift carry firearms—and those that do usually accept the extra expense of purchasing kolduncraft-grade gunpowder rather than alchemicraft-grade—there's a lesser chance that the Good Stuff in your powder horn will blow up if you start yelling at a subordinate. Those with the Gift of the Dragon are usually treated with wary respect.

GRIFFIN

Those with the Griffin's Gift use the power of their indomitable will to utterly command their bodies, enabling them to push it far beyond mortal limits. They are able to withstand pain, torture, fatigue, and mystical attack to a degree most people cannot. A griffin can even

touch insubstantial ghosts (unfortunately, the ghosts can touch back). They can even hide their aura to evade scrying.

This Gift also lends increased concentration, amazing strength, exceptionally sharp recall, speeded healing, slowed bodily functions, incredible reflexes, breath control, retarded aging, and the ability to detect subtle weaknesses in a target. (Many koldun begin their studies focusing on the Gift of the Griffin. Plenty of ghosts are the undead spirits of griffins, held together by sheer force of will.)

The downside: a person with the Griffin's Gift can only do *one* of these remarkable things at a time. And, unlike the rest of the Gifted, griffins can only affect their own body. Still: it is one of the most respected mystical talents in the World—facing a griffin on the field of battle is terrifying. People tend to be very impressed (and in some cases, envious) with those who possess the Griffin's Gift.

MERHORSE

The Merhorse's Gift grants a supernatural sense of perception. A merhorse can often—though not always—see spiritual energy (as it is being used) as a faint glow. (For example, if watching a pegasus floating a ball with her Gift, a merhorse might be able to distinguish a dim tracery of glimmering tendrils reaching out from the pegasus to the ball.) This ability alone creates great demand for merhorses in royal courts, businesses, and military forces of all the islands.

Additionally, merhorses can receive visions of the past, present, and future. They can send their mind's eye around corners, through walls, or across vast distances of time and space, and discern information that no one else could with the naked eye. They can see their opponent's attacks or defenses *before* they happen in a game or duel.

People throughout the World hire those with the Gift of the Merhorse as fortune-tellers, researchers, weather forecasters, and finders of lost objects. Since the future is always changing, any future events are seen as a welter of possible ones, with the most probable outcomes coming through the strongest to the merhorse's eye.

Unfortunately, the more one uses this talent, the muddier the Waters of Time become. Indeed, the Waters of Time become muddied if any merhorse (past, present, or future) is examining the situation. Also, few people will gamble—or duel—with a merhorse, unless that Merhorse is of impeccable reputation, is wearing a Fetter (see p. 94), or has drunk a potion that limits their Gift. And, if the merhorse accepts the limitation of their Gift, it is generally a good time to strike at them.

Lastly, if a target is wearing a Ward (see p. 96), or is a merhorse, a griffin (when shielding), or a koldun themselves, they are generally hard to perceive using the Gift of the Merhorse.

PEGASUS

Those with the Gift of the Pegasus can grasp, shift, and move objects around with the power of thought alone. At higher levels of skill and power, this Gift allows the pegasus to project



3



a tangible bolt of force, strangle from a distance, or bat attacks or missiles away in midair before they can strike. Strong pegasi can fly unaided; the very strongest can lift an entire skyship (for a short time).

Any sort of physical restraint is sheer torture to a pegasus—they are always up, about, moving, doing. Additionally, if a pegasus gets highly emotional, things around them start to *move*. People generally appreciate the abilities of those with the Pegasus' Gift—the talent can be so very handy, and who doesn't dream of flying like a bird?



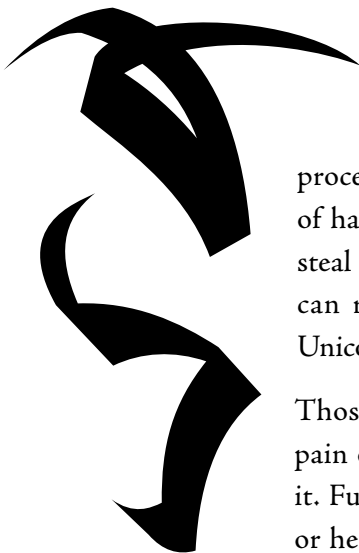
THUNDERBIRD

The Gift of the Thunderbird grants command of the winds, precipitation, and lightning bolts of the World, quelling (or causing) extremes of weather by will alone.

Thunderbirds are better at forecasting the weather than even powerful merhorses, and can withstand the ravages of hazardous environments and temperature with less effort than griffins. They can shock people with their hands, or even throw small bolts of lightning.

It's also said thunderbirds are unnaturally lucky in general, and can even direct the so-called "Winds of Luck" towards another person—but this is probably just a legend. ("Unnaturally lucky," for a person with the Gift of the Thunderbird, encompasses bad luck as well as good.)

For the most part, thunderbirds are highly respected in the countryside of each cloud-island, where their talents are most needed. In urban areas, they are less well-regarded.



UNICORN

Those with the Gift of the Unicorn can repair damage to body and mind, eliminate pain, and accelerate the healing process tremendously. This almost always requires the laying on of hands. They can also cause grievous injuries, inflict agony, and steal vitality away from a target. It is said that powerful unicorns can raise the dead, or kill with a touch. A person with the Unicorn's Gift can use it upon himself.

Those with the Unicorn's Gift are unnaturally sensitive to the pain of others. Some shrink from this sensation, others revel in it. Furthermore, plants around the unicorn seem to react to his or her moods—if the unicorn is happy, they grow luxuriantly; if

the unicorn is sad, they wither and die. People with the Unicorn's Gift are almost always respected and loved by others. Only if they use their powers to cause harm does public opinion turn against an individual unicorn.

Other Gifts?

From time to time, there are rumors of other sorts of Gifts than those listed in the maintext, which are the most common. These supposed mystical talents include Baku (dreams), Cyclopes (metal), Kappa (water), Kitsune (luck), Kobold (rock), Minotaur (mystery), Siren (song), Stirge (blood), and Tengu (forests and plants). Many of these stories come out of Sha Ka Ruq, by the way, where the traditions of their savage bluelinen progenitors still hold sway.

However, not much is known about these rare, rumored Gifts.

One can compare alchemists and their crafts to koldun and their crafts by considering the difference between a seagoing ship and a skygoing ship.

Both are useful, but the latter has more scope and freedom of movement.

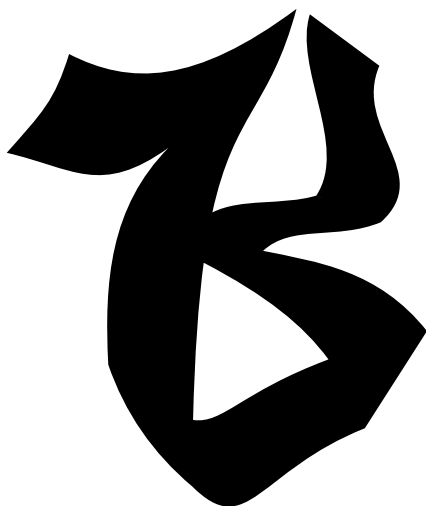
— Gold-Eyed Niko, Sha-Ku Koldun

The Koldun

Koldun are people who have the potential to develop *many* Gifts. To a koldun, the differences between Gifts are like the differences between styles of swordplay are to a fencer. They can pick and choose between the mystical powers and techniques they can bring into play. Only one in a thousand—perhaps ten-thousand—people is born with the capability to become a koldun.

During their apprenticeship with an older koldun, the student is taught alchemy, extensive occult lore regarding the capabilities and nature of each Gift, the secrets for awakening Gifts within himself, and methods for infusing objects—many constructed with *Materia Mystica* (see p. 81)—with arcane power: that is, *kolduncraft* (see p. 93).

Because Gifts are an expression of the person's soul or nature, and koldun possess many Gifts, this makes them a bit strange to others: mercurial, eccentric, flexible, confusing, and capable—all at once. Additionally, older koldun tend to have weird and bizarre physical or personality traits—strange metallic eyes, a persistent aroma



of brimstone, the ability to get drunk from merely listening to music... things like that. A koldun can only *activate* one of their Gifts at a time, but after that can *maintain* several going at once. Importantly, koldun are the only people in the 7 Skies who can learn the *Three Hidden Gifts* (see below).

Politically, koldun are unwelcome in the Colronan Kingdom and Zultanate, due to the Church's position on their powers (see textbox, p. 96). However, they are tolerated (or even accepted) on Barathi, Viridia, Ilwuz,

and Sha Ka Ruq; and actively sought out on Crail (for business issues). Otherwise, they receive respect (not unmixed with a bit of fear due to their power) from the general populace.

Koldun have an informal, cryptic social *Fraternity* with other koldun. While not an official organization, nearly all koldun assent to “professional courtesy” between themselves. There is much quoting of the *Laws of Murgan* (Murgan being a powerful koldun of ages past) to indicate proper protocol between koldun in amity and enmity. Many believe that these “edicts” are simply made up on the spot for a koldun's immediate benefit (see also *Chapter 2, “The Pirate King”*, p. 66). In any case, the koldun subculture is rife with competing sects, conspiracies, cults, and secret societies.

When a koldun learns all ten Gifts, he or she becomes an *Archkoldun*. Archkoldun can activate multiple Gifts at a time, and even “blend” Gifts together in bizarre and potent ways—for example, using the Gifts of the Dragon and the Basilisk in tandem could ***burn a victim's thoughts***, or combining the Gifts of the Unicorn and the Griffin could permit an Archkoldun to ***suck the soul out of someone and consume it*** for power. Even the most obstreperous koldun will show an Archkoldun the appropriate respect.

Multiply Gifted vs. Koldun

Since for most of the World, the common understanding is “one person, one Gift,” the multiply Gifted are often viewed as odd ducks—somewhere between a normal Gifted and a full koldun.

Indeed, some sages claim they are people who have a *flawed* koldun talent for some reason of heredity or psychology. And there is the interesting but little-known fact that many multiply Gifted hail from the Zultanate. Could these multiply Gifted be pious individuals who hold so strongly to the Church's position of koldun that they have transmuted their inherent, wide-ranging koldun ability into a few, directed expressions?

The Three Hidden Gifts

There are Three Hidden Gifts that no one in the World has ever (yet!) been born with; they only appear as mystical techniques learned through arcane koldun methods.

CHIMERA

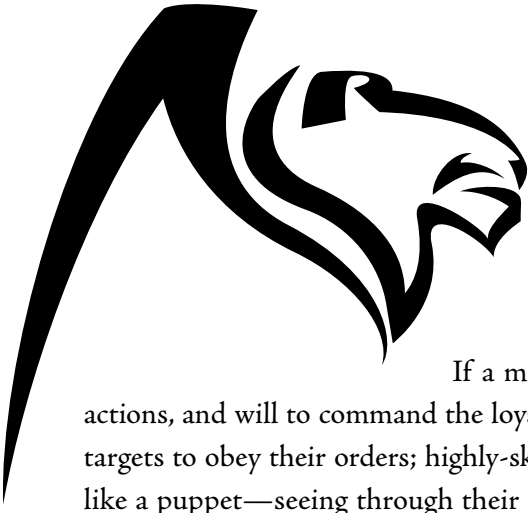
The Gift of the Chimera permits the alteration of the physical form through the power of will. They can also shift the nature of their aura, which can hide them from detection by other mystic abilities, break curses laid upon them, or fool mystical countermeasures (by duplicating another koldun's aura, a chimera would enter through a laboratory door keyed to only open for its master).



A chimera can transform into animals, plants, or things. They gain the abilities of the form they assume, be it bird or horse or fire-breathing dragon. A skilled chimera can perform partial shifts of shape—altering just one's hands into claws or one's eyes into those of a cat. They also can heal themselves even faster than someone who has the Gift of the Griffin. It is whispered that powerful koldun with the Gift of the Chimera can actually transform others into frogs, newts, or lowly worms.

The greater the difference between the starting shape of the person with the Chimera's Gift and their ending one, the greater the difficulty of the transformation; whether this difference is of size, sex, scope, or ability, each increases the complexity of the effect. Furthermore, the longer a chimera holds a shift of shape, the harder it is to maintain. A youthful male shifting to an older female could hold the form for a full day; if transforming into an elephant or a sparrow, not more than a few hours; if becoming something extremely difficult—a swarm of butterflies, a rock, a drop of water, a snatch of overheard song, a shadow on the ceiling, or a dragon, the duration is a handful of minutes at best.

There are more stories about chimeras than any other of the Gifted (except maybe griffins). The ability to shapeshift is deemed wondrous and amazing by nearly everyone in the World.



MANTICORE

Manticores are impossibly charismatic and convincing. People just seem to like them, listen to them, believe them. This is only the mildest use of the Gift of the Manticore, and is what most of its possessors use regularly.

If a manticore chooses to, they can use their words, actions, and will to command the loyalty of others. Their talent allows them to force targets to obey their orders; highly-skilled manticores can even work another person like a puppet—seeing through their eyes, hearing through their ears, speaking with their mouths, and moving their very hands with their Gift.

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Luckily, the Manticore's Gift grants no direct access to the thoughts of others. . . but it is easy to command their victims to tell all. However, strong-willed targets can pervert the spirit of the manticore's orders by hewing exactly to the letter of them. They can also slowly wriggle out of the manticore's psychic grip over time.

Universally feared, those with the Manticore's Gift tend to hide their ability. On all the Major Islands, use of the Gift of the Manticore on someone is a capital crime. The fear of their talent—along with concerns about the Gifts of the Basilisk and the Merhorse—has made the trade in alchemicraft and kolduncraft Wards (see p. 96) a booming business.



QILIN

Those with the Qilin's Gift are very light-footed and agile—they have perfect balance, and can walk on thin ropes, stretched silken cloth, and strips of paper. The most powerful are said to be able to run on smoke or mist, or stand solidly upon the top of a cloud.

The Gift of the Qilin also permits one to disappear from one place and reappear in another in the blink of an eye. This is generally limited to locations that are familiar or within sight. Powerful qilin can bring objects and people to them with concentration (or send them away). It is difficult to duel with a swordsman who possesses the Gift of the Qilin, as they can vanish and reappear, flickering like a candle flame.

Occasionally, if a qilin gets highly emotional, small objects around them *disappear*. This means that those with the Qilin's Gift are always inexplicably "losing" small personal items and coins of low value. (Some say that things get lost only if the person with the Gift of the Qilin is suffering a strong negative emotion; if the strong emotion is positive, they claim the qilin can "find" things like small personal items and coins of small or medium value.)

People tend to be fascinated with those who possess the Gift of the Qilin. They are full of impertinent questions and suggestions.

By stealing away my friend's mistress, the Count filled my dear friend's life with sadness.

As Armand is not the sort of man who easily sheds tears, I decided to translate his sorrow into a little present for the Count. Now, wherever Count Repelli is, rain falls.

He stole the sun from Armand's eyes, thus I steal the sun from his.

— **Shien of the Thunders, Colronan Koldun (late of the Zultanate)**

Kolduncraft

Koldun have the knowledge and skills to create wondrous things that no mundane craftsman—not even an alchemist!—could ever assay. Those who wish to purchase *kolduncraft* should expect to pay exorbitant sums.

Most "charged" kolduncraft glows, with the brightness reflecting the amount of energy it contains; this glow dims as the charge is used up performing wondrous feats. Some kolduncraft spend their force slowly over time, and others allow it to explode out all at once. Anyone who is Gifted can charge up kolduncraft with flesh-to-object contact, time, and concentration. Inattentive Gifted or koldun might "over-charge" a Kolduncraft, destroying it (often explosively).

Many kolduncraft are made to order, and thus unique. However, there are a few types of kolduncraft that are common in the 7 Skies:

Charms: *Charms* are small bits of wood, metal, or glass that are constructed to preserve good luck and deflect bad luck. While popular, they are only mildly effective. Indeed, they are more a form of ornamental jewelry than anything else. Serious misfortune causes them to shatter; some say that such misfortunes would have been even worse if not for the ameliorating protection of a charm. (Who knows?)



Coldlocker: A *coldlocker* is a large cupboard constructed of tym, and painted inside and out with a paint composed of fek venom, redpowder, scarletjack pulp, and the powdered shells of wheeltree nuts in an oil base. (Depending upon the color of the nuts used, coldlockers tend to be tawny yellow, dull green, vibrant orange, or flat brown in color.) The interior of a coldlocker is very chilly, perhaps only a few degrees above that of a winter's day, and can keep food fresh for a surprisingly long time without spoilage or the growth of mold or other rot.

Fetters: Used as a way to restrain the Gifted, a *fetter* is a manacle or collar scored with runes, studded with crystals, or both. If someone attempts to use a Gift (or koldun powers) while wearing a fetter, it redirects the mystical energy back onto the wearer as light, heat, and pain. It can be overcharged and destroyed, but this is risky—many individuals die from the injuries they sustain pouring energy into the fetter, or lose a hand (or neck!) when the overcharged fetter explodes.

There are three main types of fetter:

1. *Lock:* Any use of a mystical ability does damage (used on Gifted or koldun prisoners World-wide).
2. *Keyhole:* As per Lock, except a single Gift is permitted free use (used by the Church to help devout koldun “control themselves”—see *The Zultanate and the Mystical*, p. 53).
3. *Counter:* Any “improper use” of mystic powers—whatever the crafter of the fetter defines as “improper”—causes pain and increments a clockwork *counter*. As this counter increases, the level of pain increases. This counter can be decremented with a key, entrusted to a “handler” (said to be used by covert kolduns working for the Kingdom... and maybe even the Zultanate!).

Fire Wands: A wooden stick, banded with wix, that releases burning energies., Fire wands come in three main types, distinguished by the type of wood used in its construction: 1) *oak*, where the wand is simply a focus for a dragon's inherent Gift (or a koldun's power); 2) *tym*, where the energy comes out as a jet of flame; or 3) *bluewood*, where the energy comes out as bolts or balls of fire. Generally, a fire wand of tym or bluewood contains one to six “shots” and is less accurate than a musket. Unfortunately, the fire that comes out of it has no physical force behind it—while it could burn through a door's lock, it could not push a glass off of a table.

Floater Discs: A sandwich of slivered duzha crystals, redpowder, and raw cerulean, bound between thin circles of bluewood, a *floater disc* is an item that can be placed underneath other objects to lift them off the ground of a cloud-island. However, outside force must often be used to pull or push the floated items, unless a complex



rig—and more floater discs!—are used. A charge can lift only a certain amount of weight for a limited amount of time (maximum of an hour of constant use), and is a steady, slow “push”—not a blast of force. (Koldun often attempt to create floater disc weapons, with limited success.) Floater discs are used extensively in cloudships (see p. 108), for additional levitation and propulsion (using a complex bit of machinery that angles the discs properly). At best, they do not work in the 7 Skies; at worst, they act as a magnet of incredible strength with regard to the Blue, dragging the skyship down to a smashing impact.

Ghost Paste: A whitish-gray preparation of powdered bone, trigo flour, dried scarletjack pulp, and airwhale ambergris, when this paste is spread upon one’s hands (or any physical object), one can touch an insubstantial ghost. It quickly dries and flakes off within minutes, so skyships traveling through the Ghost Sky usually stock up with a keg or two, just in case.



Gunpowder: A mixture of several types of *Materia Mystica* and other secret ingredients, *gunpowder* is a flammable explosive used in muskets, pistols, and cannon. Alchemicraft gunpowder is light green in color; kolduncraft-grade stuff is light blue and faintly glows. The former is very unstable, but cheap; the latter lasts longer, keeps better, is less affected by the damp, is less likely to randomly explode, and is quite expensive. (Skysailors’ tales claim that if the owner doesn’t want it to light, kolduncraft gunpowder *simply won’t*, even if a match is dropped directly into it!)

Heatstones: A *heatstone* is a glass cube that gives off little light but great heat. A charge can give off only a certain amount of heat for a limited amount of time (maximum of a day of constant use).

Lightstones: A *lightstone* is a glass sphere that gives off little heat but bright light. A charge lasts a moderate amount of time (maximum of a week of constant use).

Medicine-dust: Finely ground *Materia Mystica* (usually *Isla del Huitra* pearls) mixed with herbs and spices, *medicine-dust* can be taken internally or used to pack external wounds. A “generic” dose will aid in recovery from many diseases, ease pain or discomfort, and speed healing—with bigger, better, and faster effects from special preparations focused on a specific type of injury (healing broken bones, pain relief, disease cures). There are only a handful of diseases and infirmities that are resistant to properly targeted medicine-dust.

Skyship Components: There are numerous pieces of equipment or elements of construction of skyships that can be kolduncraft, too numerous to list here. See *Parts of a Skyship*, p. 106, for further details. If a skyship captain or owner can afford it, having an alchemist or koldun crewmember is often well worth the expense. If they cannot, they must make do with practitioners in various ports of call.

Tzushen: Small sculptures, often of tym, beloved by Sha-Ku for their utility in face-trading (see boxed text, p. 73). Anyone who holds a tzushen and tries to perceive its worth in prestige will get the impression of the sculpture increasing in weight, with increasing levels of prestige being perceived as heavier weights. (The tzushen does not actually get heavier.) The giver of a tzushen is the one who impresses value upon it. Tzushen react to changes in status of their primary owner automatically; a tzushen given by someone who suddenly became Cynosure would dramatically increase in “weight” the moment that the giver took the Throne.

Wards: Usually in the form of jewelry, a Ward helps shield the wearer from telepathic intrusion, clairvoyant observation, and mental control. A charge lasts a moderate amount of time (maximum of a week of constant use).

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The Church & Alchemy

The Church supports and endorses alchemy and alchemists, provided that they use their knowledge honorably. Indeed, alchemy is one of the domestic crafts that some priests study during their training. The Church holds that the ability of anyone to learn alchemy, and its useful but often limited effect, means that its power is no more likely to be abused or used dishonorably than any other skill.

The Church & Gifts

The Church accepts the existence of the various spiritual Gifts as blessings of Vaoz. While Gifts are not in and of themselves dishonorable or evil, they are *dangerous*. A person with a powerful Gift is like a baby with a sharp knife: it's likely the baby will hurt themselves or others unless they have the knowledge, integrity, and discipline to use it honorably.

The Church & Koldun

While the Church does not think that koldun are by nature evil, it does not trust that koldun—any koldun—can have the knowledge, integrity, or discipline to use the vast power that they've been granted in an honorable fashion. The Church views a person possessing koldun talents as a baby with a hair-trigger pistol: it's *extremely* likely the baby will hurt themselves or others, often purely by accident. (However, see *Fetters* above, p. 94, and *the Fettered*, p. 53.)

Some heresies (see p. 101) in the 7 Skies focus on the nature of kolduns; common heretical beliefs about koldun include: they are a priori evil; they are perfectly able to use their talent honorably; and koldun are the chosen anointed of Vaoz.

No, Captain, I doubt it's honorable to "slit the bastard's weazand" because you didn't like the color of the bales of silk you, ah, appropriated from his hold when you took his ship off Barathi.

Excuse me, I think I need another grog.

— Father Fehrad Djezuni, preaching at Vaoz's Chalice on Ilwuz

The Faithful

The Church of Vaoz

The *Church of Vaoz* has spread across the World from its humble beginnings on Colrona. The Church mediates between peoples when there is no other common ground, educates the young, and advises everyone on how to keep their honor bright.

The Creator God, *Vaoz*, made the World, and all within it. He giveth and he taketh away. He challenges his people to learn how to be, how to do, how to speak, and how to live with Honor.

The symbol of the Church is a golden solar circle (the same as is used by the Colronan Zultanate; see p. 49).

Tenets of The Faith

As laid down by the First Prophet, Honor is the foundation and the mechanism for successful communication between people. Protect the weak; keep your word; tell no lies. Give favors lightly; receive them gravely.

Honor lasts beyond physical life. Honor shines from everything an honorable man touches. Dishonor muddies everything a dishonorable man touches. The Honorable become *Angels of the Sun* after death, the Dishonorable become *Demons of the Uttermost Dark*. Ghosts are poor souls that need to resolve a matter of Honor before they can pass on.



Honor others rightly, so that you may be honored rightly. Honor others for their words, deeds, integrity, and accomplishments.

Honor: Vaoz, as your Creator; your parents and family, for preparing you for the battle of life; your superiors, for your duty to them; your peers, for it is just to give Honor where it is due; and your subordinates, for your responsibility and care for them.

Defer humbly to superiors, assert kindly to inferiors. In all things, hold yourself worthy of your Honor; judge the Honor due you accurately, neither seek more nor accept less.

3 Honor cannot exist in an atmosphere of lies, deceit, or fraud. Honor must be pursued and held tightly, despite danger, loss, or inconvenience. If your Honor is lost or compromised, your very life is lost or compromised.

Church Holidays & Rituals

The Church of Vaoz celebrates two religious holidays—*Winterfeast* (midwinter) and *Summer-revel* (midsummer). Both are large parties, with much drinking, eating, singing, dancing, and gift-giving—everything that helps build community ties.

Church services are held regularly (daily in large or devout population centers, weekly in smaller or more casual ones, monthly in tiny or irreligious ones). A Church service is usually composed of a reading from *The Mirror of Honor*, a sermon, a short meditation, and a short dialogue with the celebrant.

The Church's priests also administer seven personal rituals for the faithful — Celebration of Birth, First Day of School, Cleansing of Honor, Rite of Adulthood, Rite of Marriage, Rite of Childbirth, and Mourning of Death. Each personal ritual has a distinct spiritual effect on the recipient; the mystically-minded claim to be able to perceive small alterations in ritual recipients' auras (for this reason, the Cleansing of Honor is sometimes used as a curse-breaking or exorcism ritual). These rituals may also be used on (and affect!) inanimate objects—for example, a slightly altered form of the Celebration of Birth is used as a ship-christening and first launch ceremony.

*Vaoz, shield these avowed foes from Dishonor with your Benevolent Hands;
raise within them Honorable thoughts, words, and deeds with your Uplifting
Hands; and allow this exchange to wipe all tallies clean.*

May justice, tempered by mercy, prevail. Oyez.

— The Prayer Before Formal Duels

Priestcraft

All of the priests of Vaoz are entrusted to instruct everyone on the nature of honor and its exercise in the political, theological, philosophical, and practical areas of life, and to protect and strengthen the weak. To that end, they have become general teachers and perpetual students, in order to best speak the language of the people that they wish to educate.

To enter the priesthood, a layperson (male or female) is tested for clerical aptitude—a strong sense of honor, a sharp mind, and a desire to aid others. If successful, he or she enters a monastery as a Novice, to learn literature, Church rituals, history, first aid, teaching methods, and a useful *domestic craft* (alchemy, brewing, cooking, smithing, weaving, etc.). After his or her competency is proven by passing the Test of the First Gate, the candidate becomes a Monk (or Nun) and joins an *Order* (see below). Novices, Monks, and Nuns are called “Brother” or “Sister” depending upon their gender.

The new Monk/Nun is trained in debate, oratory, philosophy, and theology, as well as basic training in administration, business, science, and linguistics. Successful completion of the Test of the Second Gate elevates the cleric to the rank of Priest (or Priestess), grants permission to perform the rituals of the Church, and—depending upon the Order—certain rights or duties (for example, running a parish on some backwater island or independent study in a field of interest).

More prestigious ranks in the hierarchy can be achieved through additional rigorous testing and appointment by superiors (since the Tests for the clergy are nearly the same as the Examinations for the secular, see *How the Zultanate of Colrona Is Ruled*, p. 51, for further details).

Priests and priestesses of the Church can marry and raise children; however, marrying someone outside of the clergy, or even of a Church rank “too far away” from one’s own, is frowned upon.



Virtutoirs

Any priest can become a *Virtutoir*, after taking specific training in the intricacies of Honor, diplomacy, and psychology; some choose it as their “domestic craft.”

Layfolk or even other clergy members who desire advice on ethics, need to unburden their conscience in confidence, or require an unbiased arbitrator for a contentious issue, may require the services of a *Virtutoir*. *Virtutoirs* are oath-bound not to *reveal* the details of what is spoken to them in confidence. *Virtutoirs* may have access to people of the highest rank due to this. (What most non-clergy do *not* know or realize is that to maintain their own personal honor, and that of the Church, a priest may still *act* on what they’ve heard, even if they are unable to speak of it.)

3 If a Priest wishes to become a *Virtutoir*, he must pass the *Test of the Sun’s Gate*. In this strenuous Test, not merely the cleric’s level of knowledge is investigated, but also his *character*—usually by a Gifted priest (Merhorse or Basilisk) who is also a *Virtutoir*. This is to assure that only the most principled individuals gain this position of trust.

Priestly Orders

There are three main Orders of priests: the *Peregrinators*, the *Cenobites*, and the *Eremites*.

Peregrinators wander the 7 Skies in order to learn what they will, teach when they can, and preach where they may. *Cenobites* are deeply involved in communities, either that of a parish or a clerical monastery. They instruct the young of many Worlds in their reading, writing, arithmetic, good manners, theology, and philosophy, and often provide an additional service to their community (running a brewery, granary, scribe service, apothecary shop, etc.). *Eremites* are solitary priests, living alone in a remote site, dedicated to trying to glean Vaoz’s Plan through meditation, scholastic research, or mystical pursuits.

We must meet heretics with all of the weapons at our disposal: our thoughts, our words, and our deeds. Only at the last should weapons be drawn—you cannot convince a corpse of the rightness of the Truth of Vaoz.

— Mother Amily Godsjan of Sunseer Freehold on Viridia

Popular Heresies of the World

(See also the *Church & Koldun* textbox on p. 96.)

Ancient Survivals

Before the formation of the Church of Vaoz, the religious practices of the islands were mostly idiosyncratic precursor faiths. These usually took the form of folk rites for protection, healing, weather control, and fertility—though with regional differences, based on the character of each particular people. It is probable that these precursor beliefs grew up around Gifted priests and priestesses.

To this day, such folk beliefs and rituals survive *sub rosa* in the great nations of the World. (On smaller, more provincial cloud-islands, they may be *super rosa*—the official faith of the nation!) The Church usually either turns a blind eye to these beliefs, attempts to co-opt them in the greater scheme of the Church, or mounts missionary crusades to convert people to the True Faith.



The Barathi Penstari

Before the rise of the Church, a type of paganism-cum-ancestor worship was practiced on Barathi: the veneration of the penstari, the guiding genius of a Noble House (see p. 32). The Elder of the House was said to receive spiritual communications from the penstari, sharing in the wisdom, knowledge, and bloody-minded desires of their forbearers.

This practice still exists in the Empire, quietly. Barathi priests of the Church tend to look the other way. Intriguingly, the Church has recently received a report by one **Mother Cantara**—a Peregrinating Virtutoir who possesses the Gift of the Merhorse—claiming to have seen the dying spirit of the Patron of House Ophidi uniting with a ghostly, monstrous form hovering over his deathbed. Mother Cantara is now missing, and is suspected to have regrettably drowned. The Church wants to know more.

First Prophet, Koldun

A delightful mélange of heresy and conspiracy theory, adherents believe that not only was the First Prophet himself a koldun, but that all of the Zultans and Zultanas since (as well as all high-ranking potentates of the Church) have been too. The Church is simply a sect of koldun dedicated to controlling mystical power for themselves.

The Merciless Vaoz of the Crailese Rugged Tribes

Many of the Rugged Tribes of Crail (see p. 58) believe in Vaoz as the Creator of the World, but do not ascribe positive qualities or actions to Him. He is thought to not show any benevolence whatsoever.

To the Rugged Tribesmen, Vaoz is the Inquisitor, the Tester, the Tempter—the one who throws opportunities for dishonor at people. They offer prayers and sacrifice to the god to keep these opportunities away from them.

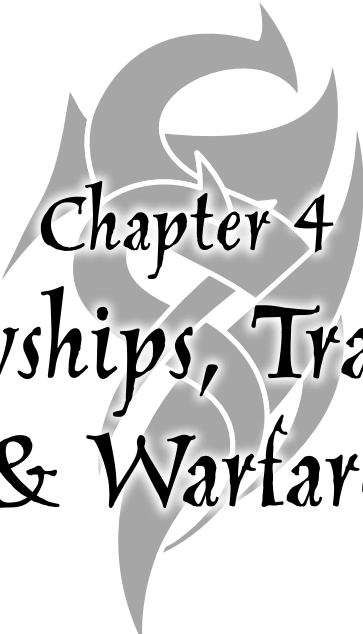
Missionaries who travel into the deserts of Crail rarely return; if they do, they are often infected by this heresy.



Sha-Ku Pantheism

The Sha-Ku have inherited the bizarre beliefs of their savage blumen ancestors. They believe that everything in the World is a divinity (or aspects of a single divinity; reports are unclear). While they seem to appreciate the social advice and admonitions of the Church, and the secular benefits of Church education, many refuse to accept the Truth of Vaoz. Some few actually seem *amused* by the theology.

The Church is vitally interested in bringing the Light of Honor to these people in a way they can understand. Some of the best philosophers, scholars, and theologians are studying the Sha-Ku, trying to find the proper key for the locks of their souls.



Chapter 4

Skyships, Trade, & Warfare

Listen up, you swabs—the Captain wants to make an inspection of the foredeck before the dinner watch. That means it has to be cleaner than your mothers’ bloomers, understand?

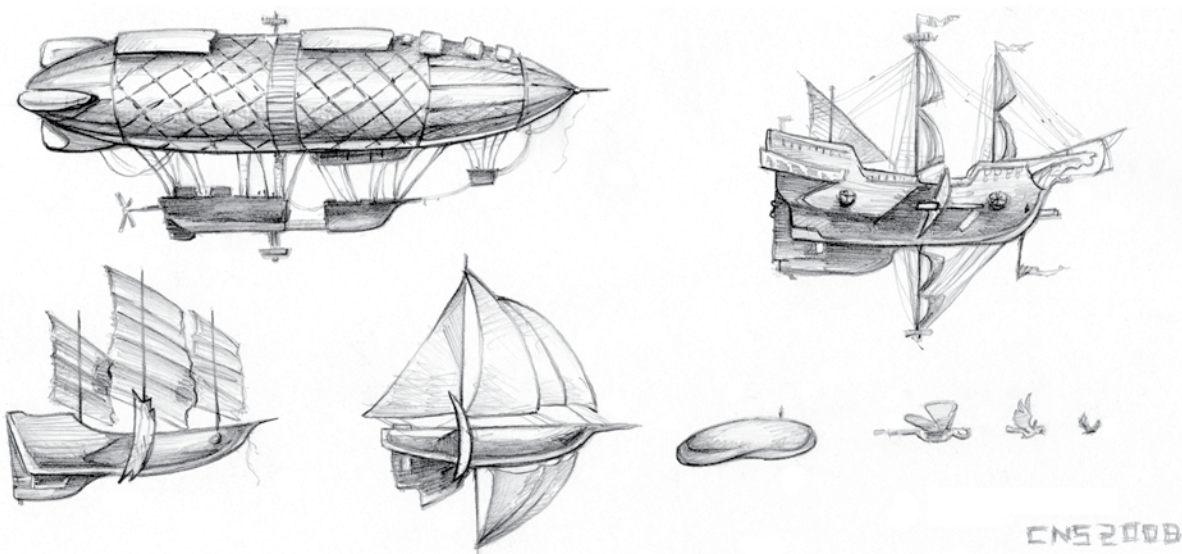
We have two bells to stow that cargo, coil those lines, rewind the works, holystone the deck, and make sure that everything is in fighting trim. Note that here I say “we.”

You *have one bell before I take the cat out of the bag and start laying about with a will. Do you understand, you grub-pated idiots? One bell, and I want this deck perfect, or there’ll be blood.*

Hop to it!

— **Jelissa Knott**

First Mate of the Viridese trader *Black Turtle*



Skyships

The extremes of weather, climate, and floating obstacles in the Dome of the Heavens means that only very special types of ships can bridge the vast distances between the cloud-islands: *skyships*.

4

While properly only referring to the vessels inspired by surface sailing vessels which traverse the 7 Skies, many people (especially land-lubbers) also use “skyship” to refer to two other types of vehicle: *cloudships* and *gliders*.

Skyships Proper

Skyships proper are craft that can safely leave the Fog- and Cloud-surf of their home cloud-island (often by sailing right over the island’s edge), withstand travel through the tremendous winds of the 7 Skies between the islands, and enter the surf of another island.

They are constructed (mostly) of bluewood, which floats over the Blue. Rudders and keels of bluewood treated with a paint primarily composed of redpowder (see p. 15 and p. 83) allow tacking and steering in open sky. Additionally, a combination of special skyship rigging and components, plus the inherent mystical abilities of blue-wood, permits the setting of courses that involve changes in altitude. A skyship averages speeds of 100 miles per day in the 7 Skies. Unfortunately, skyships cannot fly directly over the land of cloud-islands at low altitudes: the lifting properties of blue-wood vanish within the Fog of an island. (However, a skyship can fly over an island at extremely high altitudes, as it were, so long as they don’t come near its Fog.)

There are three main types of skyship:

1. **Sky-Galleon:** The largest sort of skyship, a *galleon* is fast and can carry a lot of cargo (however, the weight of the cargo usually interferes negatively with absolute speed). They are somewhat sluggish in terms of maneuverability, and ascend and descend slowly. It also takes a good eight hours of work to properly dismast a galleon to permit it to sail through the Cloud and Fog of an island onto water; most galleons therefore use ship's boats of various sizes to transship provisions, cargo, and passengers to port. A galleon usually mounts between 10 and 20 cannon.
2. **Sky-Junk:** The *junk* is a middle-size sort of skyship. Due to the intricacies of its construction and rigging, it can sail into the wind on its same Layer (see *Skysailing*, p. 110). The complex works (see p. 107) of the junk allow it to quickly alter from sky-sailing to water-sailing, at the cost of cargo space and mechanical upkeep. A junk usually mounts between 8 and 10 cannon.
3. **Sky-Schooner:** A small and nimble skyship, the schooner is known for its ability to rapidly ascend or descend. However, its cargo space is similar to a junk's, and it's overall speed is fairly slow. However, it can dismast itself in one-quarter of the time required for a galleon, and can thus surface-sail into port much more quickly. A schooner usually mounts between 6 and 8 cannon.



Falling Overboard in the 7 Skies

The equivalent of a life-preserver in the 7 Skies is a block of bluewood, or a woven vest of bluewood twigs. Either can help slow or arrest a person's fall towards the Blue (see *Chapter 1*, p. 6).

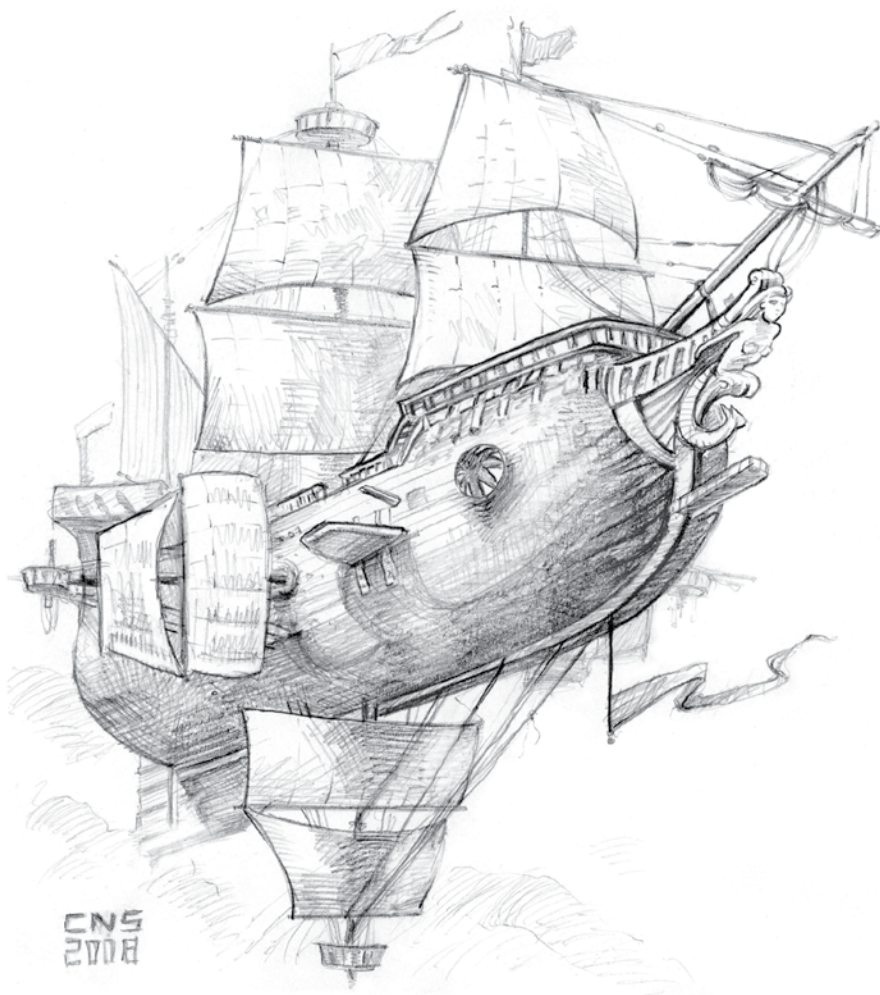
Individuals with wingcloaks (see p. 116) may be even able to return to their ship, eventually.

Otherwise, it's a long, long fall towards the Blue. Pray to Vaoz that you will bounce rather than smash.

Parts of a Skyship

A skyship is composed of many parts. First, and most importantly, is the *hull* composed entirely of bluewood. While the various *masts*—*deck*, *keel* (or *belly*), and two *wingmasts*—are often also of bluewood, they need not absolutely be. Each mast has at least one—and often several—*booms*, which help hold a *sail* in the position desired.

“Rope” is cargo: if it’s in use on a skyship, it’s called a *line*—and there are several names for lines, depending upon what they do. Lines that help support the mast (standing rigging) are called *shrouds*. Lines that help to control the sails (running rigging) are called *sheets*. Lines used to tie the ship up to a dock are called *warps*; any line that connects a skyship to anything else is also called a warp—for example, a harpoon’s line is called a *harpoon warp*, and if it is used to board another skyship is called a *zip-warp*. Anchors (sea- or sky-) and balloons are supported by *chains*, even if they’re not made of metal. *Nets* are used to scoop birds out of the air and rescue men who fall overboard.



The bottom of the hull, running lengthwise along the ship, is the *keel*. It often hangs downward, and is painted with a redpowder-based paint. The resistance of the keel to the surrounding sky is what allows a skyship to push against the prevailing wind, and move in another direction.

Inside of the hull, walls are called *bulkheads*, ceilings are called *overheads*, and floors are called *decks*. The kitchen is the *galley*, the toilet is the *head*, any special storeroom (armory, sailmaking, supplies, timber, etc.) is called the (*whatever*) *locker*, the chamber where the ship's healer performs surgery or other healing and allows crewmembers to recuperate is the *sickbay*, and the place where prisoners are confined is called the *brig*. The room where gunpowder is stored (usually, in the center of the ship) is called the *magazine*. The officers all have their own *private quarters* and share a *wardroom* to eat in; the rest of the crew shares a large *bunkroom* and eats in the *common mess*. The captain has the most expansive quarters, which serve double-duty as his office; the captain tends to eat in his cabin, alone, unless he invites people to dine with him there, or is invited by the officers to share a meal in their wardroom.

There is often a large area taken up by the *cargo hold*: most cargo holds must be loaded from the top-deck, others have more direct access through the hull—these access points have been called *bomb-bays*, since numerous pirates utilize this capability to rain down bombs or wingmen upon a target. Most skyships—especially sky-junks—require an area to hold *the works* (sometimes called the *linebox*), which is the gearing and cables that permit the operation of manipulating sails and masts. There are also *windlasses* and *capstans*, used for shifting cargo, ballast, anchors, sails, and anything else that needs to be lifted or lowered on a ship. At the very lowest level of the ship, right above the keel, is the *bilge*, where water collects (usually only when the skyship is traveling on an island's surface water or in severe rainstorms). There are *pumps* to help get this *bilge-water* out.

The skyship is steered from the *cockpit*, usually located in the stern of the ship. This is where the *pilot*—the person who directs the movements of the skyship—is located. There is the *rudder-wheel*, a big wheel that the pilot turns to effect changes in lateral directions by turning the *rudder*, and there are the *aileron-wheel* (which controls small bits of bluewood machinery) and the *wing-wheel* (which controls the revolving of the wingmasts for the orientation of the wingsails), which aid changes in altitude.

Within easy access of the pilot are several special instruments, including a *spyglass*, the *blue-level* (a device that shows how high a skyship is above the Blue), the *Chameleon's Compass* (a silver needle that always points towards that star), the *Dragon's Compass* (a golden needle that always points towards the center of the Sky of Fire), a *moonclock* (a black dial that shows the current position of the moon in the



sky), and a *sunclock* (a white dial that shows the current position of the sun in the sky). Usually, the skyship's captain and navigator have their own sets of instruments, in addition to that of the ship's, which they can use to plot courses with the aid of *maps* and *charts* and *almanacs* that they—or the ship—possess.

The area on a deck where a *cannon* and its *gearing* (used to aim by elevation, declination, or traversing the gun) is called a *blister*; if sticking out of the hull, it's called a *turret*. Given the amount of weight of these *gunworks*, most skyships only carry what they need to defend themselves from attackers. A cannon connected to a ship's keel or carved *figurehead* is called a *spinal gun*. Any cannons mounted directly fore or aft are called *chasers*.

Skyships possess *signaling flags*, *flares*, *running lamps*, and *balloons* to communicate with other skyships. By tradition, the national flag of a ship's home port are flown always, and are called the *colors*. Unscrupulous sorts—like pirates and smugglers—often have several sets of colors. This is usually a crime under aeronautical law.

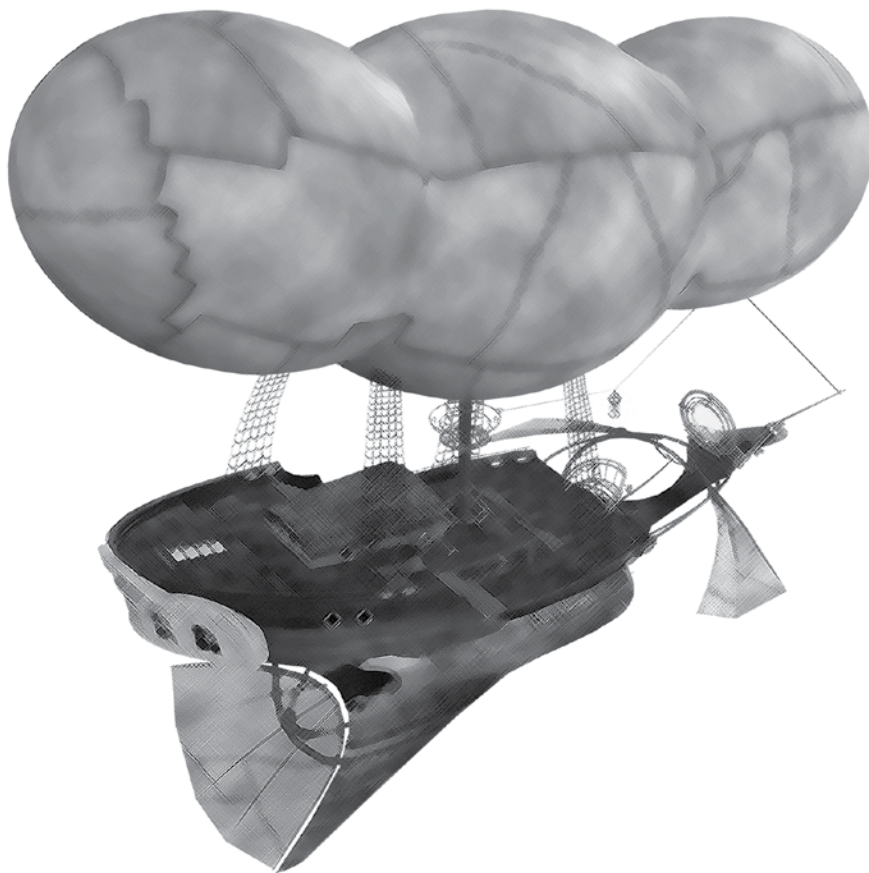
4 Most skyships have one to four smaller bluewood-hulled boats that they use to make landings on cloud-islands (if the keel-mast cannot or should not be unstepped), tow the skyship out of doldrums into another Wind Layer (see *Chapter 1*, p. 5), investigate things without endangering the main vessel, and for lifesaving and escape if the ship is going down. These often include a *longboat* (a large boat), one or two *cutters* (medium-sized boats), and two to four *jolly boats* (small boats).

Some skyships carry supplementary *gasbags* (allowing them to travel within a cloud-island's Fog like a cloudship; see below) and one or two *gliders* (see p. 109) for emergencies.

Cloudships

Cloudships are ship-hulls or very large wagons—usually called the *gondola*—that have been fitted with giant balloons (called *gasbags*) and huge *floater discs* (see p. 94). The lifting power of the gasbag (provided by *lifting gas*, available in alchemical and koldun varieties) and discs allow a cloudship to float over the surfaces of cloud-islands; propulsion is provided by an arrangement of floater discs in a device called *the chandelier*, which permits the angling of discs to help “push” against landmarks on the ground. Some cloudships also have sets of propellers—called *the blades*—driven by the muscle-power of crewmembers through complicated gearing.

Unfortunately, cloudships are only truly effective within the protective Fogs of an island: the intense winds and hurtling obstacles of the 7 Skies are dangerous to



fragile gasbags, floater discs do not work—or malfunction disastrously—over the Blue, and without floater discs, a cloudship has no propulsive power. (That being said, a few skyships proper possess gasbags which they can inflate in an emergency.)

Furthermore, cloudships are expensive to operate and are—because of their complexity—breakdown-prone. Travel speed is usually a few dozen miles a day. Only the very wealthy individual, a well-capitalized company, or a national government can afford to keep more than one or two cloudships operating regularly.

Most cloudships do not mount cannon, given the weight; some do utilize large crossbow-like weapons called *ballista*.

Gliders

Gliders are winged craft that can soar on the winds, be they of a cloud-island or those of the open sky. However, they *must* keep moving in order to stay aloft. They can fly through an island's Fog into the 7 Skies with skilled piloting. A bluewood glider is a cheap, effective, and *fast* method for traveling the Dome of the Heavens, and has the extra benefit being almost impossible to stall, given the vast expanse of open sky. They are used primarily for courier work: mail delivery, diplomatic pouches, and military dispatches—though all messages sent by glider are copied and sent

by slower and safer methods. While gliders can be used for extremely fast personal travel or to transport small and unique valuables, this is usually not the case—the risks of glider travel are too great.

What are the limitations and risks of gliders? They usually only have a small crew (one or two pilots) and a tiny amount of room for passengers and/or cargo (roughly the size and weight of two adults). Accommodations are not luxurious or expansive: it is essentially a comfortable chair for both crew and passengers. They move extremely fast and are relatively fragile—if the glider even strikes a glancing blow against a small Stone, flying bird, or floating plant, it can be critically damaged. Strong winds can rip a glider's wings off. Lastly, and most disturbingly, skysharks are attracted to gliders, but scholars are split on whether this is whether they want to eat it or mate with it. In either case, colliding with a skyshark will destroy a glider.

Most gliders are composed out of bluewood, and are styled to look like birds, bats, insects, fish, or skysharks. The crew of a glider sits in the *cockpit* (or *the beak*), which is the front of the *fuselage* (or *the body*). The *wings*, *legs* (often equipped with skids or wheels), and *tail* sprout from the sides, bottom, and rear of the fuselage; some gliders have retractable legs which are called *talons*. The interior compartment of the fuselage where cargo or passengers sit is called *the gizzard*.

A glider can reach speeds of 1,000 miles per day. Most do not mount any weapons due to weight and handling concerns, though pilot or crew can use handheld weapons like pistols or grenades. However, military-issue gliders often mount a heavy musket with a gunner.

Skysailing

Skysailing is the ability to control a skyship through adjusting the rigging, sails, rudder, and ailerons of a vessel. (Additionally, the bluewood hull of a skyship responds to the thoughts and desires of its crew—especially its captain and pilot—so skysailing includes a number of mental techniques not needed for surface sailing.)

A skyship floats above the Blue due to its bluewood hull. It moves forward because of wind pushing on the sails, which are attached to masts, which are attached to the hull. The differences in speed of movement between the pushing of the wind hitting the sails and the drag of the hull and keel allow horizontal movement. (Skyship keels are often covered in a paint made of redpowder, see p. 83; the difference between the nature of how bluewood floats and how the Stones—from which redpowder is made—float adds to the proper drag.) Most sky-galleons and sky-schooners

Aeronautical Terms

Many of the terms used in skysailing are adapted from surface sailor's jargon, with new additions to take into account the different environment and capabilities of a skyship:

Aft: Toward the rear.

Back: The top of a ship.

Beam: Widest part of ship.

Belly: The bottom of a ship.

Bow: Forward part of hull.

The Chameleon's Dram: An extra ration of grog, given to the first sailor who sights a change in the color of the Chameleon's Candle (see p. 6).

Forward: Toward the front.

Good Blue: Kolduncraft gunpowder.

The Good Sky: What many skysailors call the Ghost Sky while passing through it.

In Irons: Loss of maneuverability from being stuck head to wind (by mistake).

Port: Left, when facing bow of ship.

Quiet-folk: What many skysailors call ghosts when passing through the Ghost Sky.

The Sailor's Friend: What many skysailors call the Chameleon's Candle (see p. 6).

Ship-eyed or Ship-fingered: The ability of a helmsman to vaguely "sense" immediate obstacles around their skyship through its bluewood hull. (Those with the Gift of the Merhorse are especially good at this, but all pilots get something of a feel for a ship after some time piloting it.)

Starboard: Right, when facing bow of ship.

Stern: Aft part of hull.

Stubs: Ailerons.

Top: The furthest point of rigging away from the ship—therefore, a skyship has a back top, a belly top, a portwing top, and a starboardwing top.

Wingmen: Aerial marines, trained in boarding actions and aerial combat (see p. 116).

See also the maintext for more skysailor terminology, especially p. 112.

cannot sail directly into the wind (but see below); only sky-junks are properly rigged to do so.

To move in a vertical direction, a skyship turns into the wind, adjusts the *trim* (the weight of ballast, cargo, passengers, and crew sitting forward and aft) and the *balance* (the weight of ballast, etc., sitting starboard and port), *rotates the wingsails* and *adjusts the ailerons* to aid up or down movement, and the pilot *concentrates* on the proper mental images for the direction he wishes to go (some crews sing particular shanties at this time to help the pilot focus).

See also *Chapter 1, The Layers of the Dome & the Winds*, p. 5.

Skysailing Maneuvers

There are a number of maneuvers or techniques used in skysailing, often with strange or unusual names associated with them. These include:

- 
- ◆ **Arching:** When the bow rises above the stern, usually caused by turning into the wind in order to ascend.
 - ◆ **Beating:** Sailing as close to the wind as possible (often 45 degrees) off of how the wind is blowing.
 - ◆ **Head to Wind:** Sailing directly into the wind and coming to a stop.
 - ◆ **Heeling:** When the ship rolls over onto its side from the wind.
 - ◆ **Jibing:** When the stern of the ship passes through the wind.
 - ◆ **Luff Up:** Turning the ship into the wind, usually in preparation for ascending or descending.
 - ◆ **Making More Sail or Piling on More Sail:** Increasing the amount of sail the ship is flying.
 - ◆ **Reaching:** Anything between beating and reaching. A *close reach* is 60 degrees off of the wind, a *beam reach* is 90 degrees off of the wind, and a *broad reach* is 150 degrees off of the wind.
 - ◆ **Reefing:** Reducing the amount of sail the ship is flying.
 - ◆ **Running:** Sailing with the wind blowing from directly behind.
 - ◆ **Stooping:** When the stern rises above the bow, usually caused by turning into the wind in order to descend.
 - ◆ **Tacking:** When the bow of the ship passes through the wind.

A skysailor uses a combination of these techniques to steer the ship to a particular course, improve the ships speed, avoid obstacles, and maneuver in combat.

My favorite maneuver was to come perpendicular to my target, sailing right at them, though above. The fools would assume I meant little harm—after all, they were “crossing my T” as sailors say: a broadside from them (if I came into range) striking my bow could seriously damage the Lazy Dog.

What these poor souls never realized is that I had spent a goodly fortune to have a Viridese koldun make me a special gun. You see, the figurehead of the Dog was more than it seemed—a long gun, cast entirely of solid wix, with greater range than you’d ever think, and insanely accurate. All the crew had to do was remove the dog-head cover from my “horizon gun” and we were ready. (Of course, the cost of that cannon was tremendous, and I could only really use the Fine Blue with it, but you understand.)

I would stoop down upon the target vessel, at the Lazy Dog’s best speed. While they scrambled to traverse their top cannons, I’d fire the horizon gun—loaded with chain-shot—and dismast them. Then, one of the Dog’s jolly boats would deploy astern, connected to the Dog with stout ropes. I had it modified to utilize a gasbag—much like an islander cloudship, you see—and that would provide sufficient drag.

Descending through the cross-rip (depending upon the course of the target and the time of day, of course), the Dog would “square-heel, stoopingly,” as we skysailors say, as the hull caught the wind of the new current and the jolly boat tethered to our stern kept to the former. This brought our side guns to bear, faster than you’d think was possible. Two of my six side guns were usually loaded with grapeshot, so as the hands of the target tried to clear the deck of their ruined masts and sails, they were fairly peppered with lead.

The tether for the jolly boat would be cut (they would catch up with us later). Two more of the side guns would fire harpoons, to connect us to our victim. The last two side cannon would either be loaded with gas-shot or grape, depending upon my mood. The Dog’s wingmen would launch themselves, and swoop down on the wreck’s crew. It was generally over fairly soon after that.

This maneuver worked almost every time I used it. Except the first. But there were necessary kinks to be worked out.

— Captain Alexei Rostand, *Memoirs of a Sky Pirate*



Skysailors

A skysailor knows the basics of how to tie specific knots for specific purposes; set the sheets and shrouds; shift ballast and cargo; work the windlasses and capstans; knowledge of the winds, weather, Layers, sky-tides, and the 7 Skies; perform general repairs and upkeep duties; rudimentary navigation; how to steer a ship; how to load, aim, and fire a cannon; and basic self-defense for repelling boarding actions.

Typical skysailors often specialize in one of these roles, and get an additional title (and a certain amount of status). These positions, and their duties, include:

- ◆ **Boatswain:** In charge of the deck crew, cordage, anchors, and ship's boats.
- ◆ **Cabin Boy:** An errand boy, also waits on passengers and officers.
- ◆ **Carpenter:** In charge of the masts, hull, overheads, bulkheads, doors, decks, and repairs to all.
- ◆ **Cook:** In charge of the galley, as well as food storage and preparation.
- ◆ **Doctor:** In charge of the health of the crew.
- ◆ **Gearmaster:** In charge of the works (see p. 107), and repair and maintenance of same.
- ◆ **Gunner:** Operates a cannon (includes loading, aiming, and firing tasks), and performs maintenance and repair on the gun and its gearing.
- ◆ **Lookout:** Sharp-eyed crewmembers who sit in the *crow's nest* on the main topsail mast (on larger sky-galleons, there is often a Lookout in the *raven's nest* on the main keelsail mast), visually detecting obstacles, weather, other sky-ships, and islands.
- ◆ **Powder Monkey:** A runner who brings gunpowder from the magazine to a gun crew.
- ◆ **Purser (sometimes called Quartermaster):** In charge of cargo and non-food ship supplies; responsible for managing the ship's finances (under the watchful eye of the Captain, of course!).
- ◆ **Sailmaker:** In charge of the sails, and repair of same.
- ◆ **Wingman:** A fighting man who protects the ship (see textbox, p. 116).



Officers

Over the crew are several *Officers* in positions of authority. In the 7 Skies, most of a skyship's officers are competent skysailors who worked their way up through the ranks. However, sometimes outside preferment (wealth or social status, usually) puts an officer in place who has few—if any—of the basic skysailing skills (some don't even have the skills needed to perform their actual duties, either).

Officer positions, and their duties, include:

- ◆ **Captain:** In charge of entire ship, crew, cargo, and passengers; the boss.
- ◆ **First Mate:** Second-in-command, takes over if the captain is disabled or otherwise unavailable; coordinates ship operations and damage control during combat.
- ◆ **Master of Arms:** Commands the crew in melee combat on the deck, be it for boarding actions or repelling boarders; also responsible for training crew in self-defense.
- ◆ **Master of Guns:** Directs the gunners, manages the gun crews and powder monkeys, and maintains gunpowder stores in the magazine.
- ◆ **Sailing Master:** The ship's pilot and navigator; determines courses using maps, charts, and instruments at the captain's direction.

Lastly, each of these officers serves as *Officer of the Watch* on a rotating basis. It is the job of the Officer of the Watch—while the rest of the crew is engaged in their daily duties—to keep an overall view of the entire status of the skyship, discipline the crew, order responses to various hazards (obstacles, dangerous weather, pirates, etc.), and notify the captain when the situation demands it.

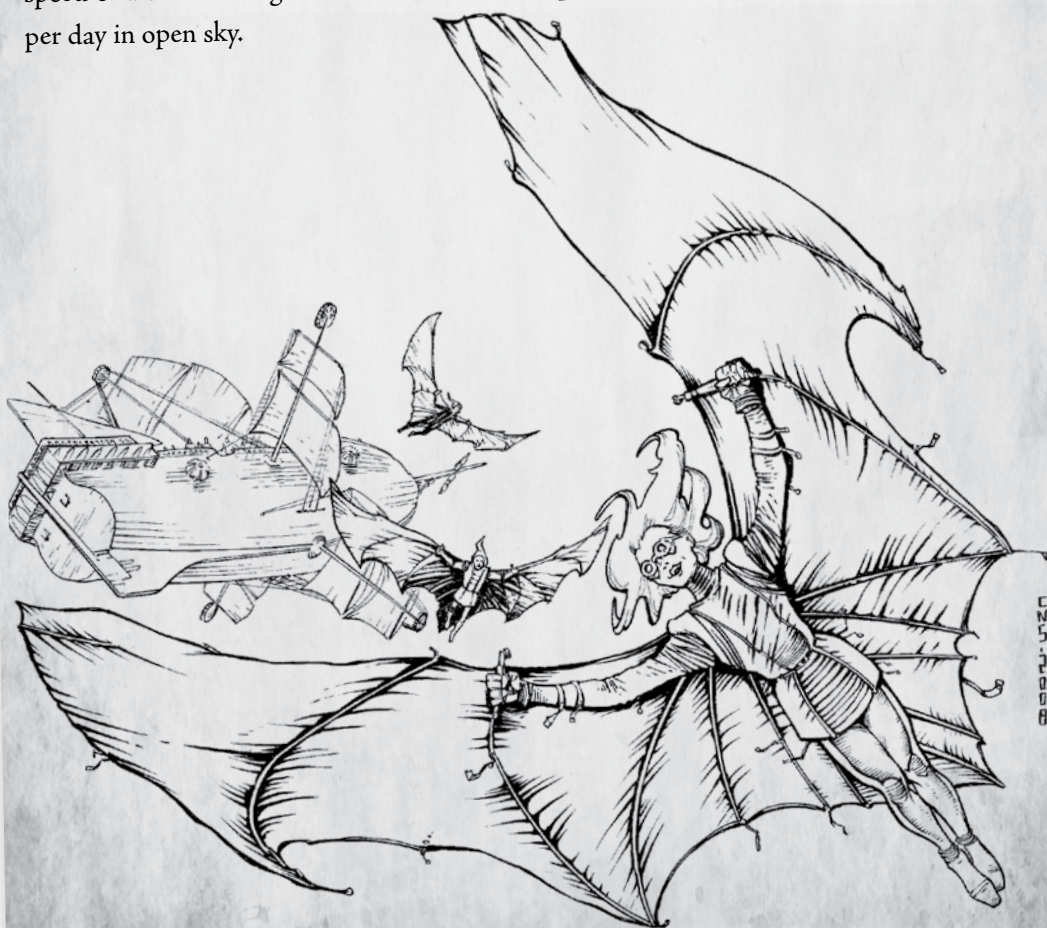


Wingcloaks & Wingmen

The *wingcloak* is a large, full cape of extremely tough but light material, equipped with integral “sleeves” and straps, allowing it to be attached to the wearer’s limbs. They are used as parachutes and one-person “lifeboats” in open Sky. It can even be used on a cloud-island to slow a descent to a safer landing speed. Some top of the line wingcloaks incorporate thin bluewood lathes and dowels as boning (giving a bat-like look to the wingcloak) to aid maneuverability and buoyancy above the Blue.

Wingmen are “aerial marines” who are specially trained in how to glide, soar, and land safely from a great height; how to board skyships in flight and repel boarders; to detect updrafts and downdrafts; basic repair and maintenance; simple acrobatics and navigation; and how to attack enemies and defend themselves while in flight. Using a wingcloak is a strenuous athletic activity.

The utility of a wingcloak is limited to the capabilities and skill of its pilot. In theory, a wingcloak could be used to travel between islands, but if the wingman grew tired, ran into a downdraft or Sky animal, or fell asleep, they would quickly fall to the Blue. The top speed of a skilled wingman is around 10 miles per day on an island, and about 60 miles per day in open sky.



Travel Across the 7 Skies

Surface Travel on a Cloud-Island

Island land travel varies depending upon the quality of terrain and weather. In general, a person on foot can average 5 miles per day for long journeys, 15 miles per day for shorter journeys, and 40 miles per day in a forced march. Wagons can travel 20 miles per day; horseback travel can be anywhere up to 40 to 50 miles a day. Post couriers can cover 150 miles in a single day by changing horses often.

Sea travel in surface ships ranges from 50 to 100 miles per day, depending upon the weather and wind.

(Sometimes, it's quicker to take a skyship around to another port of the island before tackling the interior.)

Inter-Island Travel Times



A rough chart of travel times—including the horizontal and vertical distance that needs to be traversed—across the Dome of the Heavens:

TRAVEL TIMES	BARATHI	COLRONA	CRAIL	ILWUZ	SHA KA RUQ	VIRIDIA
BARATHI	<i>x</i>	12 weeks	7 weeks	Varies	18 weeks	14 weeks
COLRONA	12 weeks	<i>x</i>	6 weeks	Varies	12 weeks	8 weeks
CRAIL	7 weeks	6 weeks	<i>x</i>	Varies	16 weeks	7 weeks
ILWUZ	Varies	Varies	Varies	<i>x</i>	Varies	Varies
SHA KA RUQ	18 weeks	12 weeks	16 weeks	Varies	<i>x</i>	20 weeks
VIRIDIA	14 weeks	8 weeks	7 weeks	Varies	20 weeks	<i>x</i>

Skilled skyship navigation and piloting can reduce these estimated average travel times. (Note that gliders can theoretically cut this travel time to one-tenth. . . if they survive the trip at all.)

Hazards of Travel in the Dome

There are many hazards in traveling the 7 Skies between the cloud-islands. Careful skysailors should take heed!

One can become *becalmed* when the winds die down. This means no movement is possible—if the sails aren't filled with wind, all that one can do is attempt a tow: placing an anchor (or drogue) into a lower layer of wind, or using a ship's boat or a gasbag to enter a higher layer of wind (see p. 5). Of course, this option is limited by the length of cable on a ship; sometimes, the next layer is too far away. However, if one has someone with the Gift of the Thunderbird aboard, they can use their abilities to call the winds—very handy in these situations. (Someone with the Gift of the Pegasus might be able to shift the skyship a bit, but this would be difficult and exhausting.)

Storms and other *inclement weather* are always a challenge. Lines can break, sails can shred, accidental fires can start, the bilges can fill with rainwater—all can cause problems for a skyship. However, a properly trained crew can handle all but the most extreme of weather situations.

A skyship can become *entangled* by wheeltree branches, web-ivy, or zargazum. Depending upon the situation, and the extent of the entangling material, ships can often be cut free with a little sweat and dedication, at the cost of travel time. Of course, becoming entangled often causes damage that may need to be repaired, and makes a ship vulnerable to attack...

Attacks from wild animals (like skysharks, frostwings, and wild ruqs) or human predators (like savage bluemen, the gypsies of the Stones, and pirates) are frequent dangers that doughty skyship crews must face when sailing the 7 Skies. Keep your cutlass handy and your powder dry!

How the 7 Skies Affect Travel

Each of the 7 Skies has different qualities that can smooth or impede skyship travel, from the nature of the season of the year they represent, to the flora and fauna living within each, and the mystical qualities of each. (See *Chapter 1* for more details on the specific elements in each Sky.)

The Ghost Sky: (late autumn) Speedy travel, though beset with ghosts and kite-grubs fouling the hull.



The Jungle Sky: (late spring) Slow travel from navigating through the Channels (see p. 10) between the entangling wheeltrees and web-ivy, kite-grubs fouling the hull, and attacks by savage bluemen, pirates, and wild ruqs.

The Mists: (early spring) Variable speed of travel, depending upon visibility within the Mists, plus entangling zargazum and attacks from skysharks.

The Sky of Fire: (n/a) The threat of immolation (both slow and fast) makes the Sky of Fire nearly impassable, though shallow shortcuts through its outermost edge—during nights of the new moon—can be made by adventuresome captains.

The Sky of Frost: (winter) Medium to fast travel, though beset with snowstorms, the chance of freezing solid, and attacks by frostwings.

The Sky of Stones: (early autumn) Slow travel from navigating through the Channels (see p. 15) between the hurtling Stones and attacks by gypsies, pirates, and the mysterious rockmen.

The Sky of Thunder: (summer) Extremely rapid travel, albeit through violent storms, with regular chances of a skyship attracting a lightning strike (or three).



Trade Routes

Currently, all major trade routes pass through the cloud-island of Crail; most ships have it as a port of call on their journeys.

There are three minor trade routes that do not involve Crail: *Barathi-Viridia*, *Viridia-Colronan Zultanate*, and *Colronan Kingdom-Sha Ka Ruq*.

Amusing Oneself on a Long Journey

What does the World-traveler do during the long days of skysailing?

It is a perfect time to catch up on one's rest, get to know one's companions better, learn a new skill, meditate, practice an existing skill, observe the wonders of the 7 Skies, or work out the kinks of upcoming plots and plans.

Making Port

When a skyship sights a civilized island, the lookout cries, “Land ho!” and the rest of the crew scrambles to prepare for sailing into port. Lighthouses and buoys on the outer edge of the island’s Cloud (constructed of bluewood and Stones, usually) are the first gleaming jewels on a glimmering necklace of lights that lead deep into the Fog, guiding ships on approach. For skyships that cannot or choose not to dismast their keelsail, local tugs and packet-boats can be signaled here to pick up cargo, mail, and passengers, or the skyship can use its own boats to transfer goods to the port.

As the skyship or boat penetrates the last interior layer of the island’s Fog, the Cloud beneath them has become water. The crew sails the skyship, just as if it was a normal sailing ship, to the wharves, piers, and docks of the port. Usually, a representative of the *harbormaster* called a *customs agent* comes alongside, gets some basic information about the ship (its name, home port, cargo, the names of its captain, crew, and passengers), checks for dangerous or quarantined goods, and demands any *import taxes* (though *export taxes* upon cargo when leaving port are more common in the World) and *harborage fees* the ship must pay. In smaller ports, these transactions often wait until the ship has tied up at a dock and may even be handled by the harbormaster himself (or herself).

Once the craft has been warped to a pier, they can begin unloading, using their own crew and gear, dockside cranes operated by local stevedores, or—most likely—a combination of both. Cargoes can be transferred to *warehouses* (if the captain, ship’s owner, or pre-established customer has one), *factors’ offices* (if trying to sell to the *factor*—that is, the representative and agent—of another person or organization), or directly to the *marketplace*.

The ship’s Purser seeks out the local *ship chandlers* to restock their supplies of necessary material, while the ship’s Cook goes to local *provisioners* for immediate food stores replacement, as well as arranging further deliveries of staple and luxury food-stuffs based on the estimated date the ship will be leaving port.

Once the cargo has been unloaded, the necessities have been taken on, and the vessel is generally ship-shape, the Captain declares the crew at *liberty* (except for those on *watch* or *discipline*). The First Mate announces the watch schedule and takes the first turn as the Officer of the Watch, the Captain and the Purser pay the crew their wages, and the skysailors on liberty run down the gangplank to spend their salary—with, perhaps, a quick stop at a *moneychanger’s* to get local coin, though this isn’t absolutely necessary in most ports—in the port’s shops, taverns, gambling dens, and bordellos in the harbor district of the port town.

Skysailors back on land for the first time in weeks generally like a raucous good time, and flush with several weeks' worth of wages, they generally get it. Sometimes the town's *guardsmen* need to get involved. A jolly time indeed!

Languages & Literacy in the World

While each cloud-island possesses its own language (some scholars say that all are merely extremely variant dialects of Barathi; of course, the majority of these scholars *are* Barathi), two tongues have become quite common: *Kroyu* is the common tongue of trade throughout the World, incorporating loan-words from all languages as well as terms from Lost Kroy; all merchants worth their salt can communicate in it. *Colronan* is used throughout the 7 Skies as the language of the Church—and, interestingly, a popular language for secular songs, prose, and poetry.

While the aristocracy of the Barathi Empire once used an alphabetic script, which spread to many other islands through trade and colonization, today the simpler *Church syllabary* has displaced it almost everywhere, including on Barathi. This is due to the emphasis of public schooling—in reading, writing, arithmetic, and theology—by parish priests of the Faith. A surprising number of people are literate (at least in their own language). However, some Barathi antiquarians still study the Old Script.

Even today, the *Kroyu numbers and glyphs* are used in commercial concerns and treasure hunting.

Lastly, though the Sha-Ku koldun have a crude and limited system of iconic *hieroglyphs*, until missionary schools can be set up to teach the Church syllabary (or some other form of public schooling), most Sha-Ku can be considered completely illiterate.

I have been trying to “translate” The Mirror of Honor into Ilwuzi patois, so that the people here can hear the First Prophet’s words in their own idiom. I believe it will aid them in seeing the Truth of Vaoz. And perhaps some general insights could be gleaned from the attempt.

I knew that this would be an extremely difficult undertaking.

It’s much more... fraught... than I thought it’d be.

— Father Fehrad Djezuni, Ilwuzi Priest

International Trade

While bulk trading of goods does happen in the 7 Skies, only on occasion will a skyship completely load themselves up with a single good (say, Colronan trigo) and carry it to a port where they know it will almost always be welcome (say, Viridia), because one never knows when another skyship loaded with trigo will sail into Magnusport, and undercut the demand. Most skyships carry varied cargos, to guard against this sort of thing.

The majority of inter-island commerce comes from the exchange of small or medium cargoes of luxury, much-needed, or highly-desired items readily available at the origin, but normally unavailable at the destination. (Mail between the islands and passengers both fit these requirements.)

The core of this sort of *adventure trading* is taking a risk: are the goods you can pick up at low cost on one cloud-island able to be sold at a high price at a later port? Additionally, new and reliable sources for rare goods—or entirely new types of goods (new fruits, spices, metals, gems, and so forth)—can make an adventurer's fortune.

CLOUD-ISLAND	SPECIALTY GOODS	HAS	WANTS
Barathi	<i>Funiket, Isla del Huitra</i> <i>Pearls, Water from the Tree of Life.</i>	Fish, Kelp, Kelp Products (Oil, Paper, Rope, Smoking, etc.), Pearls, Shellfish, Silk.	Grains, Livestock, Meats, Metals, Woods.
Colronan Kingdom	<i>Horses, Trigo.</i>	Alcohol, Art, Books, Entertainers, Songs.	<i>Specialty Goods.</i>
Colronan Zultanate	<i>Horses, Trigo.</i>	Alchemical Drugs, Cheese, Educators, Glass, Pottery.	<i>Specialty Goods.</i>
Crail	<i>Blackcotton.</i>	Citrus Fruits, Olives, Olive Oil, Palm Oil, Spices, Water.	Everything, especially <i>Specialty Goods.</i>
Ilwuz	<i>Ilwuzi Navigators, Scarletjacks.</i>	Nothing.	Everything.
Sha Ka Ruq	<i>Ruqs, tym.</i>	Animals (many unique, especially Birds); Plants (many unique, but especially (Fruits, Lumber, and Vegetables).	Metals.
Viridia	<i>Wix, Fek Venom.</i>	Coal, Eggfruit, Eggfruit Products (Green Wine, Pickles, Preserves), Gemstones, Gold, Iron, Sulfur,	Cloth; Fruits; Grains; Livestock; Meats; Paper; Vegetables; Wood.

Warfare in the 7 Skies

Where different peoples come into contact, there will often be conflict. When nations come into conflict, sometimes this leads to war.

Surface War

All of the major cloud-islands have land armies and sea navies (provided there are at least large rivers and lakes on the island). Many surface navy ships are constructed as dual-purpose for both water and sky.

These military forces are usually defensive forces, in case of invasion. . . which is somewhat impractical, given:

- ◆ The distance between cloud-islands;
- ◆ The expense of creating enough skyships to transfer large numbers of troops;
- ◆ The expense of necessary war material to mount an invasion;
- ◆ The difficulties in coordinating the movement of an army; and
- ◆ The resistance of the invaded nation.



Given these issues, most military forces aren't sent directly to attack the major cloud-islands of their foe. Instead, when a new cloud-island appears, the military accompanies civilian colonists for protection from foreign colonists. Even so, it generally takes a lot of time to build up a military garrison on a colony island.

Except between the nations of the Colronan Kingdom and the Colronan Zultanate—who share a land-border (see below)—the majority of the *international* surface warfare in the World occurs, then, as either:

1. Struggles for control of an island (or resource, like a *duzha* crystal mine in the Sky of Stones) between already-established colonies (or mining outposts); or
2. Small raiding parties of agents with specific designated missions (destroy this defensive work, kidnap that general, steal this set of plans, etc.).

Still, there's plenty of surface fighting in the World—just most of it happens between rival factions within a particular nation (like the Viridese Freeholds), rather than between cloud-islands.

Colronan Land Warfare

Due to their proximity and differences in theology, the two nations on Colrona battle one another regularly. The Kingdom and the Zultanate produce some of the best soldiers in the World (narrowly beating out the Viridese, but Viridese warriors are generally more versatile). This stems from long practice at war—all sorts of conflict: raiding parties, short wars, and long wars.

Given the influence of the Church, and the more-or-less shared concepts of faith (despite it being the spark of combat more often than not), Colronan warfare is oddly *honorable*. While war is indeed hell, the fighting on Colrona is rarely *unnecessarily* bloody and grim.

Soldiers fight soldiers: that is the way it is done. There are rules of combat that are followed (or else). There is chivalry and respect between forces; if quarter is asked, it is given. The battle lines of horsemen and infantry clash, but they do not swing their weapons against civilians. Crops are rarely burned to deny supplies to the enemy. Towns are not leveled by siege engines—just the fortresses.

Indeed, whole battles have been decided by a *Contest of Champions* on Colrona, where one warrior from each side has come out, and the two fight for the decision of who has won the field. Usually, such a Contest only happens after several previous days of general fighting, but there have been notable exceptions.

The main forces of our respective armies had moved off to the south. My regiment remained at the Haiduk Aqueduct, ostensibly to hold it, but really because the Zultanista regiment across the field was still in the area. They, I discovered later, were remaining in the area because we were still there. Ridiculous.

When the idea came for a Contest of Champions to determine who would hold the Aqueduct, I immediately volunteered. One way or another, win or lose, we could then quit this staring contest and return to the real fighting. The Zultanate commander agreed with ours.

Bright and early, just as dawn was breaking, I and my servant climbed the ivy that grew on the crumbling stones of the Haiduk. I saw my opposite number and his servant climbing up the other side.

It was quite a shock when we both reached the top, and looked full into one another's face across the Aqueduct's channel. It was the Sandman I had fought alongside Baron Theodoreson in the alley behind Baroness Izolda's house back in Chansonville! I saw he recognized me as well.

I spoke first. “Good morning, Rahimat. You’re looking well. Care for a spot of breakfast?” I indicated my manservant, who was setting out a dozen eggs, some rashers of bacon, a loaf of fresh white bread, a knob of butter, a small skillet, and a somewhat cracked but still serviceable heatstone.

The Sandman unhooked the veil that covered the lower part of his face, letting it hang free, before he replied. “Leftenant Armandson—”

“Victor, please.”

He paused before continuing. “Victor, then. I would like nothing better.” He snapped his fingers, and his manservant stepped forward with a wooden tray, bearing a steaming silver pot, a small copper bowl and cover, and a stoneware jug beaded with sweat. “Coffee?”

We smiled at one another.

As is right and proper, we broke our fast together before we tried to kill one another.

— Leftenant Victor Armandson,
King’s Musketeer, Knight of Grande Dellaluna

Sky War

Most of the fighting between nations happens in the 7 Skies, between their skyship navies. Sometimes this involves only a handful of ships, sometimes it involves whole armadas. Flotillas blockade and bombard ports, raiders make hit and run assaults on treasure, mail, and supply ships (and, sometimes even floating fortresses—see below—and ports on cloud-islands), and there’s a bunch of cat and mouse chases between skyships on specific missions. And, when one skyship overhauls another, there’s usually a boarding action—though sometimes, absolute destruction of an enemy ship is preferred.



Movement is key in skyship battles—one needs the speed to pursue or outrun pursuit, the nimbleness to maneuver one's ship (and its guns) into proper position, and to close for any boarding action or coup de grace. Second only to movement is *communication* between elements of a aerial force; this can be accomplished through flags, flares, and some of the mystical Gifts. Skilled skyship captains know how to use the wind and the capabilities of their ships and crew—and coordination with other ships, if necessary—to best advantage.

If seeking to disable another skyship, there are four main targets: the *masts* (and *sails*), the *rudder*, the *crew*, and the *gun blisters* and *turrets*. If seeking to destroy another ship, the primary targets are the *hull* (which is especially weak straight-on at bow and stern) and the ship's *gunpowder magazine*. Several types of special cannon-balls—or shot—have been developed for these purposes:

- 
- ◆ **Ball Shot:** A solid ball of cast-iron, useful for smashing things with great force. Normally used against the target's hull and gun blisters.
 - ◆ **Chain Shot:** Two small cast-iron balls, connected with a sturdy length of chain, useful for cutting things. Normally used against the target's masts, booms, sails, and cordage.
 - ◆ **Gas Shells:** A hollow ball of lead, filled with an alchemical concoction that turns into a noxious or deadly gas, used for disabling the target ship's crew. Usually used to clear the target deck before a boarding action. Unfortunately, the winds of the 7 Skies can dissipate this gas too quickly to be useful or even blow it back at the attacker.
 - ◆ **Grape Shot:** A net bag full of small lead balls, which spread widely upon being fired. Normally used against the target ship's crew to injure or kill them, grape can also affect cordage and sails, with a little luck.
 - ◆ **Harpoon Shot:** A metal arrow that drags a sturdy chain or rope, useful for grappling the target ship, in preparation for a boarding action. If a sailor uses the harpoon chain or rope to board, the chain or rope is usually called a *zip-warp*.
 - ◆ **Incendiary Shells:** A hollow ball of cast-iron, filled with an alchemical preparation that lights on fire, useful for setting targets ablaze. Normally used against the target's deck, sails, hull itself, and gunpowder.

Over the past decade, both the Barathi and Viridese have explored the construction of *Floating Fortresses*. These are much like surface fortresses such as castles and forts, but built on extremely small cloud-islands. Those constructed completely out of

floating Stones and bluewood (harvested from the Sky of Stones and the Jungle Sky, respectively) are called *Flying Fortresses*.

Floating Fortresses are stable in the Dome and are protected by their island's Fog from the hazards of the 7 Skies. Flying Fortresses are, in theory, mobile (though no one has yet really figured out how to make them anything but ponderous and slow), but suffer a tremendous battering from the fury of the 7 Skies since they lack a Fog. In any case, both tend to be strongly defended, carry a tremendous amount of guns and materiel, and possess a number of sloops or even sky-schooners they can launch. On the downside, they must be re-supplied regularly.

Only time will tell how useful these new developments in sky-war are.

The Barathi Floating Fortress they dubbed "Astramorte" was a joke. Someone in the Empire, thinking himself a military engineer, constructed a vast castle out of stone and bluewood, chinked with redpowder mortar, and loaded down with hundreds of long guns. The place fairly bristled with them.

But there were no scorpions—no smaller guns to guard the approaches of fast and nimble targets—especially gliders and wingmen. All it had was the muskets and pistols of the patrolling soldiers, because the guncrews were not armed as they slaved over their huge cannon. And their patrols were both few and lax.

As a squadron of sloops engaged the big guns on the Fire-side of Astramorte, four gliders arrowed in from the Utter-side at great speed. My squad—three wingmen to a glider—leapt out, and coasted right up to the very wall of the Floating Fortress. There, near the base of the wall, in a narrow niche, there was a sewer grate no more than six feet tall. We set charges, blew the grate, and used the sewer pipe to enter the Fortress. Inside, we cut through the minimal patrols like a hot knife through butter, and made our way to the armory.

My squad set seven charges in Astramorte's magazine, to be detonated by time fuzes. We quickly left the way we had came, running into only one patrol on the way. We launched our bodies back into the sky, gaining as much distance as possible from the wall without entering the long guns' field of fire.

The glider squadron returned, deploying catch-nets for us. We grabbed on, and were spun away faster than thought.

And just in time, too. The charges we'd set detonated the gigantic powder magazine of the Astramorte, blowing the Fortress to bits of gravel that fell towards the Blue.

My squad lost three men.

— Ram Snakemind, Warmaster of Helkirk Freehold



Piracy & Privateering in the 7 Skies

In the 7 Skies, a *pirate* is a person (or a ship) who commits robbery, pillage, or plunder at sea or sky; pirates are criminals. A *privateer* is a person (or a ship) who bears an official warrant—a *letter of marque and reprisal*—from a government, which allows the attack, robbery, and plunder of another country's (or countries') merchant ships. A *corsair* is a person (or a ship) that bears a letter of marque and reprisal and a *letter of commission* from a government, essentially deputizing them as a member of the government's military.

NOTE

While many pirates happen to be Ilwuzi, there are pirates of every nation.

4

How Piracy is Done

A pirate skyship swoops down on its victims, usually out of some sort of concealment (a side-channel in the Jungle Sky or Sky of Stones, or out of a cloud or fog bank), and overtakes the target ship at speed. Some pirates prefer to come from above, others from below. They disable the masts, sails, and rudder of the target (if possible), and take out any blisters and turrets that they can on the side facing them. The pirate ship pulls up alongside, lays down covering fire to clear the target's deck, and grapples on with harpoons.

Then the pirates board the target. Boarding can be done by wingcloak gliding and sliding down zipwarps, or if the ships are close enough, leaping from the booms, swinging across on lines, or even a gangplank. Melee ensues, as the victims try to repel the boarders.

Eventually, one side or the other wins the boarding action. If the pirates lose, they scramble back to their ship, cast off, and flee. If the pirates win, prisoners are taken, provisions and treasure—or *booty*—are liberated, and the target ship—if not too banged up—may be taken as a prize.

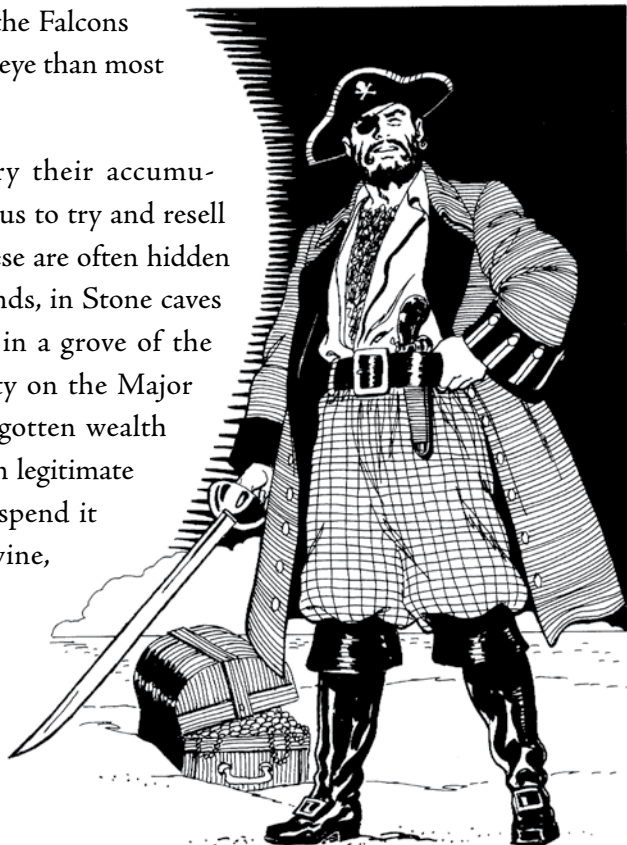
What Do You Do With the Booty?

When the coast is clear, pirate crews generally divvy up the coinage and jewelry amongst themselves according to whatever agreement to the division of spoils—or *articles*—they have signed between themselves. While each crewmember gets a share, officers usually get at least one extra share in addition to this, and the captain gets two extra. Many pirate crews often cut *the ship itself* in for a share, to help defray running and supply costs; the ship's share is generally controlled by the Purser, the Cook, or split between both.

(Piracy articles also include discussions of authority, codes of conduct, punishment for violations of said code, compensation for injuries taken aboard ship, and things along that line.)

Raw goods, luxury items, intercepted mail, and prisoners are usually kept in trust, until port can be made and they can be disposed of; then any earnings gained from their sale (or in the case of important prisoners or information, their *ransom*) are divided by shares. Then again, sometimes consumable luxury goods—like, say, a keg of Colronan brandy or a load of Barathi smoking kelp—are divided on the spot. The preferred ports to dispose of booty like this are *Ilwuz* (welcomes all comers, though it is often difficult to get to) and *Crail* (plenty of trade and people to get lost in, but the Falcons of Crail—see p. 63—keep a sharper eye than most out for pirates).

Some pirate captains hide or bury their accumulated wealth—or goods too dangerous to try and resell immediately—in *treasure caches*. These are often hidden on minor or uninhabited cloud-islands, in Stone caves within the Sky of Stones, or deep in a grove of the Jungle Sky. Some purchase property on the Major Islands. A few have taken their ill-gotten wealth and “gone off account” by investing in legitimate merchant trading. And still others spend it profligately on clothes, weapons, wine, companionship, and song.



Getting Caught

Unless a pirate captain bears a letter of marque and/or a letter of commission from a government, he and his crew are criminals, and can look forward to imprisonment (at the very least) and often execution. Depending upon where a pirate is captured (on land, in Sky, or far from the capturer's home island) and their own reputation, they might be killed out of hand, marooned adrift in the Dome or on a Stone, or clapped in irons and dragged back to port to have their case heard before an *aerial maritime court*.

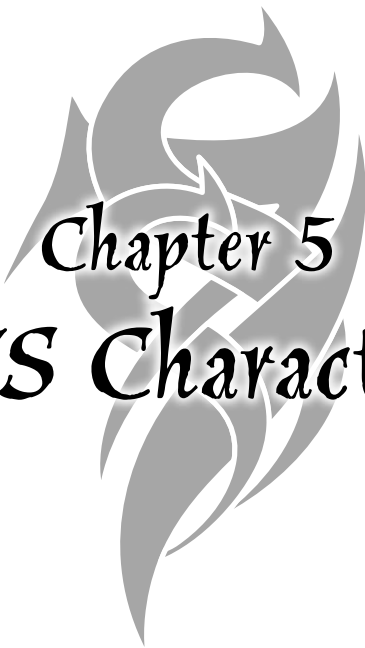
Escapes, rescues, bribery, the sudden outbreak of war, revealing important secrets, drawing on social connections, purchase of retroactive letters of marque and commission, and suicide are all useful methods for avoiding standing next to the hangman with a noose around one's neck, waiting for the inevitable and unpleasant short, sharp shock.

A canny pirate captain should keep at least two of these last-ditch efforts in mind.



*When soaring through a pirate's sky,
Keep your eyes peeled and your powder dry!*

— **Captain Alexei Rostand, *Memoirs of a Sky
Pirate***



Chapter 5

S7S Characters

The core design concept of *PDQ*-based games is of prose, descriptive, do-it-yourself, wide-ranging *Fortes* (in other *PDQ* games, called *Qualities*) that summarize a range of attributes, advantages, merits, skills, special equipment, or relationships. *Fortes* are a measure of story-effectiveness rather than reality simulation, and are intended to be compared to *Difficulty Ranks* (see below).



This chapter contains a modified (but complete!) version of the *PDQ* character generation rules suitable for swashbuckling action (called *PDQ Sharp*, or *PDQ#*), so that players have a basic understanding before creating characters.

The *S7S Master Chart* (see p. 133) is the foundation of *PDQ#*. When attempting a task, players roll dice, plus the Modifier—or MOD—from the Rank of the ability they are using to determine whether or not they succeed. *Techniques* (see p. 139) permit *either* a flat bonus of +1, *or* the rolling of additional dice for tasks. However, only 2 dice may be kept for *Challenges* (see p. 200), and only 3 may be kept for *Duels* (see p. 209).

The first third of this chapter contains a discussion of the *Elements of an S7S Character*, the second third deals with *Character Generation*, and the last third deals with *Group Creation* (plus *Animals*, *Vehicles*, and *Sanctums*).

NOTE

A number of elements found in the free *PDQ* Core Rules download, *Dead Inside*, and *Truth & Justice* do not appear in *PDQ#*, and some have been radically altered. A free download of the *PDQ#* Core Rules can be found at:

<http://www.atomicsockmonkey.com/freebies/PDQ.pdf>

Elements of an S7S Character

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Fortes

A *Forte* is a noteworthy talent, skill, relationship, or resource of a character. It is an inherently positive aspect; a strong point. The player selects a word or phrase to sum up what they want the character to be like or things they are able to do, and the GM will then agree to or veto the *Forte*. A *Forte* represents a broad skill, field of knowledge, unique perspective, personality trait, special gift, or social connection.

If a particular *Forte* is relevant *at all* to an action or topic, the character may apply it when attempting that action or understanding that topic. This is called the *penumbra* (or “shadow”) of the *Forte*. Therefore, a player shouldn’t pick *Fortes* that are too narrow or its *penumbra* will be too narrow; too broad, and identifying the sorts of things that should fall under the *penumbra* becomes pointless. Proper word choice is key. The parameters for what’s “too broad” or “too narrow” are up to the individual GM.

Consider a character who has the *Forte* of “Smith.” For some *S7S* games, that will be perfectly fine; for others, too broad. The GM might ask the player to refine the *Forte*, to give a better idea of the sorts of things that will fall under its *penumbra*. So: “Smith” could become “Armorer,” “Blacksmith,” or “Goldsmith.” While all would

S7S Master Chart

LEVEL	AS FORTE RANK	MODIFIER TO ROLL	AS DIFFICULTY RANK	TARGET NUMBER
<i>POOR</i>	Notably Inept.	-2	A trivial task.	5
<i>AVERAGE</i>	Typical human capability.	0	Straightforward task.	7
<i>GOOD</i>	Better than usual; most professionals or talented newcomers.	+2	Complex task, requiring attention to detail.	9
<i>EXPERT</i>	Noted/famed professional; talent with skill to back it up.	+4	Intricate task, difficult and requiring sharp concentration, hard for a typical untrained person (Average).	11
<i>MASTER</i>	Acclaimed genius: talent with substantial skill behind it.	+6	Extremely difficult task, hard for most professionals in the field (Good).	13
<i>IMPRESSIVE</i>	—	—	Ridiculously difficult task, hard for most skilled and experienced professionals in the field (Expert).	15
<i>INTIMIDATING</i>	—	—	Ludicrously difficult task, one in a million shot, hard for most Masters of the field.	17
<i>IMPOSSIBLE</i>	—	—	Even Masters of the field cannot regularly accomplish this task.	19
<i>INCONCEIVABLE!</i>	—	—	The difficulty of this task beggars the imagination!	21+

cover the basic concept of metalworking, each individual choice brings different skills under the penumbra—not just the specific field of interest, but also knowledge related to it. For example, the Armorer would have more experience with crafting protective equipment and would have connections among the knights and nobles who use his gear, the Blacksmith would know more about creating and repairing agriculture tools and how to shoe a horse, and the Goldsmith would be better at working with precious metals and estimating the value of jewelry.

Example Fortes

- ◆ **Personality:** Thoughtful, Empathic, Obsessive, Friendly, Prankster, Perceptive.
- ◆ **Physical:** Roguishly Handsome, Strong, Dancer, Perseverance.
- ◆ **Mental:** Scholar, Fine Food and Drink, Genius, Linguist, Repartee.
- ◆ **Social:** Knows the King, Friends Everywhere, Conversationalist, Intimidating Guy, Loves Lady Roberta.
- ◆ **Professional:** Teacher, Spy, Professional Duelist, Bounty Hunter, Thief.

NOTE

Since the S7S setting has a number of things in it that do not exist in the real world, some of the setting-specific Fortes listed later in this chapter (see p. 142) have penumbras that are not immediately obvious. S7S GMs should take the time to highlight these new and different aspects of the setting for their players.

IMPORTANT NOTE

If a PC wants to be particularly better at some Forte that might normally fall under the penumbra of another Forte—for example, taking “Musketeer” and “Fencing” separately—that is perfectly okay, provided that the player realizes that in exchange for the benefit of being able to use both Fortes at the same time (adding the MODs together; see **Chapter 6**) when they get into a scuffle, this character generation choice **limits** the total breadth of what the character can do.

Forte Ranks

Fortes have Ranks that indicate increasing levels of proficiency (see also the *S7S Master Chart*). From lowest to highest, the Ranks are:

- ◆ **Poor** [-2];
- ◆ **Average** [0];
- ◆ **Good** [+2];
- ◆ **Expert** [+4]; and
- ◆ **Master** [+6].

The numbers in square brackets following the Rank of the Forte show the Rank's *Modifier* (or MOD)—how much is added to or subtracted from a 2d6 dice roll for resolving a Challenge or from a 3d6 dice roll for Duels (see *Chapter 6*).

IMPORTANT NOTE

At everything else, characters are neither noteworthy nor inept—that is, they're Average [0]. They can attempt a 2d6 roll for any task, knowledge, or skill that is not specifically secret, technical, or esoteric. That is, while any character can look for the secret door in the library, it's doubtful they'll be able to successfully decode the encrypted battle-orders for the Musketeer regiment without at least one espionage or military Forte.

Alchemy, Avokato, Gifts, Koldun, and Priest abilities should be considered secret, technical, or esoteric in the *S7S* setting. (As to what each of these Fortes are, read on...)

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Fortes also absorb *damage* (see p. 222).

During character generation, players choose several Fortes to describe their characters.

Never fear: if after play begins, a particular Forte sees no use and doesn't really add to the characterization of a PC, the player and the GM can work together change it to something that fits better.

Common swashbuckling Fortes: Athletics, Brawling, Fencing, Firearms, Horsemanship, Gear: Ancestral Sword, Organization, Repartee, Secret, Servant/Sidekick, Wealthy.

Prerequisites

Some Fortes—especially those with very broad penumbras, in-setting reasons, or both—require a character to take *Prerequisites*. (These Prerequisites are noted in the Forte descriptions below.) Examples of Fortes that require Prerequisites include Colronan Musketeers, Sha-Ku Ruqriders, and Viridese Warmasters.

Prerequisites are usually other Fortes, Foibles (see p. 137), or character details (see *Miscellany*, p. 191) that must be taken during character creation.

See also the “I Wanna Be a Female/Commoner Musketeer!” textbox on p. 145.



Swashbuckling Forte

Every S7S character has a particular swashbuckling specialty: some characters swashbuckle with swords, others with mystic powers, still others with repartee, skull-duggery, skysailing, or a host of other talents. A character's *Swashbuckling Forte* is the thing that they are most **astounding** at and that they have deep knowledge of, and this grants them a wider range of abilities with regard to that talent.

A character gets a discount on purchasing *Techniques* (see p. 139) chained to their Swashbuckling Forte, both during character generation and later advancement after play.

Any Forte can be a Swashbuckling Forte, but a character can only have **one** Swashbuckling Forte.

(Furthermore, the selection of a Swashbuckling Forte informs the GM about what sorts of conflicts the PC wishes to be involved in; see also *Chapter 7*).

Foibles

A *Foible* is a failing or feature that makes a character *interesting*: it presents opportunities for *interesting* failure. It is an inherent negative or problematic aspect of the character, a weak point, stemming from ignorance, flawed understanding, physical or mental incapability, a recurring duty, a particular penchant or method of getting into trouble, or some other vulnerability. (Sometimes, a Foible gives a better idea of what really drives a character, even moreso than *Motivation*; see p. 156!)

The Foible a player selects for his character tells the GM clearly what the ongoing challenge *is* that the PC struggles with, which the player wishes to explore. They are tools for controlling the plot of the game, for giving the GM options for future incidents. Players should pick a word or phrase that describes something that will be *fun* or *entertaining* to run into throughout play. A recurring cabal of villains, an uncomfortable situation, or an activity that the character just regularly **flubs** are all possible Foibles.

Foibles are *unranked*; this means they do not add to rolls or absorb *damage* (see p. 222). They serve as constant *Story Hooks* (see p. 240) for characters. When a Foible comes *directly* into play, the PC gets **Style Dice** (see p. 169).

Some Fortes recommend specific Foibles. PCs can use these as guidance, or completely ignore.



IMPORTANT NOTE

If a player makes his character's Foible and Motivation (see p. 156) the same thing—say, *True Love*—then those aspects will be a constant presence in his adventures. True Love will cause them trouble, but will also give them the strength to win through. This can be very fun, but limits the sorts of things that will happen to a character: their life will ultimately *revolve* around True Love.

NOTE

If a Foible ever needs to be rolled against (for a Challenge situation), treat it as a Poor [-2] Rank Forte. However, it *still* cannot absorb damage (see p. 222).

Common swashbuckling Foibles: Drunkard, Enemy of the Crown, Greedy, Honorable, Loyal to the Crown, Naïve, Perfect Gentleman, Poverty, Proud, Secret Identity, True Love, Unrequited Love.

Player-Initiated vs. GM-Initiated Foibles

A character's Foible can come directly into game-play in two ways:

1. *The player specifically plays to the Foible*, allowing it to dictate their responses to a situation; or
2. *The GM tries to activate the Foible*, reminding the player that his or her character has that particular weakness or flaw.

In the first case, the player can and *should* remind the GM when playing to his or her Foible, so as to get a Style Die for good roleplaying. In the second case, if GM attempts to activate a Foible, the player can always refuse to go along with it. . . he or she just doesn't get the Style Die. However, the GM can escalate, sweetening the pot with multiple Style Dice, making it a better offer. The player can always refuse, of course.

Activating a Foible is all about good characterization and putting complicated situations and difficult choices in the character's path—not about hosing the character, and not about forcing a single direction or behavior for the player to follow. It's about giving the character—and player—a chance to act non-optimally (but in-character) in a situation for a later benefit.

Techniques

A *Technique* is a bit of nature, training, or background that provides a bonus or benefit in specific, relevant situations. It's a bit of recurring style or flair of the character.

IMPORTANT NOTE

If a PC wants to be particularly better at some particular aspects of a Forte with a very broad penumbra—for example, taking “*Situation: While Fencing*” or “*Vs.: the Cardinal’s Men*” chained to the “*Musketeer*” Forte—that is perfectly okay, because that is providing differentiation between the character’s general strengths as compared to other Musketeers.

Then again, the character could just as easily focus all his Techniques on a single aspect of the Musketeer Forte: all Fencing-related Techniques. That’s fine too.

However, taking “*Situation: While Fencing*” as a Technique of the “*Fencing*” Forte is just Bad Form (see p. 173).

When used in a Scene, a Technique can have one of two effects:

Roll & Keep: Each Technique that comes into play allows an *extra die* to be rolled, to try and assemble the best kept dice (2 for Challenges, 3 for Duels); or

Flat Bonus: Each Technique that comes into play allows a +1 to the roll result per Technique used.

NOTE

Techniques are functionally the same as the *Be Impressive* use of Style Dice (see p. 176).

Each Technique can only be used once per Turn within a Scene, but multiple Techniques can be used at the same time. They can be used “upfront” (before a roll) if a character wants to pull them in explicitly when doing an action, or “ex post facto” (after a roll) when a character realizes that he has a Technique that covers the situation. (Often, the +1 usage of a Technique is to boost a roll total after the character has already succeeded.)

Techniques are *unranked*; this means they do not absorb *damage* (see p. 222). They appear on the character sheet in parentheses.

If a Technique *must* be used with a specific Forte, it is a *chained* Technique, and is usually listed on the character sheet near the Forte in question. Most Techniques are chained Techniques. These chained Techniques add depth to a specific aspect of the character's Fortes.

Collections of specific chained Techniques are called *Schools*, which will most commonly be seen with the Fencing and Koldun Fortes (see p. 147 and p. 155).

If a Technique can be used with **any** Forte, it is an *unchained* Technique.

Unchained Fortes are more “expensive” to purchase, and have a wider scope than most Techniques. Chained Techniques are “cheaper”, and are related to a specific Forte. Techniques chained to a character's Swashbuckling Forte are cheapest of all.

What Sort of Technique is

“Laughing, then Jumping Off of Something”?

That depends on how the player envisions it:

If “LtJOoS” is seen as the character running around always grinning and bouncing around like a crazed monkey, that's probably an Idiom (Think Douglas Fairbanks, Sr. in *the Mark of Zorro*).

If “LtJOoS” is seen as the character striking a particular pose for great effect, that's probably a Maneuver (Think Errol Flynn in *the Adventures of Robin Hood*).

Types of Techniques

There are five main types of Techniques:

IDIOM

Idiom is the “style” or “flavor” of the action undertaken. If the player describes their character's actions and reactions according to their Idiom, they get a bonus.

Examples: Acrobatic, Calculating, Drunken, Pedantic, Fierce, Languid, Sarcastic, Precise.

LOCATION/SITUATION

Some Techniques give a bonus in particular situations or places.

Examples: City Streets, Marketplaces, Private Chambers, Bars & Taverns, Churches & Temples, Court, Wilderness, During Open Warfare, At a Gala Ball, Mounted, Aerial, In Masked Identity, Underwater, Close-combat (Corps-a-Corps), Shipboard, On Cluttered Ground, Under the Orders of a Superior, Kitchens, In Total Darkness, While Wounded, With a Partner.

MANEUVER

Some Techniques give a bonus in using a specific type of maneuver, method, or stratagem.

Examples: Convince, Dodge, Research, Parry, Specializes in Silken Goods, Lie, Throw.

FOES(s) AKA vs. [X]

Some Techniques give a bonus against preferred targets.

Examples: vs. Clergymen, vs. Aristocrats, vs. Peasants, vs. Assassins, vs. Criminals, vs. Mounted Foes, vs. Animals, vs. Spies, vs. One's Special Nemesis, vs. Children, vs. Targets Named By Superior, vs. the Supernatural, vs. Sailors, vs. Soldiers, vs. Enemies of the State, vs. Officers of the Law, vs. Ministers, vs. Traitors, vs. Gullible Foes, vs. Fencers of the Agev School.

TOOL OR WEAPON

Some Techniques give a bonus in using a specific weapon or tool.

Examples: Rapier, Crowbar, Cutlass, Royal Decrees, Saber, Lockpicks, Truncheon, Unarmed, Magic, Make-up, Dual/Paired Weapons, Prepared Speech, Cloak, My Father's Forge, Furniture, Found Objects/Scenery.

Characters can mix and match Techniques—all Locations, just Idioms, all Foes, or whatever. (See also *Fencing Schools*, p. 147, and *Mystic Schools*, p. 155.)



Stacking Techniques

An important aspect of stacking Techniques that needs to be pointed out is that only *one* Idiom can be active at any time. Also, it is unlikely that many Techniques will align at one time for a particular situation.

However, if they *do* align, characters should get *all* of the benefits!

Common S7S Fortes

Below is a brief list of Fortes commonly found in the World of the 7 Skies. (However, players should *not feel constrained* by this list: anything the player comes up with as a Forte is fair game, if the GM assents.)

SYMBOL WHAT IT MEANS

- § indicates that the Forte has prerequisites.
- * indicates that the Forte is esoteric and/or has special rules associated with it.
- † indicates that the Forte is Core.

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Acrobatics

Swinging on chandeliers, climbing down a rocky crevasse, hanging by one hand to a skyship's keel, leaping over tables while parrying your foe's blade, scaling a castle wall to enter through an open balcony door, forward-somersaulting into a knot of city guardsmen... *Acrobatics* (also called *Athletics*) is the Forte that lets you do it all.

Alchemy *

Alchemy is the knowledge of and skill in manipulating natural and mystical substances, transmuting them into other substances. Alchemists can produce alchemicraft items (see p. 181, and especially the *OPTIONAL RULE: Materia Mystica Symbolology* textbox on p. 182).

See also *Chapter 3* for more details on alchemy, alchemists, and alchemicraft items.

Aristocrat

The *Aristocrat* Forte indicates good breeding, the knowledge of good manners, and a certain degree of status, wealth, property, political issues (duties to liege and vassals, connections to other aristocrats), and *savior-faire*. Aristocrats run and control many of the nations of the World; each cloud-island has a different group of noble titles and honors (see Chapter 2).



Aristocrat characters should *strongly* consider also taking *Minions* (see p. 155) and/or a *Sidekick* (see p. 163). After all, most noble sorts have servants, yes?

Being an Aristocrat is a prerequisite for being a Colronan Musketeer.

Aristocratic Ranks of the Major Cloud-Islands

The comparative Forte Ranks of the aristocratic classes of each of the major nations of the World follows (with the proviso that the supreme leader of each island is considered to be “above Master [+6] Rank”):

- ◆ **Barathi:** Master [+6] is *Patriarch/Matriarch*, Expert [+4] is *Markiz/Markiza*, Good [+2] is *Cavalier/Lady*, and Average [0] is *Scion*. (See p. 31.)
- ◆ **Colronan Kingdom:** Master [+6] is *Duke/Duchess*, Expert [+4] is *Baron/Baroness*, Good [+2] is *Knight/Dame*, and there is no Average [0]. (See p. 45.)
- ◆ **Colronan Zultanate:** Master [+6] is *Amir* (prerequisite: also Priest of the Church), Expert [+4] is *Houzi*, Good [+2] is *Zirdar*, and there is no Average [0]. (See p. 51.)
- ◆ **Crail:** Master [+6] is *Senior Judge* (prerequisite: ex-Falcon)/*Deraad*, Expert [+4] is *Junior Judge* (prerequisite: ex-Falcon), respected *Falcons* (or *Gangsters!*) could be Good [+2], most everyone else is Average [0]. (See p. 60.)
- ◆ **Ilwuz:** No Aristocracy at all. (See p. 66.) Use *Reputation* (see below) instead.
- ◆ **Sha Ka Ruq:** Master [+6] is *Kashaku*, Expert [+4] is *Shi’huna*, Good [+2] is *Hakuteka*, and Average [0] is *Maka’huna*. (See p. 74.)
- ◆ **Viridia:** Master [+6] is *Varlud* (prerequisite: also Viridese Warmaster), Expert [+4] is *Orl* (prerequisite: also Viridese Warmaster), Good [+2] is *Thex*, and Average [0] is *Xorga/Axma*. (See p. 38.)

OPTIONAL RULE

If it makes it easier or more enjoyable for players, GMs might want to standardize Aristocratic titles to a single scale, standardize spelling to common English usage, or even include other rank titles (like Archduke, Count, Earl, Graaf, Hidalgo, Landgrave, Marquis, Viscount, etc.).

No Average [0] Aristos?

For those islands that have Aristocratic levels of status, but no Average [0] Ranked one, a character *can* take Average [0] Aristocrat, with the proviso that they (or their families) are of gentle birth, but limited means and/or title.

If one wishes to play a disgraced, poor, provincial, or otherwise looked down upon by the rest of the noble class, taking Aristocrat as a Foible is an acceptable option. However, the PC should be prepared for a lot of sneering comments and treatment that is, at times, *worse* than that dished out to the peasantry!

Avokato *

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The complex morgani contracts (see p. 30) of the Barathi requires a special type of lawyer, skilled in writing, researching, negotiating, understanding, and challenging these contracts: the *Avokato*. They also deal with the legal arrangement and aftermath of formal duels and vendetta. All Avokatos belong to the College of Avokatos, and usually have access to morgani contracts, vendetta papers, and other official documents filed with the College.

See also *Chapter 2, Barathi*, for more details.

Brethren of the Skull

The *Brethren of the Skull* Forte is possessed by the most dangerous and feared pirates of the World, the sworn men and women of a fleet of seven pirate ships under the command of the Dread Pirate Radu. They are the closest thing Ilwuz has to a military. The Brethren wear a purple “blood-stripe” along the outside seam of their trousers, breeches, or pantaloons; have a tattoo of the Ilwuzi skull sigil somewhere on their bodies; and carry a knife with a skull-shaped pommel.

Brethren of the Skull are adept at acrobatics, fencing, the use of firearms, and skysailing, and have ties to other Brethren.

Brethren often have a Foible of Loyal to the Dread Pirate Radu or Protect Ilwuz or something similar.

See also *Chapter 2, Ilwuz*, for more details.

Colronan Musketeer §

The *Colronan Musketeer* Forte is taken by the elite troopers of the Kingdom of Colrona. They are widely regarded as the best soldiers in the World. They wear crimson cloaks and hats with feather plumes.

Colronan Musketeer has prerequisites of being male, Nationality: Colronan Royalist, and possession of the Aristocrat Forte (but see the textbox below).

Musketeers are skilled in athletics, fencing, the use of firearms, first aid, all of the Military Arts (artillery, fortress defense, logistics, mining/sapping, soldiery, and tactics), and riding. They have organizational ties to the Musketeer Corps and the King.

Musketeers often have a Foible of Loyal to the King, Protect the Kingdom, Compulsive Dueling or something similar.

See also *Chapter 2, The Kingdom of Colrona*, for more details.



“I Wanna Be a Female/Commoner Musketeer!”

You do? Cool!

Here’s a neat thing: You can use Foibles to obviate prerequisites to any Forte, if the GM permits.

Here’s how you violate the three prerequisites for Colronan Musketeer—make your Foible something like *Secret: Not Colronan Royalist* or *Secret: Not a Man* or *Secret: Not Noble*, and come up with a good explanation on how you fooled the Musketeers for your backstory (see *Miscellany*, p. 191).

If you want your character to be *any two* of these, make your Foible *Secret: Not a Noble Man*, and your explanation should be **phenomenally good**.

If you want your character to be *all three* of these, make your Foible *Secret: Not a Noble Colronan Royalist Man*, and your explanation should be **inconceivably good**.

Colronan Sandman §

The *Colronan Sandman* Forte is taken by the elite troopers of the Zultanate of Colrona. They are widely regarded as the most honorable opponents in the World. They wear an ornate sash (either shoulder to hip or as a belt), embroidered with golden eyes, and tend to use scimitars. Many are also Gifted, Priests, or *both*.

Colronan Sandman has a prerequisite of Nationality: Colronan Zultanista.

Sandmen are skilled at acrobatics, diplomacy, fencing, firearms, first aid, riding, and wilderness survival. They have organizational ties to their fellows and the Zultan.

They often have a Foible of Devout, Honorable, Loyal to the Church, Loyal to the Zultan, Death Before Dishonor, or something similar.

See also *Chapter 2, The Zultanate of Colrona*, for more details.

Crailese Falcon

The *Crailese Falcon* Forte is taken by the elite police officers of Crail. They are widely regarded as the consummate street fighters in the World. They wear a falcon badge and a black cape, and often carry truncheons instead of—or in addition to!—swords.

Crailese Falcons are adept at acrobatics, diplomacy, fencing, forensics, firearms, law, riding, unarmed combat, and urban survival and tactics. They have organizational ties to the Commandant, of course—but not so much with other Falcons (squads tend to be competitive and cliquish).

Falcons often have a Foible of Compulsive Dueling, Loyal to the Commandant, On the Take, Protect Crail, or something similar.

See also *Chapter 2, Crail*, for more details.

Fencing

Fencing is a martial art, much more refined and potent than the simple “hack and block” of the common ruffian or soldier. Fencing also includes knowledge of fencing weaponry and various dueling traditions, as well as social connections and status. It covers all sorts of swashbuckling combat, not just formal duels.

A character that has Fencing as their—or as an aspect of their—*Swashbuckling Forte* (see p. 137), can use their Technique points *en bloc* to purchase a *Fencing School* (see below).

See also *Chapter 6, The Duel Itself*, p. 211.

Fencing: the Gentle Art of Slashing & Skewering

Fencing is the sine qua non of swashbuckling adventure; many characters will take it as their Swashbuckling Forte. Fencing is what separates swashbuckling heroes—and villains!—from the typical Guardsman, Pirate, or Merry Man: the cheap Techniques granted from a Swashbuckling Forte makes them *devastating* with a blade.

PCs without Fencing?

Player characters who do not take Fencing (directly, or effectively via another Forte like Colronan Musketeer) will suffer a disadvantage when it comes to sword-fighting Duels (see p. 211), as they will be using an effective Average [0] Forte to do so. That may be totally okay, depending upon the character conception and the thrust of the campaign. However, it is generally a good idea for a PC in an S7S game to have some form of Fencing, one way or another.

Fencing Schools

Fencing Schools are setting-specific collections of Fencing Techniques, starting from the base of a single Idiom; above all else, a Fencing School *must* have an Idiom. Schools can help speed character generation, because of the more limited set of pre-selected Fencing Techniques and “point costs.” Here are some basic examples:

- ◆ **Agev:** Agev is a School said to originate on Barathi, but found everywhere in the World, beloved by those with a sense of the theatrical. *Idiom:* Flashy; *Situation:* When Masked. (2 points)
- ◆ **Nangatrad:** Nangatrad is a Colronan School, favored among those that prize nimbleness. *Idiom:* Acrobatic; *Weapon:* Saber; *Situation:* On Cluttered Ground; *Maneuver:* Parry. (4 points)
- ◆ **Simara:** Popular among duelists, Simara is a Barathi School. *Idiom:* Playful; *Weapon:* Dagger; *Weapon:* Rapier; *Weapon:* Dual Weapons. (4 points)
- ◆ **Sohta:** Sohta is a Crailese School, popular among street-fighting fops and rakes. *Idiom:* Fierce; *Weapon:* Rapier; *Weapon:* Cloak; *Weapon:* Dual Weapons. (4 points)
- ◆ **Sohtrop:** Beloved by the Viridese, Sohtrop is a simple School emphasizing the fighter’s physical power. *Idiom:* Forceful; *Maneuver:* Weapon Break (2 points).

- ◆ **Trofehcor:** Trofehcor is a Zultanista School, most often taught to Colronan Sandmen. *Idiom:* Precise; *Foe:* Enemies of the Zultan; *Weapon:* Dagger; *Weapon:* Pistol; *Weapon:* Scimitar; *Weapon:* Dual Weapons. (6 points)
- ◆ **Warrops:** Only taught on Ilwuz, Warrops is a simple but bizarre School. *Idiom:* Drunken; *Idiom:* Insane Attempt (2 points).

Anyone with Master [+6] Fencing can develop their own, unique, named school (comprising a combination of some or all of their Techniques) and teach it to students. (S7S GMs should feel free to come up with their own sets of Fencing Schools!)

OPTIONAL RULE: *You are using Bonetti's Defense against me, ah?*

If a character's opponent in a Fencing Duel uses any of the Techniques from a School the character knows, the PC gets a single-use "vs. [X] School" Technique automatically in that Duel.

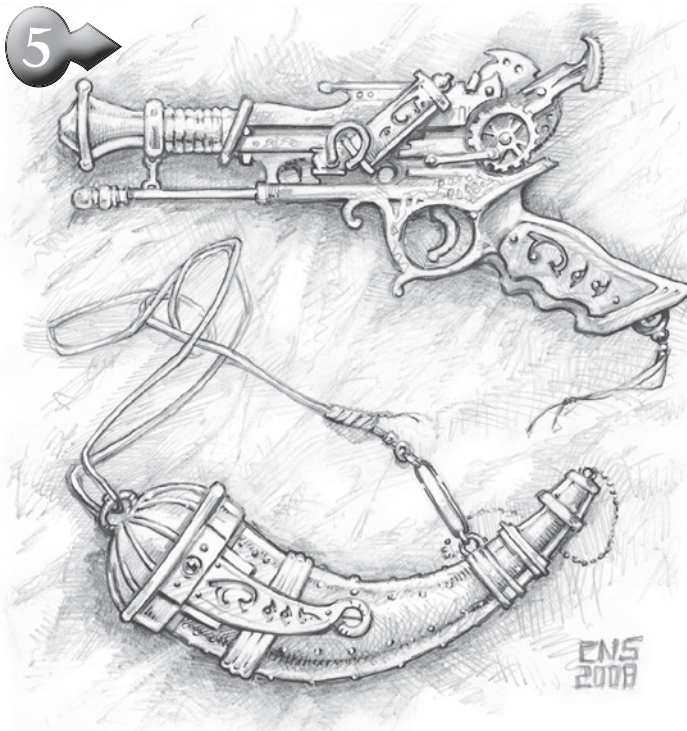
Of course, this requires the GM and Player to pay close attention to all of the Schools and their relative Techniques.

Firearms

The *Firearms* Forte represents the knowledge and skill required to load, aim, shoot, maintain, and repair pistols and muskets, and is used to acquire more powder and shot. It also means that the character has at least one gun.

Unfortunately, the *Firearms* Forte grants no especial facility with cannon, be they ship's guns or artillery pieces (however, see below, *Gunner*, p. 151).

For a discussion of the relative lethality of guns in an S7S campaign, see *Chapter 7, Bringing a Musket to a Sword Fight*, p. 263.



Example Gear

Ancestral Sword: Provides its Rank's MOD in combat.

Armor: Provides its MOD for defensive rolls.

Charm: One-use alchemicraft item; +2 to a single roll.

Fetter: Three types: 1) *Lock* (any use of a mystical ability does Failure Rank damage equal to the Gift's MOD, plus Fetter's MOD); 2) *Keyhole* (as per Lock, except one Gift is permitted free use); and 3) *Counter* ("improper use"—whatever the crafter of the fetter defines as "improper"—of mystic powers ratchets up pain level as per Lock).

Fire Wand: 1 shot per Rank (however, a Koldun or someone with the Gift of the Dragon can just use the Wand's MOD, to enhance their own abilities).

Long Musket: Extended range for musket shot; adds its MOD to attack rolls.

Three-Shot Pistol: Has 3 shots, adds its MOD to attack rolls.

Ward: A Ward provides a TN (equal to its Rank) that must be first surmounted before a Koldun or Gifted is able to affect the possessor with mystical abilities.

Gear: [X]

While an S7S character is assumed to have access to the normal tools and resources related to use of their Fortes (unless otherwise explicitly stated), there are some pieces of special equipment—like exceedingly fine swords, three-shot pistols, letters of marque and reprisal, and special kolduncraft (see p. 93) devices—that are so impressive that they can be considered a separate Forte collectively called *Gear*.

Two types of Gear get their own special identifiers and rules: *Sanctum* (see p. 161) and *Vehicle* (see p. 165).

The Rank of the Gear's main ability will be the same as the Rank the Player uses to add it to their sheet; a Gear's MOD adds to relevant MODs of other relevant Fortes when used in a situation. (For example, a Good [+2] Three-Shot Pistol gives a character a +2 to attack rolls when using it, in addition to the MOD of the character's Firearms Forte).

Defining an ability as Gear rather than a regular Forte means that it can be temporarily *taken away* from the character (but the PC is usually able to regain the Gear with a Scene or two of effort). All types of Gear have the inherent Foible of *Can Be*



Stolen, unlike a character's other Fortes. If *Gear* is stolen during the course of a session, this is effectively *Vexing Misfortune* (see below, p. 175), and the PC receives 3 Style Dice. If *Gear* is destroyed during the course of the session, at the end of the session, the player may select a new Forte of the same Rank for their character.

See also *Temporary Gear*, p. 178.

Gift: [X] *

A Gift is a mystical power possessed by a character; it is a supernatural expression of their deepest nature. There are seven common types of Gift, each associated with a mythological animal of the World (see *Chapter 3*). In addition to mystical powers (see below), a Gift grants knowledge, skills, social contacts, and professional opportunities (mundane and mystical) related to the specific Gift, like any other Forte.

Gifts can be used for attack and defense in combat (see *Chapter 6*); for example, the Dragon's Gift can launch blasts of flame, the Gift of the Griffin can enhance a character's strength or speed, or a merhorse could sense an attack before it is initiated and thus react to it speedily. This boils down to using the MOD of the Gift for rolls; if the character wishes to do something outside of that, they must spend a *Style Die* (see p. 176).

Example: A character with the Gift of the Griffin wishes to use super-strength in a Duel. He gets his MOD to rolls during the Duel for free. However, if he wishes to use his super-strength to pick up and throw an oxcart at his foe, he must spend a *Style Die*.

The target of a hostile Gift *can* resist its effects with a Challenge roll (out of combat; see p. 200) or a defense roll (in combat; see p. 209). If the target is also Gifted, they may add the MOD of their Gift to this resistance roll, *provided they can explain how such would work to the GM's satisfaction*.

The GM can activate a character's Gift at any time (especially useful for giving visions to merhorses). If inadvertent activation is truly negative or dangerous in a situation, this counts as an instance of *Vexing Misfortune* (see below, p. 175), and the character gains 3 Style Dice.

The seven common Gifts and their thumbnail descriptions are as follows:

- ◆ **Basilisk:** Hear and send thoughts; subtle mental suggestions.
- ◆ **Dragon:** Create, control, and quench fire; manipulate passion; use flames in supernatural ways.

- ◆ **Griffin:** Supernatural control of one's own body, mind, and soul.
- ◆ **Merhorse:** Sense things at far distances or through solid objects; detect mystical energies; visions of the future and the past.
- ◆ **Pegasus:** Hold, move, and throw objects with a thought (this includes personal flight).
- ◆ **Thunderbird:** Weather prediction and control; command of lightning; also, possibly, the manipulation of luck.
- ◆ **Unicorn:** Healing of wounds; causing injuries with a simple touch.

Again, when used simply for their MODs in Challenges and Duels, Gifts are *free*. However, if the character wishes to do anything more complex or impressive than simple attack and defense, they must spend a *Style Die* (see p. 176) to do so. (See also *Chapter 7*, p. 275.)

More Gifts?

There are 3 Gifts that only Koldun can possess (see the *Koldun Forte* description on p. 152)—no one in the World has ever possessed them as a Gift. (Yet?)

Players and GMs can also consider making up new Gifts to their tastes, using the suggestions in *Chapter 3*, p. 89, or their own imaginations.



Gunner

The *Gunner Forte* represents the knowledge and skill required to load, aim, shoot, maintain, and repair cannon, be they mounted on a ship, part of a fortress, or as a single artillery piece. It also means that the character has access to at least one cannon (with reasonable notice), and is also used to acquire more powder and ammunition, if necessary.

Unfortunately, the *Gunner Forte* grants no especial facility with personal firearms (however, see above, *Firearms*, p. 148).

For a discussion of the relative lethality of cannon against characters in an S7S campaign, see *Chapter 6, Cannons vs. Characters*, p. 226.

See also below, *Skysailor*, p. 164.

Imperial Spider §

The *Imperial Spider* Forte is taken by the legendary spies and assassins of the Barathi Empire. They are widely regarded as the most deadly killers in the World. All have a small tattoo of a black spider hidden somewhere on their body. Their weapon of choice is usually a knife or fighting dagger.

Imperial Spider has a prerequisite of Nationality: Barathi.

A Spider is skilled in athletics, fencing, the use of firearms, unarmed combat, knowledge of poisons (see p. 263), and general espionage activities. They have organizational ties to the rest of the Spiders and the Empress.

They often have a Foible of Loyal to the Empire, Protect the Empress, Openly Known (House Spideri) or something similar.

See also *Chapter 2, Barathi*, for more details.

Koldun *

The *Koldun* Forte represents the broad supernatural skill of the mystic masters of the World. Koldun partake of a wide-ranging mystical art, much more flexible than the focused abilities of the Gifted. It includes knowledge of alchemy, general arcane and supernatural lore, and the secrets of how to awaken Gifts within oneself. Koldun have loose professional ties with each other and associated trades (crystal miners and smiths, healers, scholars, etc.). They can create alchemicraft or kolduncraft items (see *Chapter 3*).

A koldun can learn a number of different Gifts (purchased as *chained Techniques* to Koldun rather than separate Fortes), including the *Three Hidden Gifts* (see below), or *Koldun Techniques* (see below). A koldun can only *activate* one of their Gifts at a time, but after that can *maintain* several at once. (They do, however, get all the benefits of using a Technique—Roll and Keep, or Flat +1, in addition to this MOD. Only *Archkoldun*—see below—can activate multiple Gift Fortes or Techniques simultaneously.)

When used simply for their MODs in Challenges and Duels, koldun powers are free. However, if the character wishes to do anything more complex, impressive, or game-affecting than simple attack and defense, they must spend a *Style Die* (see p. 176) to do so. (See also *Chapter 7*, p. 275.)



Koldun often have weird and bizarre traits—which can be physical or mental, subtle or blatant—related to their powers, which they can use as an excuse to take some *really weird* Foibles. These can include such things as Absent-mindedness, giving off a Creepy Vibe, a persistent Calming Aura, the Stench of Brimstone, Bedeviled by Butterflies, or Glowing Eyes. Some koldun have Foibles related to limitations on their mystical abilities (for example, Cannot Make Kolduncraft, or Powers Do Not Affect Women, or Cannot Create Fire with the Dragon's Gift, etc.). Koldun tend to accumulate several of these quirky Foibles over the course of their career (probably so they can collect more Style Dice for mystical use!).

See also *Chapter 3*, p. 89, for more details.

IMPORTANT NOTE

If a player does not make Koldun his or her character's Swashbuckling Forte (which gets "cheap" Techniques), it will be *very* expensive to increase their mystical abilities by purchasing Techniques separately.

Taking the Koldun Forte without *any* Gift Techniques means the character gets knowledge of alchemy, the very basics of identifying kolduncraft, and the ability to learn how to gain the Gifts as Techniques, but otherwise has no mystical powers. This is great, however, for representing a character who is an apprentice koldun, or someone who has "koldun potential" but hasn't developed it yet.

5

Limiting Koldun Abilities (Optional Rules)

Since koldun abilities are wide-ranging and readily available, some GMs may wish to further limit their power. Here are some suggestions for OPTIONAL RULES that can cover S7S games where koldun powers are taking up "too much" of the session's limelight:

- ◆ Strictly enforce the Style Die cost for using koldun abilities.
- ◆ Make Wards (see p. 96) and Fetters (p. 94) readily available to NPCs.
- ◆ Alter the Difficulty Ranks of mystical Challenges randomly (see *Chapter 6*, p. 202).
- ◆ Require *both* Style Die expenditure *and* a roll versus a mystical Challenge Difficulty Rank to activate the power.

Hexing

By spending a *Style Die* (see p. 176) and an *action* or *reaction* (see *Chapter 6, Time* textbox, p. 203), and declaring a specific taboo thing the target must not encounter or perform, a koldun can make a mystical effect *persistent*, attaching it to a target forever! If the taboo is encountered, the mystical effect fails or ends. Examples of taboos include drinking wine, entering the Sky of Fire, setting foot on Crail, etc.

Koldun Techniques

Koldun have a number of special Techniques available to them that most characters do not. These include:

- ◆ **The Seven Common Gifts:** For example, Basilisk, Dragon, Griffin, etc. (See *Chapter 3*.)
- ◆ **The Three Hidden Gifts:** There are three Gifts no one is born with, but that koldun can develop (see *Chapter 3*):
 - **Chimera:** Shape-shifting (see also *Animals*, p. 196).
 - **Manticore:** Powerful mystical charisma and mind-control.
 - **Qilin:** Supernatural agility and light-footedness, as well as teleportation.
- ◆ **Extant Phenomena:** Instead of generating things out of thin air, some koldun specialize in using what is lying around—for example, grabbing an already burning fire out of a hearth and throwing that rather than shooting a jet of flame out of his hands.
- ◆ **Foci:** The use of a physical object or mental construction to aid concentration gains a bonus die. These can include things like alchemical elixirs, voodoo dolls, chalked circles, athames, the Laws of Magic, True Names, etc.
- ◆ **Sacrifice:** To gain the bonus die, some specific action must be performed, or some valuable material destroyed (gold, blood, valuable trade goods, etc.), in the creation of the mystical effect.

Koldun can also look to the various other *Techniques* (see p. 139) for more ideas on Koldun Techniques (like *Situation*: Creepy, *Foes*: Other Koldun, *Idiom*: Fire!, etc.).



Archkoldun

Prerequisite: Know all ten Gifts as Techniques.

The most feared and respected Koldun Technique is that of becoming an *Archkoldun*. An Archkoldun can activate multiple Gifts at one time, combining their power (and bonus dice) in the same instant, and even “blending” Gifts together to achieve amazing and terrifying effects—for example, using the Gifts of the Dragon and the Chimera in tandem could allow the Archkoldun to turn themselves into a being of living flame, or combining the Gifts of the Unicorn and the Thunderbird could permit the Archkoldun to absorb the power of a stroke of lightning to heal themselves.



Mystic Schools?

If desired, the GM can make up Mystic Schools analogous to Fencing Schools to add to personal their take on the *S7S* setting and/or speed character generation. Note that there must be at least *one Gift Technique* involved in a Mystic School.

Example: Miracle Man (*Gift:* Unicorn, *Situation:* Good with Dead, and *Foci:* Alchemical).

5

Minions

The character has a number of henchmen or followers to carry out his orders. These might be crewmembers, guardsmen, liveried servants, or employees. The TN of the Forte Rank gives the total number of Minions the character possesses.

Minions each have a Name and one Forte at Good [+2] Rank. They are not considered full “characters.”

The GM will design and play these Minions as NPCs. When the character gives an order to his Minions to carry out, the GM will determine a Difficulty Rank for the command. The character then rolls 2d6, plus the MOD of his Minion Forte, to determine how well the Minions follow their edict.

See also *Sidekick* (p. 163), and *Minion Squads* (Chapter 6, p. 211).

Motivation * †

Motivation is a special Forte representing the most important drive or goal of a character.

Players should come up with a single word or phrase that explains the seed of their character's underlying ambition. This doesn't mean that the character's temperament is *solely* that word or phrase—to paraphrase Whitman: characters are vast, they contain multitudes. This single word or phrase is merely to give a general *feel* for what the character wants most.

If a situation or task *directly* involves the character's pursuit of their Motivation (and the GM agrees), it can be used in addition to any other Fortes relevant that task. (A word of advice: if you have to *stretch* to justify the inclusion of a Motivation, it should not grant its MOD.)

Special Rule

If a character is involved in a situation that is “the point” of their Motivation—meeting the character they have sworn revenge upon, or hard on accomplishing their overall goal—they can “burn” their Motivation to get a bonus of *double their Motivation MOD* throughout the duration of that Scene. However, win or lose, the character must then *discard and change* their Motivation to something else!

5

The seven basic Motivations of S7S are *Freedom, Honor, Power, Revenge, Romance, Status, and Wealth*. (Often these are more specific, like *Revenge on Markiz Dupree* or *Find a True Love*.) However, players shouldn't be limited to these basic ones alone—other goals and principles are perfectly fine. Examples could include *Get Married to Prince Viktor, Buy Back the Family Farm, Find My Long-Lost Father*, and so on.

Motivation is one of the Core Elements of a Character.

See Also...

See the IMPORTANT NOTE under Foible (p. 138) about making a character's Foible and Motivation the same.

Fiddly Bits: Multiple Motivations?

Can my character have multiple Motivations?

Sure! A character who purchases multiple Motivations in character generation is someone to watch. This means that several issues or situations spur them on to great deeds. . . and great internal conflicts.

Also, a GM that doesn't put a character who has multiple Motivations in a difficult situation where they have to choose between them is missing a trick!

Nationality: [X] * +

Nationality is how the character identifies himself, no matter where he's currently living. A character's Nationality indicates where he was born, the Nationality of his parents, the cloud-island he considers himself a citizen of, or where he was raised as a child. The individual nations are described in *Chapter 2*, and those descriptions may provide valuable details in fleshing out a character.

As a Forte, Nationality can be used to grant knowledge of local customs, fashions, language (including dialect and slang), laws, folktales, familiarity with an area, current events, and connections at home and abroad (personal, social, and professional). For example, a Barathi soldier trapped on Viridia has a better chance at getting an inexpensive passage back to the Empire if he seeks out a Barathi merchant ship.

Each major Nationality also includes some intriguing bits of unobvious "cultural knowledge":

- ◆ **Barathi:** All Barathi can all swim, operate surface boats (rowing, sailing), understand complex legalistic issues, and have an uncanny understanding of common poisons (see p. 264)—and their antidotes.
- ◆ **Colronan Kingdom:** All Royalists know numerous love songs, can ride and care for a horse, and can bake tasty bread.
- ◆ **Colronan Zultanate:** All Zultanistas can read, write, do simple arithmetic, and converse on issues of theology.
- ◆ **Craill:** All Crailese can cook a delicious meal, haggle in a marketplace, and read Kroyu glyphs.

- ◆ **Ilwuz:** All Ilwuzi can sense which Sky Ilwuz is currently in, and all have a basic understanding of how to skysail.
- ◆ **Sha Ka Ruq:** All Sha-Ku can speak before an audience with skill, identify useful plants, and hunt and gather food.
- ◆ **Viridia:** All Viridese are adept at playing games, hiding their emotions, and showing economy in the use of resources.

Nationality: [X] is one of the Core Elements of a Character.

Organization: [X]

Organization is a social/professional Forte showing membership in some form of social club, military regiment, craft guild, secret society, court faction, trading house, skyship crew, etc. While many Fortes already include an element of professional connections within their penumbra, Organization is a formal and explicit participation in a *specific* group. Drawing on Organization ties could supply information, Gear, or sanctuary to needy members.

Players should feel free to invent new Organizations—they are grist for the GM's adventure mill.

5



Past: [X] †

The *Past* Forte represents the skills and knowledge of a character's backstory before the start of play. This could include what he or his family did for a living while he was growing up, a horrific event in his youth, or a profession that the character or his family has formerly held. Useful Pasts include Disgraced Noble, Ex-Spider (or any other elite national warrior), Farmboy, Former Seminarian, a different Nationality, Secrets, Thief, or anything else that the player can come up with.

Past: [X] is one of the Core Elements of a Character.

Pirate

The *Pirate* Forte encompasses not just the basics of skysailing, but also includes the skills and knowledge of how to commit aeronautical criminal mayhem in the 7 Skies. These include how to capture a skyship, how to evade capture, wingcloak use, where and how to sell one's ill-gotten booty, a measure of reputation, how to smuggle goods past customs, and criminal connections with other pirates.

(See also the textbox below, “*Skyship Captain*” vs. “*Skysailor with Captain*”, p. 164, which also holds true for Pirates—just swap out “Skysailor” and “Skyship” for “Pirate”.)

Priest *

The *Priest* Forte is taken by the clergy of the Church of Vaoz. They are widely regarded as the most well-educated people in the World. They usually wear the symbol of the Church somewhere on their person.

Priests *could* be considered to have a prerequisite of “not being a koldun” (but see the textbox below).

During their training, Priests are taught first aid, priestcraft (theology and rituals of the Church), repartee, scholarship, and how to teach others. Also, all Priests know a [*Domestic Craft*] of some sort as a Technique: essentially, a useful skill or trade. Examples include alchemy, blacksmith, brewing, farming, animal handling, scribe, teaching, etc. They get this Domestic Craft as a *free, chained Technique*.

Priests have organizational ties to the rest of the clergy, the Church itself, and the Zultan.

They often have a Foible of Devout, Honorable, Loyal to the Church, Loyal to the Zultan, Compulsive Proselytizing, or something similar.

See also *Chapter 3, The Faithful*, p. 97, for more details on the clergy.

Priest-Koldun?

A character cannot be both a Koldun and a Priest, without a Foible of *Secret: I'm a Koldun* and a *phenomenally good* explanation of how this state of affairs came to be.

Priest Techniques

Priests have a number of special Techniques (see p. 139) only available to them. These include:

- ◆ **Domestic Craft:** [X]: All Priests get a free, chained Technique representing a useful skill or trade.
- ◆ **[Priestly Order]:** Each of the three Priestly Orders of the Church (see p. 100) can be taken as Techniques:
 - *Peregrinator* grants a bonus for familiarity with all of the various cultures of the World and general travel lore.
 - *Cenobite* grants a bonus when dealing with any community or education issues.
 - *Eremite* grants a bonus when used in scholarly or mystical situations.
- ◆ **Ritual of [X]:** Grants a bonus die for a specific Church ritual (see p. 98), useful for impressing others.
- ◆ **Virtutoir:** Grants a bonus die to situations involving giving advice, arbitrating a dispute, exploiting social connections, or utilizing diplomacy. (See also p. 100 for more details.)

Priests can also look to the various other Techniques for more ideas on Priest specialities.

5

A Free Technique?

Sometimes, those mundane Fortes that will probably never be used much in a swashbuckling fight could use a little extra jazz to make them worthwhile—especially when those Fortes reflect roles that are useful in society, if not necessarily adventurous or swashbuckling ones. *Priest* is one such Forte: it gets a free Chained Technique, but that Technique is constrained to specializing in the Domestic Craft the character has been educated in.

Profession: [X]

Profession is what the character does for a living. Since Fortes are wide-ranging, a Profession includes not only the skills needed to do the job, but also a welter of common knowledge, gossip, professional connections, and mild social status elements.

Professions in *S7S* include jobs like Blacksmith, Carpenter, Farmer, Healer, Merchant, Soldier, and Vagabond.

Repartee

Not just the knack of witty badinage, *Repartee* is also the skill of public speaking, rhetoric, and oratory. It can be useful in any situation, not simply a social or political context. It can *definitely* be used in business or professional situations (such as haggling over a price), or even combat!

Indeed, the ability to make a humorous quip in the midst of stark circumstances, or verbally needling an opponent into losing their temper (and thus giving the hero an opening) are hallmarks of the swashbuckling genre. For that reason, combining *Repartee* with another Forte (see *Chapter 6, Using Multiple Fortes for Tasks*, p. 208) is *always* appropriate. (Please also see the *Rhetorical Repartee* textbox on p. 211.)

Reputation

The Forte of Reputation measures fame and status (outside of one's social class; for that, see *Aristocrat*, p. 143). A strong Reputation can aid a character in all sorts of situations, be they business/professional, social, political, mental, physical, or combat. Consider the difference between facing off against an unnamed swordsman in a back-alley versus crossing blades with famed duelist Baron "Redblade" Reynaldo in the King's Court.

Rogue

A swashbuckling Rogue—be he burglar, con-man, or pickpocket—knows many thieflly skills like fast talk, finding a fence, pick-pocketing, sleight of hand, stealth, streetwise, and other "criminal" abilities not already covered by such Fortes as Pirate or Smuggler.

Sanctum: [X]

A *Sanctum* is a place like a fancy townhouse, a sturdy fortress, a private port, lonely tower, or secret base that belongs to a character. It provides a base of operations for the character (and his or her allies) to rest and recuperate, study, resupply, plot and plan—and even retreat to, if need be.

A headquarters of this sort has a Sanctum: (Type) Forte at the Rank that the PC used to add it to his sheet, plus an additional Good [+2] Forte that indicates other resources it possesses. These Fortes can be broken apart into smaller pieces to provide more abilities (with Average [0] Rank counting as 1).



For example, a character with an Expert [+4] Sanctum—say, a Masked Avenger with a hidden cave—could configure it in numerous ways:

- ◆ Expert [+4] Sanctum: Cave and Good [+2] Hidden.
- ◆ Good [+2] Sanctum: Cave, Good [+2] Hidden, and Good [+2] Alchemical Laboratory.
- ◆ Good [+2] Sanctum: Cave, Good [+2] Hidden, Average [0] Alchemical Laboratory, and Average [0] Training Ring.
- ◆ And so on...

Additional Fortes for a Sanctum can include things like Alchemical Laboratory, Cached Supplies, Chapel, Dry Dock, Dungeon, Escape Tunnels, Library, Storefront, Surgery, Security System, Warded, and Wine Cellar.

These Fortes can aid the character in relevant Challenges (see *Chapter 6*) while he or she is within the Sanctum by adding its MOD to his rolls (see *Using Multiple Fortes for Tasks*, p. 208). The Sanctum Forte also indicates the *Difficulty Rank* (see p. 204) for intruders to find it, penetrate its defenses, and other things like that.

See also *Team Sanctum*, p. 197.

5 **Secret ***

A Forte of *Secret* is some sort of hidden advantage that the PC can employ at opportune times—e.g., the character is the Unknown Heir.

A Secret can also be taken as a Foible, but this portends ill for the character, because it's a disadvantage—something that must be hidden or gets the character into trouble or danger.

If a Secret is ever revealed in play, it must be immediately replaced by a Forte of equal Rank (or a new Foible).

Sha-Ku Ruqrider §

The *Sha-Ku Ruqrider* Forte is taken by the elite air-cavalry of the Confederate Tribes of Sha Ka Ruq. They are widely regarded as the most honorable opponents in the World. They wear fine flying leathers, enhanced with the colorful quills and feathers of their ruqs (past and present), and tend to use bows and spears.

Sha-Ku Ruqrider has prerequisites of Nationality: Sha-Ku and Sidekick: Ruq Mount.

Ruqriders are very athletic, and adept at handling animals (especially their mounts), archery, fencing, riding, aerial combat, and wingcloak use. They have organizational ties to the rest of the Ruqriders and the Cynosure.

Most have a Foible of Loyal to the Current Cynosure, Protect Sha Ka Ruq, or something similar.

See also *Chapter 2, Sha Ka Ruq*, for more details.

"I Wanna Have A Ruq, Too!"

You have a character who wants a flying mount but doesn't want to be a Sha-Ku Ruqrider?

Simple: purchase *Sidekick: Ruq* with your additional Fortes. **Strongly consider** also buying Techniques of *Mounted Combat* or *Aerial Combat* as well.

Sidekick

A *Sidekick* is a named NPC who serves the PC in some regard—as valet, chauffeur, bodyguard, etc.; especially-intelligent animals like horses, dogs, wolves, or even airwhales can also be Sidekicks. (See also *Animals*, p. 196.)

While ultimately *controlled* by the PC's player, Sidekicks are often more entertaining when another player or the GM *portrays* the Sidekick's responses to their master's orders.

The GM can take over playing a Sidekick at any time. If this usurpation of control from the player is truly negative or dangerous in a situation, this counts as an instance of *Vexing Misfortune* (see below, p. 175), and the character gains 3 Style Dice.

Sidekicks can earn Style Dice (see p. 169), which go to the player of their master, but they do not earn Training Points (see p. 180) at all—for themselves or their controlling PC. PCs can spend Style Dice or Training Points on their Sidekicks behalf, however, to improve a Sidekick's Fortes and Techniques).

If a Sidekick is captured or incapacitated during the course of a session, this is effectively *Vexing Misfortune* to the controlling PC, and the PC receives 3 Style Dice. If the Sidekick is killed during the course of the session, at the end of the session, the player may select a new Forte of the same Rank for their character.



Bondsman/Friend: Name, Foible, a Forte at the Rank that the PC used to add Sidekick to his sheet (or Fortes; for example, an Expert [+4] Sidekick could have an Expert [+4] Forte or two Good [+2] Fortes), plus an extra Good [+2] Forte, an Average [0] Forte, and 2 chained Techniques.

Example: (Good [+2] Sidekick) Oded, **Foible:** Gambler, Good [+2] Valet, Good [+2] Charming, Average [0] Brawling, **Technique:** Dress (the Master) for Court (with Valet), and **Technique:** An Eye for Cooks (with Charming).

Pet/Mount: Name, a Foible, a Good [+2] (Animal) Forte, plus a Forte at the Rank that the PC used to add Sidekick to his sheet (or Fortes; for example, an Expert [+4] Sidekick could have an Expert [+4] Forte or two Good [+2] Fortes), an Average [0] Forte, and 2 chained Techniques (see below, *Animal Techniques*, p. 196, for animal-specific abilities in addition to normal Techniques).

Example: (Good [+2] Sidekick) Thunderbeak, **Foible:** Stubborn, Good [+2] Ruq, Good [+2] Fast, Average [0] Navigation, War-Trained (with Ruq), and Dive (with Fast).

5 Skysailor

The *Skysailor* Forte covers the knowledge and ability to navigate and steer a skyship, how to operate its various devices (capstans, cannon, wingsails, anchors, etc.), how to repair and maintain them, as well as a smattering of other knowledge regarding cargos, exotic ports, customs, and the flora and fauna of the 7 Skies.

See also *Chapter 4*, p. 110, for more details.

“Skyship Captain” vs. “Skysailor with Captain”

Often, it is simpler to just list “Skyship Captain” as a character’s Forte, rather than using “Skysailor” with a Technique of “Captain” (or Techniques covering other *Vehicle Officer* roles; see p. 115). Still, pay heed to the potential difference in penumbras (see p. 132) between the two choices....

However, if a group prefers, “Skysailor plus Technique” is certainly a way they can go. Especially if a character’s Swashbuckling Forte is Skysailor.

Spy

While the Imperial Spiders of Barathi are the *sine qua non* of espionage in the World, each cloud-island has their own secret service. (Viridese Warmasters and Colronan Musketeers are believed to be, respectively, the second- and third-best spies.) Spies are skilled in athletics, fencing, the use of firearms, unarmed combat, knowledge of poisons (see p. 264), and general espionage activities. They have organizational ties to their relevant organization.

They often have a Foible of Loyal to their Nation or Ruler, Agent of (some functionary), or something similar.



Vehicle: [X]

A *Vehicle* is a conveyance like a cloudship, glider, skyship, or wagon that belongs to a character (see also *Chapter 4*). It provides a mobility for the character (and his or her allies) to travel, trade, and even attack and defend other vehicles, if need be.

It has a Vehicle: (Type) Forte at the Rank that the PC used to add it to his sheet, plus an additional Good [+2] Forte that indicates other capabilities it possesses. These Fortes can be broken apart into smaller pieces to provide more abilities (with Average [0] Rank counting as 1). For example, a character with an Expert [+4] Vehicle—say, a Merchant Trader PC with a fast skyship—could configure it in numerous ways:

- ◆ Expert [+4] Vehicle: Skyship and Good [+2] Fast.
- ◆ Good [+2] Vehicle: Skyship, Good [+2] Fast, and Good [+2] Nimble.
- ◆ Good [+2] Vehicle: Skyship, Good [+2] Fast, Average [0] Extra Cargo Space, and Average [0] Hidden Compartments.
- ◆ And so on...

Additional Fortes for a Vehicle can include things like Armored, Big Guns, Extra Cargo Space, Extra Crew, Fast, Hidden Compartments, Map Room, Nimble, Sickbay, and Stealthy.

These Fortes can aid the character in relevant Challenges (see *Chapter 6*) while he or she is within the Vehicle, by adding its MOD to his rolls (see *Using Multiple Fortes for Tasks*, p.208). The Vehicle Forte also indicates the *Difficulty Rank* (see p.204) for intruders to find it, penetrate its defenses, and things like that.

Note that possessing a Vehicle doesn't necessarily imply the ability to drive, sail, or captain it!

I am a Vehicle? I am a Sanctum?

Vehicles and Sanctums use their core Vehicle Forte or Sanctum Forte to cover anything that is represented by the phrase "a typical vehicle or building possesses..."

That is, while any Vehicle probably has a Map Room, it's unlikely that all Vehicles have something special or esoteric (like an Alchemical Laboratory) onboard.

Vehicles as Swashbuckling Fortes?

Can a PC take Vehicle as their Swashbuckling Forte?

Sure! (And they can then spend their cheap Technique "points" to purchase Vehicle Techniques.)

However, what a player is saying when he does this is that the Vehicle is what makes him impressive, far and away above anything else. (The most relevant example here isn't a swashbuckling genre reference, alas: think of Speed Racer's relationship to the Mach Five.)

Can Vehicles Have Foibles?

At the GM's option, PC-owned Vehicles *may* have Foibles. It's a great way to give a Vehicle more "personality"—consider the fun possibilities of Foibles like "Scared of airwhales," "Doesn't like Barathi skyships," or "Weird enthusiasm for diving into the Sky of Thunder."

Any Style Dice gained from a Vehicle's Foible can be used by any crewmember of that Vehicle while they are aboard, *provided* they have permission from either the **owner** or the **captain** of the vessel (in that order!).

Team Vehicles (see p. 198) *do* have a Foible, but crewmembers *do not* need permission to use any Style Dice accrued by the Vehicle.

Vehicle Crew

Unless otherwise noted, a Vehicle has a number of NPC crewmembers equal to the MOD of the Vehicle Forte Rank. These count as Minions (see p. 155), and each have a Name and one Forte at Good [+2] Rank. (If a Forte of Extra Crew is taken, use the TN of the Extra Crew Forte to determine the number of crewmembers.)

Additionally, there are five Officer positions, *usually and preferably assigned to PCs*, who have special duties and responsibilities on the Vehicle, especially in combat (see *Vehicular Challenges & Duels*, p. 227):

- ◆ **Captain:** Commands the ship, collects and assigns *Vehicle Dice* (see below) for the Turn, and assigns which Officer's section receives damage.
- ◆ **First Mate:** Second-in-command, takes over if Captain is disabled; handles damage control.
- ◆ **Master of Arms:** Commands the crew in melee; makes boarding/repelling Challenge rolls (see *Chapter 6*) for the NPC crewmen.
- ◆ **Master of Guns:** Fires the cannon/weapons; makes attack rolls.
- ◆ **Sailing Master:** Pilot and navigator; makes defense and movement rolls.

(There is also the *Officer of the Watch*, who serves as the lookout for stealthy attacks and approaching hazards. The only rule associated with this is that the Officer of the Watch cannot be the same character who it was the *last time* a call for the Officer of the Watch was made.)



Vehicles in Combat

In combat, Vehicles have *Vehicle Dice* equal to the number of successful orders (given by the Captain to his Officers; see p. 230 for more details).

In Challenges and Duels (see *Chapter 6*), officers can use the MOD of the basic Vehicle Forte for their rolls, alongside any of the Vehicle's Fortes that fit under their portfolio (Extra Cannon for the Master-at-Guns, Extra Crew for the Master-at-Arms, Fast for the Sailing Master, etc.).

See also *Team Vehicle*, p. 198, and *Vehicular Duels*, p. 229.



Viridese Warmaster §

The *Viridese Warmaster Forte* is taken by the elite warriors of the Viridese Freeholds. They are widely regarded as the most versatile combatants in the World. They have a brand in the shape of a sword on the arm of their dominant hand; this brand is often augmented with tattoos.

Viridese Warmaster has a prerequisite of Nationality: Viridese.

A Warmaster is extremely athletic, and is trained in

fencing, firearm use, hunting, the Military Arts (artillery, fortress defense, logistics, soldiery, and tactics), mystic lore (the capabilities of koldun and the Gifted, especially in war), joint operations in warfare, skysailing, unarmed combat, wilderness survival, and wingcloak use.

They have organizational ties to their fellow Warmasters and the Varlok (if one currently exists).

Warmasters often have a Foible of Loyal to the Varlok, Protect the Freehold(s), Compulsive Dueling, Pride, or something similar.

See also *Chapter 2, Viridia*, for more details.

Wealthy

While an *S7S* character is assumed to have enough resources (based on their Fortes) to live adequately, there's nothing like simply being *Wealthy*. Wealthy means that a character is rich "enough" at his Rank to comfortably maintain that Rank, even with plenty of expenses.

However, the wherewithal that gives rise to a character's being Wealthy does have the inherent Foible of *Can Be Exhausted if Squandered*. During a session, if a character uses his Wealthy Forte to purchase something *beyond his means* (i.e., valued at the next higher Rank) or two things that *push his means* (i.e., valued at the same Rank as Wealthy), the character's Wealthy Forte can be permanently reduced by one Rank.

See also *Temporary Wealth*, p. 178.

Wingman

The Wingman Forte covers the special training needed to excel in wingcloak use. Wingman skills include knowing how to glide, soar, and land safely from a great height (even on an island, though glide-time is extremely limited); how to board skyships in flight and repel wingman boarders; how to detect updrafts and down-drafts; how to perform basic repair and maintenance on a wingcloak; how to perform aerial acrobatics and navigation; and how to attack enemies and defend themselves while in flight. The Wingman Forte also means that the character possesses a decent-quality wingcloak.

See also *Chapter 4*, p. 116, for more details.

Style Dice



Style Dice represent the heroic energy, fortune, indomitable will, and plucky attitude that makes a swashbuckling character larger-than-life. Most people rarely access the hidden reserves within themselves to go beyond their normal boundaries; swash-buckling heroes do so **regularly**. By using Style Dice, characters can shift the odds in their favor, get up when a normal person would be down for the count, temporarily surpass their limitations, and persevere through adversity.

The basic use of Style Dice is to add **bonus dice** to characters' rolls, which they can then pick through for the highest roll total amongst the dice they can *keep*: 2 dice for Challenges and 3 dice for Duels. Furthermore, the character with the most Style Dice in front of them wins *Initiative*. (For more details on Challenges, Duels, and Initiative, see *Chapter 6*).

All earned Style Dice “go away” at the end of a session, so players should **use them or lose them!**

NOTE

It's recommended that GMs use a different color and/or size of dice to represent Style Dice, so that there's no confusion for players between their Style Dice and the dice they usually roll for tasks. GMs may need a big supply of dice to provide their players with plenty of Style Dice. Luckily, blocks of dice can be found fairly inexpensively in your friendly local game store.

Otherwise, a group could use Poker chips, pennies, or matchsticks to represent Style Dice, if they don't already have a big block of dice.

Bowl vs. Box

The GM has two sources of Style Dice to award to players: the *Bowl* and the *Box*.

The Bowl is all of the dice the GM can assign as he/she desires—the Bowl is the repository of player style. The Bowl starts a session with a number of dice equal to twice the number of players (including the GM).

The Box contains all of the dice that come into play due to other game mechanics.

5

NOTE

The GM uses his own, personal Style Dice for all NPCs (however, some NPCs may have a "set" number of Style Dice that they start play with, which is in addition to the GM's Style Dice.)

Every Session

At the beginning of each session, the GM should give out Style Dice awards for pre-play social issues (all of these come from the Box):

- ◆ **Showing Up:** Just for showing up for the session, every PC gets a Style Die.
- ◆ **Hosting:** If the player is hosting the session in their home, they get an extra Style Die.
- ◆ **Providing Snacks and/or Beverages:** If the player has brought snacks or delicious beverages, they get an extra Style Die.

- ◆ **Loaning Materials:** If a player loans a pen, paper, or dice to another player, they get an extra Style Die.
- ◆ **Outside Awesomeness:** If a player has produced outside material (artwork, handouts, short stories, placed material on an S7S wiki, made an Actual Play post to a message-board, written a game review of S7S, etc.) since the last session and makes the GM aware of this, they get an extra Style Die.

At a minimum, all players should get *at least 1 Style Die* for showing up to play. Everything else is up to them. (The GM counts as a player here; for example, if the GM is hosting the session, he or she gets an extra Style Die added to the pool in front of them—see textbox.)

Behind the Curtain: Hoarding Style Dice

Some folks may be worried about players hoarding Style Dice. Do not worry. There often is a short hoarding phase in new S7S games where the Bowl gets depleted. That means the GM can't directly award Style Dice for character actions any more. The only way for Style Dice to get back into the Bowl is for players to *spend* them on rolls or effects (this will eventually happen during the course of a session) or for them to start awarding Acclaim dice to each other (which allows the GM to pump new Style Dice from the Box to the Bowl).

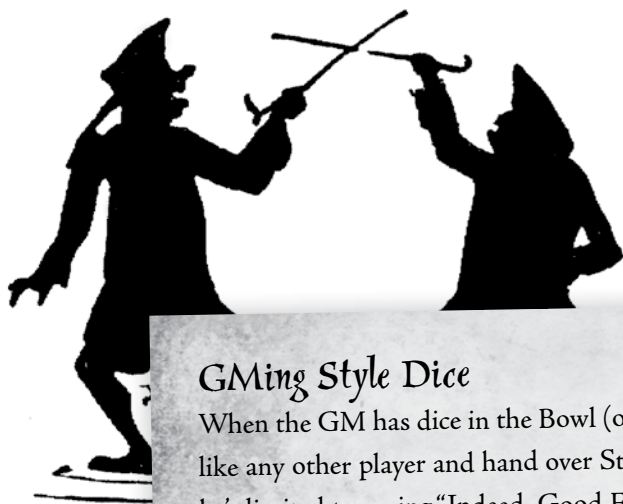
Once the trickle of shifting Style Dice starts, it usually turns into a flood. The simple reminder that all Style Dice go away at the end of a session (“use ‘em or lose ‘em”) is usually enough to trigger the players into saying “why not?”

5

Good Form vs. Bad Form (Gaining Style Dice)

Every action a S7S character takes is an opportunity to be stylish. While Justice may be blind, Luck is a people-watcher. The manner in which a character reacts to the ups and downs of fate may impress the fickle gods of chance.

The key to doing well is showing *Good Form*. Good Form is a combination of sportsmanship, justice, wit, and panache. Any action that shows flair, courage, or audacity—especially in the face of a significant risk or failure—is probably Good Form. Handing a disarmed foe back his sword is Good Form, as is a humorous quip when one is in dire straits, generosity when one's purse is overfull (or completely empty!), leaving an unconscious foe alive, keeping one's word, witty banter, or serving



GMing Style Dice

When the GM has dice in the Bowl (or in front of him), he can say “Good Form” like any other player and hand over Style Dice. But when that pool is exhausted, he’s limited to saying “Indeed, Good Form!” and handing out dice that come out of the Box. (See the *S7S Acclaim* textbox on p. 174 for more details.)

S7S GMs are advised to pump most of these pooled dice into the PC Style Dice economy as soon as possible, not just to set the tone, but also to encourage the players to use or gift them.

After the GM has run out of Style Dice from the Bowl, there is only one thing that moves Style Dice from the Box to the Bowl: Good Form Gifting. (Mechanical effects—like a Foible coming into play, a Vexing Misfortune, or winning a Flashy Challenge—grant Style Dice directly to a player.)

After a player has done Good Form Gifting, the GM can add an additional Style Die from the Box to the Bowl (or, in extreme cases, one to the Bowl and one *directly* to the stylish player) with an “Indeed, Good Form!”, thus increasing the total number of Style Dice in play.

If PCs wish to use their Style Dice to Good Form Gift the GM, the GM should take the dice, place them in front of themselves, and *immediately* note down that the players wish more of *whatever the hell just happened!*

One final note: if a character simply repeats an action that granted another character Style Dice, they *should not* receive any, unless their take on the action was *more impressive* than the first iteration (in which case, they should get *more* Style Dice than the first assay.) A good example here would be one character slicing through a candle with his blade, cutting it in half (gaining a Style Die). If another character just duplicates this, it’s not worth anything. However, if the second character makes a pass at an entire candelabra, and all of the candles only fall when she blows them over, then that should be worth at *least* 2 Style Dice. (However, this sort of thing is usually better expressed as a *Flashy Challenge*, see p. 208, than Style Dice one-upsmanship.)

as the agent of poetic justice. Some of the best times to display Good Form are when one is in a position of overwhelming superiority, or when one is up a certain creek without a certain instrument.

Whenever a character *acts heroically* or *stylishly*, the GM (or even the other players!—see *S7S Acclaim*, p. 174) should give him a Style Die. GMs should award Style Dice *immediately* after the heroic or stylish action.

PCs can also gain Style Dice for Good Roleplaying. The GM should also reward any player's character if the player adds to the spirit of the game by showing camaraderie with teammates; impresses the GM or other players by doing something cool or fun; helps aid the swashbuckling feel of the game; or says something funny that amuses everybody around the table. Each thing that makes the gaming experience more enjoyable should be rewarded with a Style Die.

Bad Form, on the other hand, is taking *undue* advantage of one's momentary situation, or acting cravenly, villainously, or (frankly) boringly. Biting the hand that feeds you, deceiving the innocent, creating needless mayhem or suffering, betraying a friend, breaking a truce, rubbing salt in a wound, flaunting one's power, killing a helpless enemy—all are Bad Form.

Showing Bad Form does not deduct Style Dice. . . but the other players and GM should feel free to cry out “Bad Form!” when one of their fellows acts the cad. Mockery or disapproval of such a player around the gaming table may be required. Within the game, however, when a character starts showing Bad Form... well, other characters are going to notice and take that into account.

There are other ways that a character can gain Style Dice: *Social Awards*, being *Affected by one of their Foibles*, having *Vexing Misfortune* happen to them, or *Feeding the Plot*. (See also the textbox on p. 178, *Temporary Gear & Temporary Wealth Rewards*.)

NOTE

The character with the most Style Dice in front of him wins Initiative in Duels (see p. 213).



S7S Acclaim (“Good Form!”)

S7S has a number of “ritual phrases” associated with Style Dice, to enhance the play experience.

All players can say “Good Form!” or “Indeed, Good Form!” to another player and hand over Style Dice to them. “Well said!” or “Well done!” or “Zounds!” or even “By the Dog!” can work.

(“Good Form!” is the Musketeer version of this ritual phrase. If playing a predominantly Pirate game, “Yarr!” and “Indeed, Yarr!” are suggested. For Robin Hood/Zorro style campaigns, “Huzzah!” and “Indeed, Huzzah!” are suggested.)

In terms of *Creating the World* (see p. 177), the GM should use some ritual phrases to indicate to the players the Style Die costs of taking hold of the narration. For example, say a PC asks, “Is there a chandelier here?”

- ♦ “**Certes, there is!**” = Minor fact; no Style Die cost.
- ♦ “**Is there?**” = Significant fact; 1 Style Die cost.
- ♦ “**I’m not sure...**” = Major fact; 2 Style Dice cost.

(Note that simply *saying* what is ends up being cheaper than *asking*!)

A good phrase for GMs to use to inject complications into a player’s description of their successes and failures are “But alas!...” or “Yet, unknown to all...”

And, as always, groups can pick the ritual phrases they prefer, or make their own ones up.

Social Awards (Box)

See above, *Every Session* (p. 170), for the social issues that give the session’s starting Style Dice. These dice come from the Box.

Affected By Foible (Box)

If a situation comes up that triggers a character’s *Foible* (say, a Skysailor with Mute being questioned by a Musketeer, or if a Rude character needs to talk nicely with the pompous Baron of Erzay), they gain a Style Die.

If the player runs with the situation, making:

His attempts to get around the Foible and succeed; **or**

His portrayal of how incredibly bad the failure caused by his Foible is;

... particularly impressive, dramatic, or entertaining, he should gain extra Style Dice (perhaps 2 or 3 extra).

These dice come from the Box.

Good Form (Bowl)

Acting heroically or stylishly, +1 Style Die.

Good Form rewards are for when the GM feels the player has described their character's actions suitably for the swashbuckling genre.

(See also the *S7S Acclaim* textbox on p. 174.)

Feeding the Plot (Bowl)

When the player or character does something—even inadvertently—that advances the main plot of the adventure (like accidentally starting a fire while escaping a fortress' dungeons, which just so happens to distract the guard while an NPC army attacks); advances one of their subplots or another character's subplot (like connecting one's long-long brother to another character's Motivation of *Revenge*); or gives GM an idea for new plot twists, NPCs, locations, or Scenes, the character gains a Style Die.



Vexing Misfortune (Box)

If the GM wants to have a *Vexing Misfortune* happen to a PC that they cannot resist (for cliffhanging purposes, or to place them into specific situations—dropping them down an oubliette, taking away their favorite sword, having someone secretly read their thoughts, capturing them while asleep, or framing them for stealing the Baroness of Erzay's diamond brooch), the PC instantly gains *at least* 3 Style Dice to ease the pain.

Win a Flashy Challenge (Box)

If a character wins a *Flashy Challenge* (see p. 208), they gain a Style Die.

Changing the Odds (Using Style Dice)

Style Dice can be used to change the odds in the hero's favor, recover from injuries, and add new material to the situation, plot, or setting (see below). By burning Style Dice, a player can make things go his character's way. When *Changing the Odds*, a player may temporarily take control of the narrative of the game.

NOTE

Style Dice *can* be earned by a character for a task even if the character is already using Style Dice to perform that task.

Below is a suggested list of ways to Change the Odds, a description of their effects, and their Style Dice (and any other) cost. As many Style Dice as desired can be used, so long as the character has dice left to burn. Some of the methods in which Style Dice can be used (but feel free to come up with new uses of your own for Style Dice) are *Be Impressive*, *Catch Your Second Wind*, *Create the World*, *Good Form Gifting*, and *Use Mystic Powers*.

When spent, Style Dice go back to the Bowl.

5

Be Impressive

To *Be Impressive*, a character can spend Style Dice to add to his pool of dice to roll for the task, or to gain a flat bonus of +1. However, he is still limited to keeping only 2 dice in Challenges and 3 dice in Duels (see *Chapter 6*).

NOTE

Being Impressive is functionally the same as using Techniques (see p. 139).

Catch Your Second Wind

To recapture his *Second Wind*, a character can spend one (1) Style Die to recover Ranks of damage (see *Chapter 6*, p. 222). Roll the die (or dice), and whatever comes up is the number of Ranks recovered.

Continue Ephemera

See p. 183.

Create the World

The most flexible use of Style Dice is in *Create the World*, which lets the player (or players, as they can pool dice for this) dictate new facts about the campaign setting. There are several methods for Creating the World, including:

- ◆ *Dictate a Minor Fact* (0 dice): A minor fact is really just local color, and has limited plot significance. This includes things like “I frequent this tavern, and they consider me a regular” or “Duke Johannes loves tomato juice.”
- ◆ *Dictate a Significant Fact* (1 die): A significant fact is something with more impact on the course of the game, like “I met the Empress once at a party, and I swear she was flirting with me” or “I know a guy who trades in illegal alchemicraft.”
- ◆ *Dictate a Major Fact* (2 dice): A major fact is something with **extreme** relevance and importance for the current events of the campaign, like “We’re looking for a substantial amount of blackcotton, right? Well, it just so happens a ship with that cargo has come into port...” or “This impregnable fortress just happens to have a sewer entrance that is unguarded.”
- ◆ *Create a Named NPC* (1 die): By spending a Style Die, a player can instantly create a new permanent, recurring NPC that drops into the setting. “I greet Herman, the bartender, and ask for the usual.” While this sort of thing usually happens *en passant* in a campaign, when a player spends a Style Die in this way, he is telling the GM he wants Herman to hang around and be important to his activities. This is usually a prelude to...
 - *Giving a Named NPC Specific Fortes/Techniques* (+1 die per Rank): By spending a Style Die, a player can grant a new NPC Fortes and Techniques. For example, “I ask Herman, since he has Good [+2] Criminal Contacts (spend 2 Style Dice), about the Black Mask...”
- ◆ *Temporary Fame, Gear, Sidekick, or Wealth* (+1 die per Rank, starting at Average [0]): For every Style Die spent, a character can pick up a Temporary Forte of *Reputation* or *Status* (say, from winning a footrace with a noted athlete or receiving preferment at court), *Gear* (by purchasing a new pistol), *Sidekick* (hiring a horse or servant), or *Wealth* (from gambling winnings or adventure trading; see also p. 178). Temporary Fortes like this have the flaws of permanent ones like *Can Be Stolen* or *Can be Squandered* for the course of the session, **cannot** absorb damage like other Fortes, and disappear at the end of the session in which they were purchased.



Temporary Gear & Temporary Wealth Rewards

Temporary Gear and Temporary Wealth are *great* ways to represent booty taken by pirates, adventure trading profits, gambling winnings, gifts from patrons, spur-of-the-moment purchases, and interesting artifacts somehow acquired by the PCs. GMs should feel free to offer Style Dice awards in this form. (See also *Ephemera*, p. 183.)

Each Style Die can be traded in for a point of MOD (minimum 1 for Average [0] Rank) Temporary Wealth. Thus, 4 Style Dice transformed into Temporary Wealth would be Expert [+4] Temporary Wealth.

But what does that *mean*? How is it represented in the World of the 7 Skies?

Temporary Gear is pretty straightforward: a Good [+2] Temporary Gear Rank represents a well-crafted (Good) sword.

Temporary Wealth is where it gets interesting. Some players may not be happy being told, "Oh, it's an Expert [+4] Rank amount of Temporary Wealth." They want to know how many coins (or pieces of jewelry) that is; how much value they have.

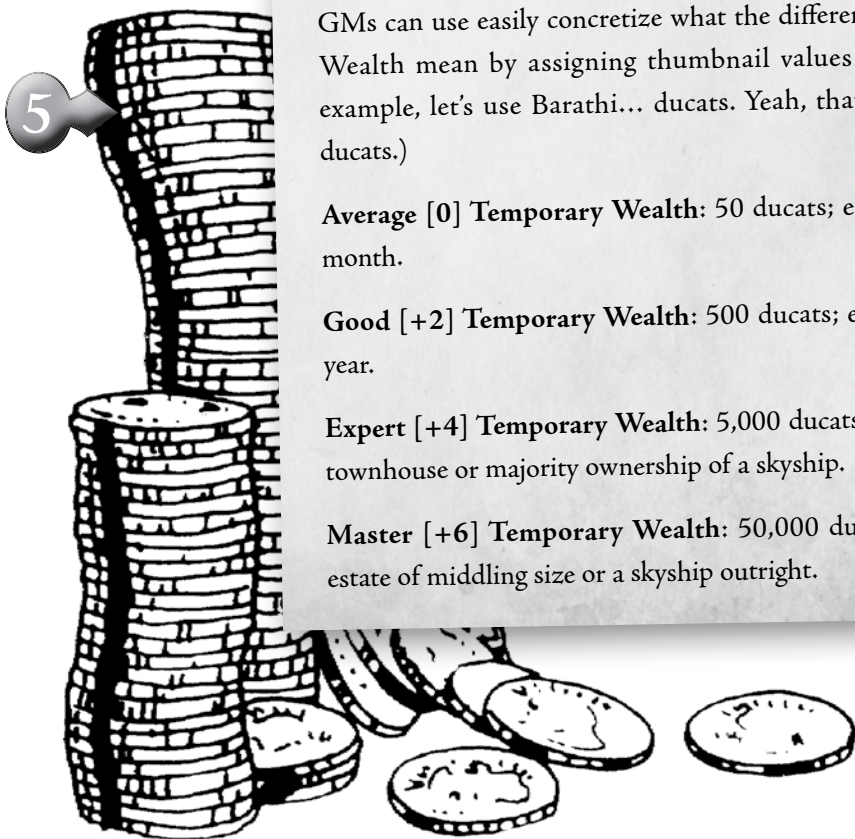
GMs can use easily concretize what the different Ranks of Temporary Wealth mean by assigning thumbnail values of currency. (For this example, let's use Barathi... ducats. Yeah, that's it: Barathi coins are ducats.)

Average [0] Temporary Wealth: 50 ducats; enough to live well for a month.

Good [+2] Temporary Wealth: 500 ducats; enough to live well for a year.

Expert [+4] Temporary Wealth: 5,000 ducats; enough to buy a small townhouse or majority ownership of a skyship.

Master [+6] Temporary Wealth: 50,000 ducats; enough to buy an estate of middling size or a skyship outright.



Good Form Gifting

See the *S7S Acclaim* textbox on p. 174 for more details.

Hexing (Koldun only)

See p. 154.

Use Mystic Powers

For more complex usage of a mystical power (from Gifts or the Koldun Forte) than simple attack and defense, a character must spend a *Style Die* to do so. (See also *Chapter 7*, p. 275.)

Here's a quick breakdown:

- ◆ *Color Effect*: Something that cannot be directly leveraged into enabling Fortes or Techniques previously unable to be used costs no Style Dice.
- ◆ *Simple Usage*: Basic use of the power to make a change in the world directly relevant to that Gift or power, or use of the power in Challenges and Duels for their MODs; costs no Style Dice.
- ◆ *Advantage Effect*: Something that can be directly leveraged into enabling a single Forte or Technique previously unable to be used costs 1 Style Die.
- ◆ *Great Advantage Effect*: Something that can be directly leveraged into enabling several Fortes or Techniques previously unable to be used costs 2 Style Dice.



Comparing the scope of the intended mystical effect to the Style Dice costs for Creating the World (see p. 177) can also be helpful.

IMPORTANT NOTE

The GM can waive or enforce Style Dice costs as he sees fit.

Training Points

Training Points are used for improving a character's abilities and adding new ones. They can also be used to improve types of Gear or Sidekicks, or create alchemicraft or kolduncraft items (if the character has the relevant abilities that permit this).

Gaining Training Points

Since swashbuckling character tend to be pretty impressive right from the get-go, they often don't improve much during the course of a campaign. Therefore, *S7S* characters only earn Training Points when they *fail* at a roll, be it in a Challenge or a Duel.

Depending upon how well the player narrates the failure, a character could gain Training Points *and* Style Dice simultaneously, *provided the player takes the time to describe the failure in a particularly flavorful way.* (See also Chapter 6, *Challenges*, p. 200.)

GMs should keep track of Training Points earned by each of the PCs, and announce them at the end of the session.

Using Training Points

5

Training Points can be used in several ways: *Increasing a Forte Rank, Purchasing New Fortes, Purchasing New Foibles, Purchasing New Techniques, Creating Alchemicraft Items, or Creating Kolduncraft Items.*

If possible, long skyship voyages from island to island are the best times to use Training Points.

TO INCREASE A FORTE RANK

Spending 4 Training Points permits a character to raise a Forte one Rank, to a maximum of Master [+6]. To raise Good [+2] Housekeeping to Master [+6] Housekeeping would require 8 Training Points (4 Training Points to go from Good to Expert and 4 more to go from Expert to Master).

TO PURCHASE A NEW FORTE

Spending 8 Training Points and creating a related *Story Hook* (see p. 240) permits a character to gain one new Forte at Good [+2] Rank. If a character wished to learn Skysailing, he would have to spend 8 Training Points and provide the GM with a

relevant seed for a future plot, subplot, or adventure that is tied to Skysailing (“hey, maybe I get shanghaied by the Imperial Navy...”).

TO PURCHASE A NEW FOIBLE

While Foibles can constrain a character’s actions in-play, they are also a great method of generating Style Dice. Spending 4 Training Points and having a good explanation permits a character to gain one new Foible (“After spending so much time in the company of the Princess, I have become more of a Gentleman”).

TO PURCHASE A NEW TECHNIQUE

Training Points can also be used to purchase new Techniques:

- ◆ *Chained to Swashbuckling Forte*: 2 Training Points.
- ◆ *Chained to any other Forte*: 4 Training Points and an explanation.
- ◆ *Unchained*: 6 Training Points and a related Story Hook.

TO CREATE AN ALCHEMICRAFT ITEM (ALCHEMISTS OR KOLDUN ONLY)

Alchemicraft items tend to be limited use, unstable, or limited in duration or scope. This means they break down more often, burn out faster, and go boom at the drop of a fancy hat. Players and GMs should assume that an alchemicraft item is useful *once per session*, whereupon it is consumed or exhausted, or needs time to recharge.

Alchemists and koldun can use their Style Dice *instead of* Training Points to create alchemicraft items (though one Training Point must *always* be spent).

To do this, they must follow certain steps. The *formula* (or *recipe*) must be acquired or developed, the relevant *Materia Mystica* (ambergris, bluewood, duzha crystals, funiket, raw cerulean, etc.; see *Chapter 3*, p. 81) must be collected one way or another and crafted to fit the formula. The item must be *assembled* and *charged*. Then, the alchemist or koldun spends 1 Style Die, 1 Training Point, and creates a Story Hook (see p. 240) related to one or more of the steps above (*GM’s veto applies*). Then and only then is the new Average [0] alchemicraft item ready to use.

Further Style Dice can be spent to increase the Forte Rank of the alchemicraft item (one die per Rank increase), but for each raising of Rank, *a new Training Point must be spent*.

- ◆ *If creating a “one-shot” item (like a potion or a bomb)*, no Story Hook is necessary, and *either* a Style Die or a Training Point must be spent.



OPTIONAL RULE: *Materia Mystica* Symbology

If a GM permits, quick and dirty method of alchemicraft creation (for items and potions) is to take the mystical connotations (or even the *reverse* of those connotations!) of the various *Materia Mystica* from p. 81, and string those words together to give a particular effect. Two words is the minimum, but as many can be added as necessary.

For example, say an alchemist wishes to create a potion that makes someone invisible. A few misthopper antennae (perception) and a drop or two of raw cerulean (change) might do the trick. Spend the Style Die and Training Point, and create the Story Hook. Voila! Invisibility potion.

This can also be fun in reverse: say an alchemist is marooned on a Stone. All he has to hand are some redpowder, lamp mushrooms, a jar of hailbee honey, and a vial of fek venom (respectively, these connote resistance, brilliance, beauty, and endurance). What to do? Brilliance, beauty, and endurance sound like they'd go together well to create a very noticeable and long-lived signal flare, don't they?

5 TO CREATE A KOLDUNCRAFT ITEM (KOLDUN ONLY)

Kolduncraft items are of higher quality and endurance than alchemicraft ones, and this is reflected in the difficulty of their construction. Usually, kolduncraft items are not consumed or do not become exhausted after a single use.

Koldun can use their Training Points to create kolduncraft items following the exact same steps as detailed for alchemicraft items, except they *cannot* use Style Dice for kolduncraft item creation. One Training Point must be spent to make the item at all and 2 Training Points spent and a Story Hook generated to create a new Average [0] kolduncraft item.

Further Training Points can be spent to increase the Forte Rank of the kolduncraft item (8 points per Rank increase).

- ◆ There are no “one-shot” kolduncraft items (even kolduncraft gunpowder requires Training Points and a Story Hook!).

(See the *Example Gear* textbox on p. 149 for some of the common alchemicraft and kolduncraft items.)

Ephemera

At the end of each session, the GM and players should discuss *Ephemera* to award to each and every PC, based upon the events of the session. Ephemera are changes in status or role caused by the events of the session that can reasonably be believed to have a possible ongoing effect on the life of the character and/or an important influence on the next session or sessions of the campaign. Examples of possible Ephemera include things like “Romantic Entanglement with Lady Aberline” or “Appointed the Tax Collector to the Silent Tribes” or “Suffering the Curse of Clouds” or “Blood-brother to Lothar.”

Mechanically, Ephemera are a combination of Temporary Fortes (see *Style Dice*) and Story Hooks. They start at Good [+2] Rank, and *can* absorb damage like other Fortes.

Ephemera last until the end of the *following* session. A PC may:

Utilize the Ephemera as a Forte: The MOD of Ephemera adds to relevant rolls for the session.

Cash in the Ephemera: For a one time bonus of +TN of the Ephemera’s Rank to a roll; this immediately removes the Ephemera from the character’s sheet.

Maintain the Ephemera: The player can spend a Style Die at any time during a session to carry-over Ephemera to the *next* session.

Formally Purchase the Ephemera: Spend 4 Training Points and a Style Die to permanently add to the character’s sheet. (After this, Rank can be improved as for any other Forte.)

PCs can have several Ephemera at a time, if they can spend the Style Dice to maintain them.



Character Generation:

Build an Adventurer

S7S allows you to play swashbuckling adventurers in a fantastic World Above the Blue. These heroes possess purity of heart, extraordinary skills, and potent drives, allowing them to perform amazing feats of derring-do. Yet they recognizably remain people, with the potential to do great good, great evil, or both.

With luck, the GM and players have already discussed what sort of campaign they want to play in, and talked about *Setting the Dials* (see Chapter 7, p. 261).

A S7S character is made up of several elements:

1. My **Name**? They call me...
2. I must confess, I'm known to have a **Foible** or two...
3. My strongest desire, my greatest hope, my **Motivation** (Good [+2] Forte) is...
4. I'm proud to say my **Nationality** is (Good [+2] Forte)...
5. And my **Past** (Good [+2] Forte), which has helped make me what I am today, is ...
6. You might say that my **Swashbuckling Forte** (Good [+2] Forte) is...
7. **Fortes**? Why yes—I've several! (3 additional Good [+2] Ranks; can be used to improve existing Fortes)
8. And **Techniques**? *Certes, monsieur!* (5 Technique "points")
 - Chained to Swashbuckling Forte = 1 point.
 - Chained to another Forte = 2 points.
 - Unchained to any Forte = 3 points.
9. **Style Dice & Training Points**: S7S characters start with at least 1 Style Die and zero (0) Training Points.
10. Not enough of me yet? Ah yes, I know the feeling... Perhaps this assortment of **Miscellany** (appearance, clothing, habits) will tide you over, hmm?

A player doesn't have to decide these elements in any particular order, though each could influence the selection of the others. It's also a good idea for the GM, if the players are not already familiar with the S7S setting, to give them a quick summary of the aspects of it which they feel are interesting. (Luckily, the underlying PDQ# system of S7S is fast and flexible, allowing nearly anything to be defined as a Forte.)



We'll create some example characters, step-by-step, to illustrate the process.

Name

Select a *Name* for the character. In this book, *Chapter 2* contains common names for the Major Islands of the World, but players should not feel limited by those lists. Any name is game.

Example 1: Amy selects the name Xenia.

Example 2: Bob has no idea what name he wants for his character.

Example 3: Chris has read the setting material, and likes the name *Pyotr Yvanson* for his character.



Core S7S Elements

Five aspects are *Core Elements*—every PC and most NPCs of significance will have them. They are the absolute minimum description for an interesting and effective S7S PC. The five Core elements are *Foible*, *Motivation*, *Nationality*, *Past*, and *Swashbuckling Forte*.

Select the specifics of the character's five Core Elements:

- ◆ *Foible* is a Foible, and is always unranked.
- ◆ *Motivation* is a Forte, and starts at Good [+2] Rank.
- ◆ *Nationality* is a Forte, and starts at Good [+2] Rank.
- ◆ *Past* is a Forte, and starts at Good [+2] Rank.
- ◆ *Swashbuckling Forte* is a Forte, starts at Good [+2] Rank.

Fiddly Bits: Swashbuckling Forte

The most common Swashbuckling Fortes in an S7S game are Fencing, Koldun, and Repartee.

Can a character have multiple Swashbuckling Fortes?

No. A character only gets one Swashbuckling Forte.

However, a character can *purchase* chained Techniques for any Forte; note: this is *expensive* (see the *Fiddly Bits: More Techniques* textbox on p. 190).

Can I take my Motivation, Nationality, or Past as my Swashbuckling Forte?

Sure, if you want to run with that concept. If you want to be a “Barathi’s Barathi,” just list it on your character sheet as *Nationality/Swashbuckling Forte: (RANK) Barathi*. Since you’re doubling-up here, take another Additional Forte (four instead of three) in the next step of character creation.

Can I take a Gift as a Swashbuckling Forte?

Absolutely! Though you’ll still have to spend a Style Die to do anything more complex than simply using your Gift’s MOD in Challenges and Duels, you’ll presumably have some Techniques to roll with in certain situations, increasing your chance of success!

See also the *Fiddly Bits: Additional Fortes* textbox on p. 189.

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Example 1: Amy decides Xenia has the following Core Elements:

FOIBLE: Unrequited Love (for an as-yet unnamed NPC).

MOTIVATION: Good [+2] Status (Xenia wishes to become an important person).

NATIONALITY: Good [+2] Sha-Ku.

PAST: Good [+2] Aristocrat (making her a Hakuteka of Sha Ka Ruq).

SWASHBUCKLING FORTE: Good [+2] Sha-Ku Ruqrider. (Note that Ruqrider has a *Prerequisite* of Sidekick: Ruq, so Xenia needs to spend at least one of her additional Fortes on her mount in the next step of character generation.)

Example 2: Bob decides his character has the following Core Elements:

FOIBLE: Revenge (against corrupt Crailese Falcons).

MOTIVATION: Good [+2] Revenge (against corrupt Crailese Falcons).

NATIONALITY: Good [+2] Crailese.

PAST: Good [+2] Grifter.

SWASHBUCKLING FORTE: Good [+2] Koldun.

Example 3: Chris decides Pyotr has the following Core Elements:

FOIBLE: True Love (the fair Yolanda, whoever she is).

MOTIVATION: Good [+2] Wealth.

NATIONALITY: Good [+2] Colronan Royalist.

PAST: Good [+2] Skyship Captain.

SWASHBUCKLING FORTE: Good [+2] Fencing.



Three Additional Fortes

Then select three more Fortes at Good [+2] Rank, or use those Ranks to improve other already-selected Fortes (for example, a player could use one of the three Goods to increase his Good [+2] Past: Scholar up to Expert [+4] Rank) or buy a new Forte of Repartee at Good [+2].

Example 1: Amy decides Xenia uses her three additional Fortes thusly: she uses one of them to boost Ruqrider to Expert [+4], then takes Good [+2] Beautiful and Good [+2] Sidekick: Ruq (Chimi)—which was a *Prerequisite* for Ruqrider.

Example 2: Bob decides his character uses his three additional Fortes thusly: he uses one of them to increase his Koldun to Expert [+4], takes Good [+2] Friend to the Rugged Tribes, and converts his last Good [+2] Forte into two Technique points (see textbox).

Example 3: Chris decides Pyotr uses his three additional Fortes by taking: Good [+2] Gift: Merhorse, Good [+2] Merchant, and Good [+2] Vehicle: Skyship. The GM mentions that he's willing to give the entire group a Team Vehicle (see p. 198), but Chris demurs—he wants Pyotr to be the *sole* owner of a skyship.



Fiddly Bits: Additional Fortes

If it is easier for some players to understand, one may count *only* those three Good [+2] Ranks of Additional Fortes as 6 “points” used to purchase additional character elements. These have a cost equal to:

- ◆ *Fortes*: The Rank’s MOD (Average [0] counts as 1). A character can “break” a Good [+2] Forte into two Average [0] Fortes. Because S7S characters are considered to already have an effective Average [0] Rank in anything that’s not secret, reserved, technical, or esoteric (for example, Alchemy, Aristocrat, Avokato, Gifts, Koldun, and Priest), breaking a Good [+2] Forte into two Average [0] Fortes is really only useful if the player wishes to have an Average [0] Ranked secret, technical, or esoteric Forte. (However, having an Average [0] Forte to roll against is a great way to earn *Training Points*—see p. 180!)
- ◆ *Foibles*: Counts as 1 point. With the GM’s permission, a player can “break” a Good [+2] Forte into two additional Foibles. (A great way to earn *Style Dice*—see p. 169!)
- ◆ *Techniques*: A character can “break” a Good [+2] Forte into two additional Technique points.
- ◆ These can be mixed and matched. For example, breaking a Good [+2] Forte into an extra Foible and an extra Technique point, or an extra Technique point and an Average [0] Forte, is perfectly fine.

Can a character spend his Additional Fortes to take a Forte that overlaps with one of his other Fortes?

Yes. A classic example here would be a character with the Colronan Musketeer Forte taking Fencing as one of his additional Fortes. The big drawback to this is that the player has limited the breadth of what the character can generally do.

On the upside, they’ve made the character a whirlwind of steel and death. This character’s Fencing Forte adds its MOD to the Musketeer MOD when rolling in combat (see *Chapter 6, Using Multiple Fortes for Tasks*, p. 208).

Spend 5 “Technique Points” to Purchase Techniques

At this point, players should use five “Technique Points” to select some Techniques. During character generation, a Technique that is:

- ◆ *Chained to Swashbuckling Forte* costs 1 point.
- ◆ *Chained to another Forte* costs 2 points.
- ◆ *Unchained to any Forte* costs 3 points.

Also at this time, players should design their characters’ Minions, Sanctums, Sidekicks, and Vehicles (if any).

Example 1: Xenia selects 5 Techniques all chained to her Ruqrider Swashbuckling Forte: **Idiom:** Acrobatic, **Situation:** Aerial Combat, **Situation:** Mounted, **Weapon:** Bow, and **Weapon:** Saber.

She must also detail her Sidekick. Her ruq mount, **Chimi** has: **Foible:** Glutton, **Fortes:** Good [+2] Ruq, Good [+2] Smart as a Person, Average [0] Beautiful Plumage; **Techniques:** Fast and War-Trained.

Example 2: Recall that Bob converted one of his character’s additional Good [+2] Fortes into two Technique points—this gives him a total of 7 Technique points to spend. He selects 7 Gifts as Techniques all chained to his Swashbuckling Forte of Koldun: Chimera, Dragon, Basilisk, Griffin, Merhorse, Pegasus, and Qilin.

Example 3: Pyotr spends 2 of his Technique points on Techniques chained to his Swashbuckling Forte of Fencing—**Idiom:** Acrobatic and **Weapon:** Paired (Rapier & Main-Gauche—and 3 points on a single unchained Technique of **vs. Foe:** Barathi—now, when up against any Barathi in any situaton, he can use that Technique with **any** of his Fortes!

He must also detail his skyship, **The Sparrow:** Good [+2] Skyship, Good [+2] Nimble. Also, **The Sparrow** has two Minion Crewmembers (Fritz and Otto) who are both Good [+2] Skysailors.

Fiddly Bits: More Techniques

As noted above, a character can use their extra Forte Ranks to purchase additional Techniques (if the GM permits): each Good [+2] Rank becomes 2 “Technique points.”

Style Dice & Training Points

S7S PCs start with at least **one (1) Style Die** (from *Social Awards*, see p. 174) and **zero (0) Training Points**.

NOTE

Some S7S NPCs may start with a “set” number of Style Dice.

Miscellany

Now just fill in some quick details on your character’s appearance, habits, preferred clothing, family background, and so forth. Players don’t need to condense this part into a single word or phrase like they did with Fortes. They should spend as many or as few words on describing the character’s appearance or experiences as they feel comfortable with. Whether a single sentence or four pages, it’s all fine. Even a short paragraph or two describing things like where the character was born, what his family is like, where he’s been, and who he’s met along the way can pay *big dividends* when actually playing that character.

Discussing the character’s Foible(s) and Motivation is a good idea in this section.

Players should feel free to describe the character’s physical appearance, even if it’s a quick thumbnail like “Elijah Wood with a goatee” or “short, brunette, and buxom.” Background info can be fleshed out further in-play, names of friends and enemies filled in, detailed character histories uncovered, turn-ons and turn-offs listed, an inventory of possessions made, whatever floats your boat.



IMPORTANT NOTE to GMs

Mine this section of the character’s write-up to provide them with interesting adventures!

And that’s it! The write-ups of the example characters can be found on the following pages.

Example Character 1: Xenia

Foible: Unrequited Love (for Tuqba Fu).

Motivation: Good [+2] Status

Nationality: Good [+2] Sha-Ku.

Past: Good [+2] Aristocrat (Hakuteka).

Swashbuckling Forte: Expert [+4] Ruqrider.

Additional Fortes: Good [+2] Beautiful and Good [+2] Sidekick (Ruq): Chimi (see below).

Techniques: *Ruqrider*: Idiom: Acrobatic, Situation: Aerial Combat, Situation: Mounted, Weapon: Bow, and Weapon: Saber.

Style Dice: 1

Training Points: 0

Miscellany: Xenia is a Ruqrider on detached duty, exploring the World—the Cynosure of the time was very interested in the other peoples and islands of the 7 Skies. She is a beautiful woman, on the short side, with long red hair that blows in the breeze. Her eyes are green and flash with haughtiness. Witty and well-spoken, she is as fast with a quip as she is with her saber. She is in love—unrequited, alas!—with another Ruqrider on detached duty: a man named Tuqba Fu. She pursues higher status in Sha-Ku society to make him *hers*.

Chimi: *Foible:* Glutton, *Fortes:* Good [+2] Ruq, Good [+2] Smart as a Person, Average [0] Beautiful Plumage; *Techniques:* Fast and War-Trained.

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Example Character 2: Naku of the Dark

Foible: Revenge (against corrupt Crailese Falcons).

Motivation: Good [+2] Revenge (against corrupt Crailese Falcons).

Nationality: Good [+2] Crailese.

Past: Good [+2] Grifter

Swashbuckling Forte: Expert [+4] Koldun.

Additional Fortes: Good [+2] Friend to the Rugged Tribes.

Techniques: *Koldun*: Chimera, Dragon, Basilisk, Griffin, Merhorse, Pegasus, and Qilin.

Style Dice: 1

Training Points: 0

Miscellany: Imprisoned for a crime he didn't commit (not that Naku is particularly innocent, mind you—he just didn't do what they said he did), Naku served his time in Sweetwater Wells, wearing a kolduncraft fetter. Now, after he's paid his "debt" to Crailese society, he seeks to make those that wrongfully incarcerated him pay... in spades!

Naku is 6' tall, about 200 pounds, with blonde hair and tanned skin.

Example Character 3: Pyotr Yvanson

Foible: True Love (the fair Yolanda).

Motivation: Good [+2] Wealth

Nationality: Good [+2] Colronan Royalist.

Past: Good [+2] Skyship Captain.

Swashbuckling Forte: Good [+2] Fencing.

Additional Fortes: Good [+2] Gift: Merhorse, Good [+2] Merchant, Good [+2] Vehicle: *The Sparrow* (see below).

Techniques: *Fencing:* Idiom: Acrobatic and Weapon: Paired (Rapier & Main-Gauche); *Unchained:* vs. Foes: Barathi.

Style Dice: 1

Training Points: 0

Miscellany: Pyotr is a skinny, wiry fellow, with long brown hair, a goatee, and beard. His favorite color is blue, and most of his clothing is in shades of that hue.

His father—Yvan Karlson—owns a fleet of merchant skyships on Colrona. Upon Pyotr becoming an adult, Yvan gave him a small skyship and trusty crew: if Pyotr can successfully increase this investment that Yvan has made in him, then Pyotr is worthy to become a full partner in the business. Therefore, Pyotr is adventure trading with a will!

Pyotr is also in love with the fair Yolanda, the daughter of his father's biggest rival. She returns his feelings. Once Pyotr becomes an established trader, he plans on marrying his sweetheart.

The Sparrow: Good [+2] Skyship, Good [+2] Nimble. **Crewmembers:** Fritz (Good [+2] Skysailor) and Otto (Good [+2] Skysailor).



Justifying Why the PCs are Together

Instead of allowing players to scamper off to separate corners of the game room to work on their characters (or worse, have people generate their characters in a complete vacuum), the GM should suggest that everybody sit around the game table and throw out their ideas and opinions on the sort of game they all want to play (see *Setting the Dials*, p. 261) and even each others' characters. This can lead to more cohesive groups, as players differentiate and interconnect their PCs.

For example, if two players both want to play a big, dumb, strong guy, simply saying that around the table could cause one of them to change their mind and go with a different character concept, or merely take the time to flesh out how his big, dumb, strong guy is different than the other player's. Some groups will take advantage of the ability to mix and match character strengths, optimizing the party so as to handle all sorts of threats. ("You be the physical guy, you be the mental guy, I'll be the social guy, and you be the professional guy." Congratulations: you've just made the A-Team.)

Another great feature of group character generation is the option to give the PCs an explicit common structure or organization. Maybe they have similar or complimentary Nationalities, Motivations, or Pasts, or were all witness to a particular event. A shared beginning point or pre-existing relationship between characters is a powerful tool for keeping the group together and friendly. Don't neglect it!



5

Some examples of shared PC structures in S7S

Cosmopolitan Friends: PCs may not share anything, and the group may be a totally mixed bag. Though the most unlimited in terms of character creation, this structure is the hardest to rationalize. The best ways to connect all the characters up might be to use one of the World-wide organizations or professions like the Koldun or the Church; make the characters the hired crew of a skyship under an NPC Corsair Captain; or throw them together by ill-luck as castaways, prisoners in the hell-mines, captives of slavers, or so forth.

Noble Household/Family Affair: The PCs are related, an extended family with pre-existing amities and enmities. This permits in-character bickering and intrigue that may or may not rise to dangerous (and unfun) levels; long-time family friends and servants can also slot in here.

Pirate Crew: All PCs are Pirates, joined together in their love of treasure and rum. Arrr!

Regimental Comrades: The PCs all belong to the same military organization (Musketeer, Wingman, Ruqrider, etc.); they probably possess the same Nationality and complementary professional specialties.

Someone Done Us Wrong: The PCs are joined together by a common desire for revenge (may or may not rise to the level of a Motivation) against an NPC that has harmed them.

The Sovereign's Troubleshooters: The PCs are (secret) agents of the leader of a cloud-island, tasked with seeking out and nullifying threats within and without. PCs should share the same Nationality, but can have wildly-varied professions and Fortes.

The two largest pitfalls with group character generation are: 1) the possibility of players getting pressured into a character they really don't want to play, simply to balance the group (a.k.a. "the Cleric Problem"); and 2) unless the players are skilled at keeping the division between player-knowledge and character-knowledge inviolate, it will be hard for a character to have a Deep Dark Secret that could cause a ruckus (of fun!) down the line. Be warned!

Animals

Essentially, animals in S7S act as minor types of characters. As such, they are streamlined for story-purposes rather than reality simulation. All animals have a Good [+2] (*Animal*) *Forté* that is used for the animal's basic abilities; the penumbra of the Animal *Forté* covers hunting, perception, survival, fleeing, fighting, and all other inherent capabilities that particular animal possesses.

Characters can take an animal as a Sidekick (see p. 163); these animals will also get a Name, a Foible, a few Fortes, and 2 Techniques.

NOTE

If they show up, mythological animals—like dragons, qilin, thunderbirds, etc.—should be statted as characters, replacing Nationality with *Territory* and Past with *Animal*.

Animal Techniques

Some possible Animal-specific Techniques include:

- ◆ **Armored:** Reflects a tough shell, thick hide, or protective scales; adds to defense rolls.
- ◆ **Big:** The animal is larger than an adult human; adds to defense rolls.
- ◆ **Fast:** The animal is generally fast, or faster than others of its type.
- ◆ **Hunter:** The animal is skilled in hunting, tracking, and stealth.
- ◆ **Small:** The animal is smaller than a human child; adds to defense rolls and helps it get into tiny spaces.
- ◆ **Smart:** The animal is more intelligent than others of its type can perform more complicated tasks.
- ◆ **Strong:** The animal is generally strong, or stronger than others of its type; adds to attack rolls and hauling heavy loads.
- ◆ **War-Trained:** The animal has been taught to fight human combatants; adds to attack rolls against people.

The Gift of the Chimera & Animals

The koldun-only Gift of the Chimera (p. 91) involves transforming into animals. The koldun becomes an animal with an Animal Forte Rank equal to their Koldun Rank, and can still use any of their other Fortes and Techniques in animal form.

Team Sanctums & Team Vehicles

PC-owned Sanctums (see p. 161) and Vehicles (see p. 165) have Fortes, much like a character does. One of the Fortes must be Vehicle: [X] or Sanctum: [X], and they generally have at least one other Forte.

Team Vehicles and Team Sanctums (see below) get *more* Fortes, based on the number of PCs in the group. They also have a Foible, selected by the GM; the Style Dice generated by this can be used by *any* crew member while on board the ship or within the base. For Team Vehicles, the PC group must come up with who fulfills each of the Officer positions (see p. 115).

Unlike characters, they do not have “every Forte” at Average [0] Rank—only those that make sense for a building or a vehicle.

Usually, the majority of NPC Sanctums and Vehicles that PCs will encounter will often have just a single Forte, but important NPCs will probably have more impressive Sanctums and Vehicles, comparable to those of individual PCs. The *really* important NPCs in a campaign might have a personal Sanctum or Vehicle equivalent to a Team's!

TEAM SANCTUM

A GM might give a group of characters a *Team Sanctum* (if they are a organization in and of themselves, or a distinct unit within a larger organization) that they hold in common.

Team Sanctums get a Good [+2] Sanctum Forte and one Good [+2] Forte per player; the GM selects a single Foible for the Sanctum.

Players can combine their assignments with other players' choices to increase the Rank of a single Sanctum Forte. For example, if two PCs picked “Training Room” as a Sanctum Forte, the Team Sanctum would have a Expert [+4] Training Room. Lastly, once per session, the GM has the right to say *Vexing Misfortune* (see p. 175) applies to the Sanctum.

With GM permission, PCs can build new Fortes into a Team Sanctum by spending their own Training Points on it.

TEAM VEHICLE

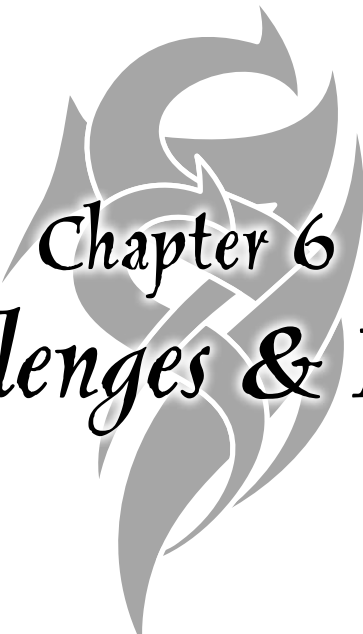
A GM might give a group of characters a *Team Vehicle* (say, they are a skyship crew) that they hold in common.

Team Vehicles get a Good [+2] Vehicle: (Type) Forte and one Good [+2] Forte per player; the GM selects a single Foible for the Vehicle.

Players can combine their assignments with other players' choices to increase the Rank of a single Vehicle Forte. For example, if two PCs picked "Fast" as a Vehicle Forte, the Team Vehicle would have a Expert [+4] Fast. Lastly, once per session, the GM has the right to say *Vexing Misfortune* (see p. 175) applies to the Vehicle.

With GM permission, PCs can build new Fortes into a Team Vehicle by spending their own Training Points on it.





Chapter 6

Challenges & Duels

When an S7S character tries to perform a task (whatever it is), the GM will determine if the task is a *Challenge* or a *Duel*. This determination usually revolves around matters of drama, pacing, and threat level.



A **Challenge** is a low-drama, low-threat task that can be quickly resolved in a single roll (pass-fail), against inanimate factors (keeping one's footing in a storm, climbing a wall, getting information from a contact, etc.) or fighting a few *Minions* (see p. 155). An S7S session can have any number of Challenges.

A **Duel** is a high-drama, high-threat task that must be resolved in several rolls (back-and-forth), against a *Minion Squad* (see p. 211), *Lieutenant*, *Villain*, or *Archvillain* NPC (see p. 210). An S7S session should only have one or two full-blown Duels.

Thumbnail Rule: Nameless vs. Named

If a situation involves a single *nameless* opponent or obstacle (haggling with a random merchant, dispatching a lone town guardsman, climbing an ordinary balcony, etc.), the task is probably a Challenge.

If a situation involves a *named* opponent or obstacle, or *several* nameless opponents (the Count of Erzay, the Chasm of Madness, or a squad of town guardsmen), the task is probably a Duel.

Challenges

A *Challenge* is any non-trivial task that a character is confronted with, where there would be only mild consequences for failure (though a small amount of damage—see p. 222—can be done to a character, if the situation warrants). Most Challenges involve some sort of opposition or obstacle, and are usually “done in one roll.” (Trivial tasks or ones without interesting consequences are *not* Challenges.)

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There are several types of Challenge that can arise, in S7S games.

- ◆ *Physical Challenges* include combat with *nameless* foes (see textbox, *Nameless vs. Named Opposition*) and brief athletic contests.
- ◆ *Mental Challenges* represent solving puzzles, analyzing clues, and engaging in short debates.
- ◆ *Emotional Challenges* can involve psychological issues (internal or external).
- ◆ *Professional Challenges* involve business dealings and mercantile skullduggery (see textbox).
- ◆ *Social Challenges* are connected to relationships with other people, groups, and society at large (see textbox).
- ◆ *Mystical Challenges* involve the use of supernatural abilities (see also textbox).

Professional Challenges

If a group is engaging in adventure trading, the rewards taking a cargo from Point A to Point B are best represented by the following general Challenge results (one can aim for anything, but may not make it; thus these graduations of success):

Average [7]: You make enough profit to resupply and pay wages.

Good [9]: You make enough to resupply, pay wages, and grant Average [0] Temporary Wealth to the Officers.

Expert [11]: You make enough to resupply, pay wages, and grant Good [+2] Temporary Wealth to the Officers and Average [0] Temporary Wealth to the crew.

Master [13]: You make enough to resupply, pay wages, and grant Good [+2] Temporary Wealth to the Officers *and* the crew.

Impressive [15]: You make enough to resupply, pay wages, and grant Expert [+4] Temporary Wealth to the Officers and Good [+2] Temporary Wealth to the crew.

Intimidating [17]: You make enough to resupply, pay wages, and grant Expert [+4] Temporary Wealth to the Officers *and* to the crew.

Impossible [19]: You make enough to resupply, pay wages, and grant Master [+6] Temporary Wealth to the Officers and Expert [+4] Temporary Wealth to the crew.

Inconceivable! [21+]: You make enough to resupply, pay wages, and grant Master [+6] Temporary Wealth to the Officers *and* to the crew.

If a character aims high and fails, **count the result as two full Ranks lower**. For example, if the character is aiming for Impressive [15] but gets a result of 14, that starts at Master [13] and goes down two Ranks to Good [9].

Social Challenges

Some gaming groups won't necessarily want to use the Challenge (or even the Duel) "rolled" mechanics to resolve social interactions. Instead, they may wish to rely on pure roleplaying. This is perfectly fine, but the mechanics do exist if a group wishes to use them. (However, if a character has any Social Fortes on his or her character sheet, this should clue the GM that the player desires at least *some* rolling for social Challenges.)

Indeed, for S7S, it is recommended to use a middle path for "rolled" social Challenges and Duels. This middle path involves three main elements.

First, the PC states his *intent* (what he is trying to achieve in the social interaction); second, he *describes* how he is trying to accomplish his intent; and third, *rolls*. (The GM may award some Style Dice to the PC at any point for insightful or flavorful roleplaying!)

Mystical Challenges

In S7S, mystical Challenges live and die on how hard they are to perform—see Chapter 5, *Limiting Koldun Abilities (Optional Rules)* textbox, p. 153.

If a GM simply permits broader mystical effects to happen with a Style Die cost, that campaign will have a **lot** of powerful magic.

If in addition to the Style Die cost, a GM **sets** TNs for doing mystical actions at low Difficulty (Average [7] to Good [9]), that campaign will still have substantial powerful magic.

If a GM sets the TNs moderately (Expert [11] and Master [13]), wide-ranging supernatural actions will be **somewhat** harder to do.

If a GM sets the TNs high (Impressive [15] or higher), wide-ranging supernatural actions will be **rather** harder to do.

This flexibility lets the GM set how **powerful** mystic elements of the setting are. This means that in a *low-mysticism* S7S campaign, lifting a coin with the Gift of the Pegasus could be an Expert [11] Challenge; while in a *high-mysticism* one, picking up an ox-cart and throwing it at someone might only be a Good [9] Challenge.

While it's best to be consistent, mystical things can be made more mysterious and frustrating by fluctuating the usual Difficulty Ranks—if it was a TN 9 to read someone's mind yesterday, but is TN 19 today (and might be TN 7 tomorrow!), this makes mystical options less reliable. . . which may or may not be to a group's taste. If the "aetheric flows" ebb and surge in this way, a GM should let his or her players know ahead of time—see *Setting the Dials*, p. 261. (Having different Difficulty Ranks for mystical Challenges based on the Sky the character happens to be in is a **great** way to mix things up.)

Lastly, a quick rule of thumb is that if the target of the mystical power is a character of Minion (see p. 210) level, the situation is a Challenge. If the target is a named NPC, has a Gift themselves, or has an alchemicraft or kolduncraft Ward (see p. 96), the task is at least a Difficult Challenge, and might be a Duel. If the target is a Gifted Lieutenant—see p. 210—or higher with a Ward, that is *definitely* a Duel.

NOTE

All these "tuning" mechanisms can be applied to other elements, if desired.

Fighting off one or two of the villain's henchmen, climbing a skyship's rigging during a storm, finding one's way through a topiary maze at a garden party, haggling for food, lifting a heavy object, convincing a guardsman that you do belong in the palace courtyard at midnight, or burning through rope bonds using the Dragon's Gift are all Challenges.

Time, Range, and Speed

For most things that come up in a S7S game, the following information is sufficient.

TIME

For most purposes, time measurements are as normal: seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, etc. However, the terms used in S7S for identifying the passage of "game time" are: Scenes, Turns, actions, and reactions.

Scenes are however long it takes for a distinct action or set of actions (combat, library research, defusing a bomb, a business meeting, traveling across town, etc.) to happen. Scenes can be long or short, and can collapse or extend time as necessary.

A *Turn* means "the set of all characters' next actions and reactions." Each character takes an individual *action*: that's when they make their move, say their piece, throw a punch, etc. Other characters *react* during a character's action—saying something back or performing a defense, usually—but reactions can only be *in response* to the actions of the character whose turn it currently is. They cannot initiate moves of their own until their action. The Turn is over when each character's action and any resulting reactions have been resolved.

How the Scenes and Turns of game time relate to the seconds, minutes, hours, etc. of real time is variable.

RANGE

In S7S, ranges are either *Near* (can punch it), *Middling* (can run up and punch it), *Far* (can throw or shoot at it), or *Too Far* (out of range). If one wants to connect Difficulty Ranks to these Ranges, Near is equivalent to Average [7], Middling is equivalent to Good [9], and so forth.

SPEED

In S7S, speeds are either *Slow* (leisurely walk), *Medium* (normal trot), *Fast* (a hurried trot or lope), or *Lickety-Split* (rapid gallop). If one wants to connect Difficulty Ranks to these Speeds, Slow is equivalent to Average [7], Medium is equivalent to Good [9], and so forth.

Difficulty Ranks

Difficulty Ranks are like Forte Ranks for things, tasks, and situations—like a wall that needs to be climbed, a spell that must be cast, a lock that must be picked, a swaying rope bridge that must be crossed, a trap which must be disarmed, a palace guard that must be sneaked past, a curse that must be broken, and so forth. The Difficulty Rank shows how challenging a thing, task, or situation is.

The GM looks at the *S7S Master Chart* (see p. 133, or the quick list below), and sets the Difficulty Rank of the task. From lowest to highest, the Ranks are:

- ◆ **Poor [5]**: A trivial task.
- ◆ **Average [7]**: A straightforward task.
- ◆ **Good [9]**: A complex task, requiring attention to detail.
- ◆ **Expert [11]**: An intricate task, difficult and requiring sharp concentration, hard for a typical untrained person (with an Average [0] Forte Rank).
- ◆ **Master [13]**: An extremely difficult task, hard for most professionals in the field (with a Good [+2] Forte Rank).
- ◆ **Impressive [15]**: Ridiculously difficult task, hard for most skilled and experienced professionals in the field (Expert).
- ◆ **Intimidating [17]**: Ludicrously difficult task, one in a million shot, hard for most Masters of the field.
- ◆ **Impossible [19]**: Even Masters of the field cannot regularly accomplish this task.
- ◆ **Inconceivable! [21+]**: The difficulty of this task beggars the imagination!

 The numbers in square brackets following the Difficulty Rank show its *Target Number* (or TN)—the number a character must match or beat on a roll to succeed or overcome the task.

Setting Difficulty Ranks is fairly common-sensical when using the chart: if a task is dead easy, it's probably Poor [5] Difficulty; if it's complicated, it's probably Expert [11] Difficulty; if it's beyond the normal aspects of life, it's probably Impressive [15] or higher.

GMs will usually figure out many Difficulty Ranks in advance when designing an adventure for players, but the simplicity of the *S7S Master Chart* makes it easy to determine the complexity of a task that comes up in play.

NOTE

To accomplish higher Difficulty Rank tasks, more Fortes have to be brought into play—either from the character’s other core attributes (like Motivation), or even from the assistance of other characters! (See the *Using Multiple Fortes for Tasks* textbox on p. 208.)

The lesson here is “when in dire straits, turn first to your other Fortes, then to your allies!”

Narration of Failure & Success?

If a player just *hates* narrating the elements of their PC’s failures and successes (see maintext, *Challenge Results*), the player can just say what they’re attempting and the GM can narrate the result instead. It’s totally okay. (However, this means the player will lose out in a key way of earning Style Dice for their PC.)

However, the player *always* has the option of adding to the greater story though narrating of their characters’ failures and successes.



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Challenge Results

For Challenges, the GM sets the Difficulty Rank (and thus TN) of the task. The player rolls two six-sided dice (2d6), at a minimum; if the character has relevant Techniques (see p. 139), those can contribute bonus dice to the roll (see textbox, *Advice: Ellipses*, p. 207). The player keeps the best two, then adds any MODs for relevant Fortes. Then, the *result* of the roll is compared to the TN.

If the result is lower than the TN, the player narrates how his PC failed in the task. The GM then tweaks the details of the PC's failure slightly (adding or subtracting elements) if necessary, or accepts the player's description as-is. Also, every failed roll in a Challenge earns a *Training Point* (see p. 180). Depending upon the sort of failure, the PC may even take *damage* (see p. 222)—and generate Story Hooks (see p. 240)—from it.

Players should keep in mind that failing at a task doesn't necessarily have to be a failure of skill on the part of the PC: it could just as easily be the fault of some change in the environment or the arrival of a new factor in the situation.

A good example would be if a character is climbing up a rope during a tower siege. A failed roll in Climbing might **not** be that the character loses his grip on the rope, but rather that a defender at the top dislodged his grapple, or friendly-fire cut the line, or a comrade higher on the line starts to slip and the character lets go to avoid being struck by his falling friend—or halts his advances to catch said falling comrade.

Example 1: Vanezza (Expert [+4] Gambling) is playing cards in a dockside tavern with a bunch of skysailors who have nothing better to do when ashore than gamble away their pay (Good [9] Difficulty). Vanezza rolls 2d6+4 vs. a TN of 9. She rolls a 2 and a 2, plus 4 for Gambling, for a total of 8. Vanezza narrates that she loses more coin than she wanted to... but she suspects that the skysailors are actually *cheating!*

Example 2: Wolfgang (Expert [+4] Repartee, with a Technique of *Sweet Talk*) is trying to charm a maid into letting him into the Countess Erzay's townhouse (Expert [11] Difficulty). Wolfgang rolls 2d6, plus 1d6 for his Technique. He will keep the best two dice, then add 4 vs. a TN of 11. He rolls a 1, a 2, and a 3; he keeps the 2 and 3, plus 4 for Repartee, for a total of 9. Wolfgang narrates that the maid, despite being swayed by his honeyed words, is too afraid of the Countess to grant him access.

Depending upon the nature of, and how well the player narrates, this sort of failure could help the character gain Training Points *and* Style Dice simultaneously, *provided the player takes the time to describe the failure in a particularly flavorful way.*



Advice: Ellipses

The absolute best advice for an S7S player is: **don't finish a statement while the outcome is "live."**

PC: "I hold my blade low, and make a stab for his kidneys and..." (Roll dice. Roll result is a failure, by 1 point.)

PC: "He's too fast for me, knocking my blade aside—*but* I spin in from the outside to blindside him with an elbow..." (This is the player pulling in a Technique of *Maneuver: Blindside*. The player uses the Flat +1 option for Techniques, and makes his roll result a tie... which PCs win!)

This allows a character to pull in Techniques *after* the roll.

Techniques can also be used before the roll, if desired, front-loading extra dice for effect—but the PC needs to include the Technique(s) being pulled in their initial narration.

If the result is equal or higher than the TN, the player narrates how his PC succeeded at the task. The GM then tweaks the details of the PC's success slightly (adding or subtracting elements) if necessary, or accepts the player's description as-is.

Example 1: Yuen the Nimble (Good [+2] Acrobatics) is climbing the outside wall of a Colronan aristocrat's townhouse (Good [9] Difficulty). Yuen rolls 2d6+2 vs. a TN of 9. He rolls an 11, plus 2 for Acrobatics, for a total of 13. "Yuen handily scales the wall."

Example 2: Shoshanna Fireblade (Master [+6] Koldun, with a Technique of *Dragon*) wants to set Count Erzay's carriage on fire (Master [13] Difficulty) as the villain escapes. Shoshanna rolls 2d6, +1d6 (keep best two), +6 vs. a TN of 13. She rolls a 1, a 5, and a 6, and keeps the 11, adds 6 for Koldun, for a total of 17. "The carriage explodes into flame!" (The GM adds) "...but the Count leaps free at the last second!"

The PC may earn *Style Dice* (see p. 169) for good description of their successes and failures. As noted for narrating failures above, succeeding on a task doesn't *necessarily* have to be solely based the skill of the PC. . . but cool actions by a character are *always* apropos.

Example: As noted above, Yuen the Nimble climbed that outside wall of an aristocrat's townhouse. He describes the alchemical lanterns that line the walls, as well as the tricky traps (barbed wire, nightingale bricks, paralyzing darts, etc.) that he surmounted in climbing the wall. The GM gives Yuen's player a Style Die for his impressive description.

If a player is having trouble coming up with interesting descriptions of ways to fail and succeed, they can take suggestions from the other players; otherwise, the GM should help out. (However, *please note*: in some gaming groups, it's impolite for other players to volunteer suggestions without first being asked.)

Using Multiple Fortes for Tasks

If the GM agrees that multiple Fortes can be brought to bear on a task, the character simply combines the MODs for all relevant Fortes—especially Motivations (see p. 156)—when rolling.

Furthermore, combining multiple Fortes also works if *multiple characters* wish to team-up to perform a task. If several characters are joining forces, only one of them needs to roll; usually, that's the character who's on the spot, but GMs can determine this as appropriate. If damage (see p. 222) is caused by failing at the task, the brunt of it is taken by the rolling character.

With the GM's permission, Techniques from different characters may also combine if they are working together. In such a case, it might be fun for the "owner" of the helping Technique to roll his or her die, while the primary character rolls his or her own.

Flashy Challenges

Characters can use their abilities in *Flashy Challenges* against other characters (NPCs or PCs, it makes no difference). Flashy Challenges *must* be a quick contest chock full of swashbuckler mojo.

In short, a Flashy Challenge is a straight roll (plus relevant MODs and Techniques), the challenger versus the challenged. Whoever has the higher roll result is the winner.

The winner of a Flashy Challenge gets a Style Die (from the Box, see p. 170); the loser of a Flashy Challenge takes a Failure Rank.

Flashy Challenges are a great way to weaken opponents before a Duel. (For Flashy Challenges *during* a Duel, see *Impasse* in the textbox on p. 220.)

Example: Confronted in his castle, Count Erzay (Expert [+4] Fencing) attempts to overawe Bernardo the Musketeer (Master [+6] Colronan Musketeer) with a Flashy Challenge: the Count uses his sword to slice through a candle sitting upon his desk. The Count rolls a 3 and a 5, plus 4, for a total of 12 in this Flashy Challenge.

Bernardo rolls 2d6, plus his Musketeer MOD. He gets a 3 and a 4, plus 6, for a total of 13. Since this is more than the Count's 12, Bernardo wins! Bernardo has sliced through an entire candelabra without much effect... until he blows at the candles, and all of them topple!

Bernardo gains a Style Die, and the Count takes a Failure Rank of Damage.

(If Bernardo had rolled, say, a 1 and a 3, for a total of 10—1+3+6=10—he wouldn't have beaten the Count's Flashy Challenge, and Bernardo would have taken a Failure Rank as damage, while the Count gained a Style Die.)

Duels

Duels are tasks that are *fun to play out in detail* (combat, chases, witty repartee, high-stakes gambling), which involve important people, important things, or extreme risks.

Duels in *S7S* include more than just the immediate success or failure of an attempted action: here, the conflict includes the back and forth of an active contest, out-maneuvering the competition, and wearing down an opponent's resistance. In Duels, 3d6 (plus MODs and Techniques) are divided between attack and defense rolls (see below for more detail).

As with Challenges, there can be several types of Duels: *physical*, *mental*, *social*, *emotional*, *professional*, and *mystical*. Examples of Duels include fencing with Baron Korek, seducing the Baroness Korek, fighting off four drunken ruffians, climbing the Deathspire, haggling with Hazin the Loquacious, debating the Minister of Musketry at Court, and so forth.

For ideas on how to apply Duel concepts to other types of duels, see the *Rhetorical Repartee* textbox (p. 211).





Duel Opponents

There are five “threat-levels” of NPC opponents in S7S:

- ◆ **Minion:** Usually (but not always) a nameless character, like a random soldier or pirate. Minions usually have only a single Average [0] or Good [+2] Forte. To a swashbuckling PC, they are only really a threat in a *Minion Squad* (see below).
- ◆ **Sidekick:** A named character that is somewhat memorable, like a servant, pet, or “Minion Sergeant.” Sidekicks have more Fortes than Minions, but less than Lieutenants (or PCs), do not usually have a Swashbuckling Forte, but may have Techniques. A Sidekick can be a minor threat to a swashbuckling PC, but are more often just obstacles to overcome.
- ◆ **Lieutenant:** A named character that is definitely memorable. Lieutenants are built like PCs (see *Chapter 4*), and have Foibles, Motivations, a Swashbuckling Forte, Fortes, and Techniques—but no starting Style Dice. A Lieutenant can be a minor to significant threat to a swashbuckling PC, depending upon how the NPC is generated and in *specific* situations.
- ◆ **Villain:** A named character of importance. Villains are built like PCs (see *Chapter 5*), and have Foibles, Motivations, a Swashbuckling Forte, Fortes, Techniques, and Style Dice. A Villain is a significant to major threat to a swashbuckling PC, depending upon how the NPC is generated, in *many* situations.
- ◆ **Archvillain:** A named character of great importance, skill, and power. Villains are built like PCs (see *Chapter 4*), but with *more* Fortes and Style Dice. Four extra Fortes (i.e., 8 extra “points” of MOD) makes a creditable Archvillain (More than eight extra Fortes—i.e., 16 extra “points” of MOD—isn’t recommended, unless the PC group is large or has access to substantial resources and allies.) An Archvillain is a significant to major threat to *an entire group* of swashbuckling PCs, depending upon how many extra elements the NPC is created with, the manner in which NPC is generated, in *most* situations.

Minions & Minion Squads

An individual Minion is no real threat to an S7S PC, just a Challenge. At least, not all by their lonesome.

However, two or more Minions with similar Fortes and MODs can combine into *Minion Squads*, which are treated in a Duel as a single character: they make one attack roll and one defense roll as a unit. Each Minion adds +1d6 to their pool of dice (remember, in a Duel, it's the best of three rolls). Minions *can* add their collective MOD to rolls—for example, a Minion Squad of 4 Good [+2] Guardsmen would roll 4d6+2, keeping the best 3 divvied between attack and defense. (Minion Squads of 2 are very weak, and not recommended, unless they have a MOD of at least Expert [+4].)

Damage (see p. 222) applied to a Squad wounds the individuals in a serial fashion: each Minion in a Squad can absorb *one hit* of damage. Thus, if a PC does two hits of damage to a Minion Squad, he has *Zeroed Out* (see p. 224) two Minions of that Squad.

(As a rule of thumb, a PC can easily handle a Squad composed of a number of foes equal to his relevant Forte's MOD. So an Expert [+4] Fencer should be able to take on a Squad of four Minions with no worries.)

Rhetorical Repartee (The Duel of Wits)

If your S7S game centers on court politics, where social and political dueling will be more likely than baring steel, it is a simple thing to extend the Duel concepts (see main text) to social Fortes more useful in such a campaign—for example, Repartee.

Mystic Struggle (The Duel of Wills)

The Gifted and Koldun use the Dueling rules in the main text for mystical conflicts with other empowered characters, using Gift: [X] or Koldun, as appropriate.

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The Duel Itself

In this section, Dueling is described with regard to Fencing, but the overall method can be used for one-on-one conflicts using *any* Forte (for example, Repartee for debate, Gambler for games of chance, etc.).

The character with the most Style Dice in front of him goes first; if there is a tie, then the highest Ranked character goes first. PCs win any ties with NPCs. (The “winner”

here can cede initiative to foes with lower totals, if he so desires. The benefits of going first are often balanced by the benefits of being able to react to an opponent's decisions.)

In Duels, characters roll 3d6. Relevant Techniques can add a +1 or a bonus die (before or after the fact; see the *Advice: Ellipses* textbox on p. 207); characters *keep the best three*. Then, the MOD(s) of relevant Forte(s) are added.

Dueling is handled in Turns; a character's Turn is usually composed of at least one action (attack) round and one reaction (defense) round.

Here is a quick list of the steps of a Turn of the Duel (each will be discussed in depth below):

1. **Engage Foes.** (*Initiative* for the Turn is usually won by the player—GM inclusive—who has the most Style Dice in front of him or her. The character who wins Initiative goes first—choosing to attack or defend. See also *The Element of Surprise!*, textbox below)
2. **Divvy Duel Dice:** Character divides their three dice each Turn between attack and defense.
3. **The Charge:** The attacker's attack and the defender's defense are announced.
4. **The Clash of Steel:** The attacker and defender roll. Roll results are compared.
5. **The Touch:** If necessary, damage (see p. 222) is determined.
6. **Volte-face:** Steps 3, 4, and 5 are repeated, this time with the attacker becoming the defender and vice-versa. After the second Clash of Steel (and Touch, if necessary), go to next set of duelists.
7. After all combatants have had their attack and defense, go to **Next Turn**. (That is, unless someone calls for an *Impasse*—see the *Fiddly Bits: Extra Duel Tweaks* textbox on p. 220.)

The Element of Surprise!

If surprised by the sudden appearance of an enemy, the surprised character—PC or NPC—loses Initiative for that Turn. If caught *completely and horribly unawares* (often by an turncoat ally, a long-dead foe back from the grave, impressive mystical effects, or other story-intensive situations), the character can only *strongly defend* on that Turn, with no attack roll possible. (And the GM should consider handing over some Style Dice.)



Engage Foes

A character must *Engage* foe(s) to enter into the Duel with them, and can only Engage **two** foes per Turn (Minion Squads count as a single foe).

NOTE

The character with Initiative (see above) sets the tone for Engaging Foes.

If there are four or more characters in a Duel, they **must** split into pairs and trios (see also the PCs *Ganging Up* textbox on p. 214)—because that is the swashbuckling way.

A character's defense roll stands against **all** Engaged opponents, but separate attacks must be made against each foe.

When it's not possible to split up into pairs and trios—possibly because the rest of your party has mopped up the Minions and everyone's descending on the master villain—there are a few things to consider:

- ◆ Swashbuckling Villains and Archvillains are often smarter than comic book supervillains... When outnumbered, they know this is a good time to call for reinforcements, take a breather to heal, or even simply run away. This is also a good time for the Villain start monologuing to delay or confuse heroes (switching a Duel of Blades to a Duel of Words, perhaps?).
- ◆ Players should make sure everyone stays involved—take turns “tagging out,” with the ones taking a breather using that time to recover lost damage, etc.
- ◆ Unengaged characters can try to cover any means of exit, if the intent is to get the villain to surrender.
- ◆ See also the PCs *Ganging Up* textbox on p. 214.

Example 1: Xenia (Expert [+4] Ruqrider; Techniques of *Idiom*: Acrobatic, *Situation*: Mounted, *Weapon*: Bow, and *Weapon*: Saber) is engaging a Minion Squad of four Good [+2] Guardsmen.

Example 2: Pyotr (Good [+2] Fencing; Techniques of *Idiom*: Acrobatic and *Weapon*: Paired Rapier & Main Gauche, as well as an unchained Technique of *Foe*: vs. Barathi (his Forte of Good [+2] Merhorse may come into play, too) begins a duel with Muktar the Hawk, a Lieutenant-level foe (with Expert [+4] Sandman; Techniques of *Idiom*: Fierce, *Situation*: Mounted, *Location*: In Taverns; and *Weapon*: Scimitar).

PCs Ganging Up

Unless the Minion Squad is very large, or the Lieutenant-level opponent(s) is highly optimized, it is *tres gauche* for PCs to join forces against them. **Bad Form!**

When characters team up (be they PC or NPC) versus a single foe, only **one** of the characters rolls—the other characters simply provide the MODs of their relevant Fortes to the roll.

(This rule is to encourage the swashbuckling genre's tendency towards one-on-one duels, rather than several against one.)

All this being said, PCs are *totally* encouraged to gang up on Villains and Archvillains. Indeed, they may need to, simply to survive!

Divvy Duel Dice

In Duels, the PC will be rolling three six-sided dice (3d6). First, the PC must determine how many dice to apply to attack and how many to defense.

There are four main ways to divide up the basic 3d6 in Duels between attack and defense:

1. *All-out Defense (Negligible Attack)* = 0d6 attack, 3d6 defense.
2. *Strong Defense (Weak Attack)* = 1d6 attack, 2d6 defense.
3. *Strong Attack (Weak Defense)* = 2d6 attack, 1d6 defense.
4. *All-out Attack (Negligible Defense)* = 3d6 attack, 0d6 defense.

6

Note that even if a duelist is going for an All-Out Attack, they still get a Negligible Defense. Though they are rolling zero dice, with a result of zero, they *still* get to add their Fencing MOD to that. (While only a Master [+6] Fencer might be able to totally defend against a Minion Squad that rolls poorly, this Negligible Defense will help minimize the amount of damage the character may take.)

Using Fencing Techniques allows the character to add a +1 bonus or to “re-roll” dice to maximize the basic 3d6 roll result (see *Chapter 5, Techniques*, p. 139). Technique dice do not have to be assigned specifically to attack or defense before they're rolled. They can also be used *ex post facto* (see *Advice: Ellipses*, p. 207), if relevant.

Example 1: Xenia will go for a Strong Attack (Weak Defense) against the Minion Squad; this is 2d6 for attack and 1d6 for defense. The Minion Squad will respond with a Strong Defense (Weak Attack); this is 1d6 for attack and 2d6 for defense—but since there are 4 of them, they have an extra die to roll, which they can use in place of any low-result die.

Example 2: Pyotr is wary of Muktar, so he opts for a Strong Defense (Weak Attack); this is 1d6 for attack and 2d6 for defense. Muktar, for his part, will be using an All-Out Attack (Negligible Defense); this is 3d6 for attack and zero dice for defense.

Always AoA?

Have a character who's always got Initiative and All-out Attacking (and it's no longer fun)?

Mix it up a little. Think about Surprise (see p. 212) to steal Initiative, a high MOD Minion Squad to get through his Negligible Defense, or someone sniping from a distance (with firearm or mystic powers).

The Charge

The attacker announces and describes his type of attack (and any Fortes used), then the defender announces and describes his type of defense (and any Fortes used).

The Charge is an excellent place to pick up a few more Style Dice with good description of a character's attack or defense.

Example 1: Xenia, already in the classic fighting stance of the Sha-Ku Ruqridders, bounds forward and begins laying about with her saber. (She is using Expert [+4] Ruqrider and adding in her Technique of Weapon: Saber up front; if she wanted to be a little more effusive in her description of "bounds forward" she could probably pull in the *Idiom*: Acrobatic Technique.) Her Forte gives her MOD bonus of +4 to her attack and defense rolls, and her Technique allows her to re-roll a die (if she chooses, or add a flat +1).

For their part, the guardsmen are a bit taken aback by the screaming saber-wielding savage, but know their duty. The Minion Squad has no Techniques, but their Good [+2] Guardsman Forte adds its MOD to their attack and defense rolls, and since there are four of them, they're rolling four dice in total.



Example 2: Because Pyotr has heard tales of the martial prowess of the Zultanista Sandman since he was very young, this influences his assay. Furthermore, he is placing trust in his mystical Gift of the Merhorse, to gain foresight of Muktar's movements before the Sandman even makes them! (Pyotr is using the Fortes of Good [+2] Gift: Merhorse and Good [+2] Fencing.) His Fortes give a combined +4 MOD to both his attack and defense.

Muktar moves forward with brutal speed and strength, whirling his flashing scimitar, with seemingly little thought of even trying to parry Pyotr's blows. (He is using his Expert [+4] Sandman Forte and the Techniques of *Idiom*: Fierce and *Weapon*: Scimitar.) His Forte gives his MOD bonus of +4 to his attack and defense rolls, and his Techniques allows him to re-roll two dice, or add a total of +2.

Duel Dice Flair

An amusing conceit might be for players to roll their attack dice and their defense dice simultaneously from separate hands—one's dominant hand being the attack dice, and the off-hand being the defense dice.

Alternately or in addition to this, players might designate different colors of dice for attack and defense.

The Clash of Steel

In the Clash of Steel, the attacker's roll, plus any relevant MODs from Fortes (plus any use of Techniques), is compared to the defender's roll, plus any relevant MODs from Fortes (plus any use of Techniques).

Comparing the roll results:

- ◆ If $\text{attack roll} \geq \text{defense roll}$, the attacker does damage to the defender (see below, *The Touch*).
- ◆ If $\text{attack roll} < \text{defense roll}$, the attack does no damage.

NOTE

The attacker's defense roll result and the defender's attack roll result *can* be rolled at this time and saved for the Volte-face phase of the Turn (see below).

As for Challenges, the player narrates the PC's successes or failures (possibly earning Style Dice; in addition, recall that Training Points are earned by failed rolls; see *Chapter 5*, p. 180), and the GM modifies the description if needed.

In PC vs. PC match-ups, *the losing character's player* narrates. Ties between PC mean no damage is done, no Training Points are earned, and the pair of them need to combine their narrations of the lock-up.

Example 1: Xenia is rolling $2d6+4$ for attack and $1d6+4$ for defense, and she has a Technique in play. The Guardsman Minion Squad is rolling $1d6+2$ for attack and $2d6+2$ for defense, and it has a bonus die (because there are 4 of them).

Xenia gets a 3 and a 3 on her attack dice, a 5 on her defense die; she rolls her Technique die and gets a 4, and uses this 4 to replace one of her 3s on the attack roll. Thus, her overall attack roll is $3+4+4=11$. Her overall defense roll is $5+4=9$.

The Minion Squad gets a 4 on its attack die, a 2 and a 4 on its defense dice; and rolls a 2 on its extra die for having 4 Minions in the Squad—which does it no good. The Squad's overall attack roll is $4+2=6$, and its overall defense roll is $2+4+2=8$.

Comparing Xenia's attack of 11 to the Guardsman Squad's 8 means Xenia has done damage to the Squad—go to the Touch! (The Squad's attack roll and Xenia's defense roll are saved for the Volte-face.) Howling her barbaric warcries, Xenia's saber is a whirlwind of steel, driving back the foolish guardsmen!

Example 2: Pyotr is rolling $1d6+2+2$ for attack and $2d6+2+2$ for defense. Muktar is rolling $3d6+4$ for attack and $0d6+4$ for defense, with two Techniques in play.

Pyotr gets a 3 on his attack die, a 2 and 5 on his defense dice. His overall attack roll is $3+2+2=7$. His overall defense roll is $2+5+2+2=11$.

Muktar gets a 1, a 3, and a 6 on his attack dice, a zero on his defense die, and he uses his Technique dice to re-roll the 1 and the 3, rolling a 2 and a 4. He uses the 2 to replace the 1 and the 4 to replace the 3. Thus, his overall attack roll is $2+4+6+4=16$. His overall defense roll is $0+4=4$.

Comparing Pyotr's attack of 7 to Muktar's defense of 4 means Pyotr has done damage to the Sandman—go to the Touch! (Muktar's attack roll and Pyotr's defense roll are saved for the Volte-face.) Pyotr's nimble blade easily pierces the rudimentary defenses of the charging Sandman's furious assault... but at what cost to our hero?



The Touch

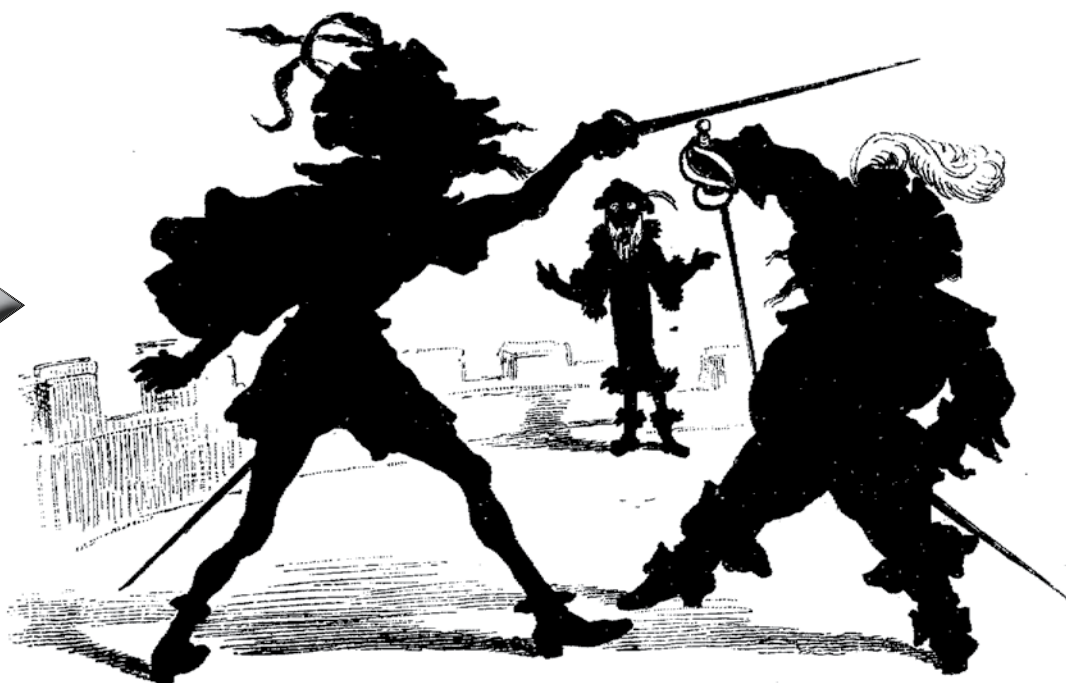
If damage has been taken, the defender applies it to his or her Fortes. See p. 222 for a full discussion of damage.

Also, note that the first hit of damage taken by a PC in a Scene generates a *Story Hook* (see p. 240), as does any damage that Zeroes Out a Forte.

IMPORTANT NOTE

For purposes of the Volte-Face (see below), even if a foe is greatly weakened or even Zeroed Out in a PC's attack, the foe's attack *still* goes off.

Example 1: Xenia's attack of 11 to the Guardsman Squad's 8 means the Squad takes 3 ranks of damage, in this case Wound Ranks. That's enough to Zero Out (see p. 224) three of the Guardsmen entirely. This will drop the strength of the Squad to only one Minion next Turn—making the sole survivor not even Duel-worthy!



Example 2: Pyotr's attack of 7 to Muktar's defense of 4 means Muktar takes 3 Wound Ranks in damage. Muktar is able to spread the damage out amongst enough of his other Fortes, such that his Sandman Forte remains at Expert [+4].

Volte-face

The attacker now becomes the defender, and the defender the attacker. Run through the Charge and the Clash of Steel again (and the Touch, if necessary). See above for the IMPORTANT NOTE regarding weakened or Zeroed Out defenders.

Then, the spotlight moves onto the next set of duelists. When all sets of duelists have had their attack and defense, move to the next Turn.

Example 1: The Squad's attack of 6 to Xenia's 9 means the Squad's blows were easily warded off.

Example 2: Muktar's attack of 16 to Pyotr's 11 (2 + 5, plus 4) means that Pyotr should take 5 Wound Ranks in damage. However, Pyotr decides to try and pull in his two Fencing Techniques of *Idiom: Acrobatic* and *Weapon: Paired Rapier & Main Gauche*. Pyotr describes how he's trying to use his Techniques: "I twist away into a tumbling roll, using both my rapier and main-gauche to deflect Muktar's blows!" (Pyotr chooses the re-roll option for Techniques on both counts—he rolls a 4 and a 5. He replaces his roll of 2 with his Technique roll of 5; this makes his defense 5 + 5, plus 4, for a total of 14.)

Though Pyotr could not counter Muktar's attack, through the use of Techniques, he was able to reduce the damage he took from 5 Wound Ranks to only 2 Wound Ranks!

Taking those two Wound Ranks, Pyotr temporarily reduces his Good [+2] Skyship Captain Forte to Poor [-2], because he doesn't think his navigational acumen will help him in this swordfight (and gains a Story Hook, see p. 240, related to Skyship Captain).



Repeat the Duel Turn sequence as many times as necessary to determine overall victory, by one of the duelists surrendering, escaping, or being knocked out of the conflict (see below, *Zeroing Out*).

See Also...

Check out the Fiddly Bits on the next couple pages for more options to spice up your duels!

Fiddly Bits: Extra Duel Tweaks

Here are some extra methods to add more interest to Duels. The Tweaks marked with an asterisk (*) can be used once per Duel for free, but after that use require the expenditure of a Style Die.

Cyrano Gambit: If a character wishes to add in a *seemingly unrelated* Forte—for example, adding Repartee to their Fencing in a swordfight—to the relevant Forte of the Duel, in order to take advantage of its MOD (see the *Using Multiple Fortes for Tasks* textbox on p. 208), they *must* roleplay it to get the bonus!

Dirty Tricks*: Throwing sand in eyes, low blows, “what in the world can that be?” (points off-screen)—all sorts of stuff. Counts as a *Feint* (see below).

Disarm*: An attack against a foe’s *weapon* rather than a foe himself. The attacker must do at least his foe’s Fencing MOD in damage to make the foe drop their weapon. Disarmed foes cannot use Fencing (unless they have the Unarmed Fighting Technique; see p. 141), and must either find a new weapon, brawl, surrender, or attempt to escape.

Feint*: An attack can be declared a Feint. If the attack is successful, the character does *no damage* but gains the margin of success (minimum 1 for a tie) as a *bonus* on their next Turn’s attack. If the feint fails, the character gets the margin as a *penalty* on their next Turn’s defense roll. Both engaged duelists can Feint.

Gifts in Melee: Mystical Gifts can also be used in a Duel. They can be an attack, a defense, or add to a character’s attack or defense rolls as any other Forte (see *Using Multiple Fortes*, p. 208) or as a Technique like *Weapon: Magic*. The direct target of a hostile Gift during a Duel can resist its effects with their defense roll; if the target is also Gifted, they may also add the MOD of their Gift to this roll, *provided they can explain how such would work to the GM’s satisfaction*. Low Mysticism vs. High Mysticism (see p. 275) may or may not be a factor.

Impasse*: Anyone (PC or NPC) can call for the momentary suspension of Duel-based violence between Turns. (Impasses are those moments during a fencing duel in a swash-buckling movie where there’s no active sword-related mayhem—getting locked corps-a-corps, slicing candles, yanking rugs, grabbing the chandelier rope and cutting it for some elevator action, that sort of thing. It’s basically a Flashy Challenge—see p. 208—that gives the winner a mild advantage and dings the loser for a Failure Rank.) Impasses can represent the foes locked corps-a-corps (a Flashy Challenge of strength, useful in changing who has initiative), maneuvering for footing (a Flashy Challenge of tactics or agility, again to change initiative), pausing to banter (a Flashy Challenge of Repartee and an



opportunity to gain Style Dice), attempting to alter the situation (escaping the conflict, fundamentally changing the Duel from a Fencing Duel to one of Repartee, negotiating terms of victory or surrender, or anything in that vein. **Recall** that the winner of a Flashy Challenge gets a Style Die, and the loser takes a Failure Rank. (GMs should decide if Impasses use 3d6 for being in Duels, or 2d6 like other Flashy Challenges, and stick to that rubric.)

Parry-Riposte*: If a character is defending before attacking in a Turn, he may sacrifice his attack roll for the Turn and declare his defense a *parry-riposte*. If the defense is successful, the character gains the margin of defense (minimum 1 for a tie) as a *bonus* on his next Turn's attack. If the defense fails, the character gets the margin of defense as a *penalty* on their next Turn's attack. If both duelists declare that they are Parry-Riposting, the nothing happens that Turn. Neither are attacking, so neither can defend.

Surrender: Players who decide to surrender before Zeroing Out may put conditions on their defeat—a *conditional surrender*. ("If I surrender, you will let Lady Agatha and Lord Gilgamesh go free?") A character can always offer terms for his withdrawal, so long as he isn't *totally* defeated. Whether or not their opponent accepts said terms is another question. (If the NPC displays Bad Form, the PC gets a Style Die.)

Weapon Recovery: Use an action to recover a lost weapon (or come into possession of a new one).

Damage

If a character fails at a Challenge or Duel, there is a good chance that they might take *damage*. Damage is the general term for the loss of capability to continue a task; it is a loss of resources, be they physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual. In S7S, this damage is represented by a temporary reduction to the character's listed Fortes.

The player selects which of his Fortes takes the damage, and can spread out the overall damage across several Fortes at once. Whichever Forte the player decides takes the "first hit" of damage in a conflict generates a *Story Hook* (see p. 240), as does the damage that causes one of a character's Fortes to *Zero Out* (see below, p. 224).

If a character is forced to use a Forte that has taken damage, before that damage has been recovered (see p. 225), they use the current Rank.

In *Challenges*, damage is equal to the difference between the roll total—after including all MODs—and the TN. In *Flashy Challenges*, the loser takes a single rank of damage (a Failure Rank; see below). In *Duels*, damage is equal to the difference between the roll totals of the successful attacker and failing defender. (In the case of tied rolls, PCs **always** win versus NPCs, and do a single rank of damage. In the case of ties between PCs, neither wins and no damage is done.)

There are two main types of damage: *Failure Ranks* and *Wound Ranks*. The type of damage accrued depends upon the nature of the situation. A character can suffer both types in the course of a conflict situation. They are functionally the same thing *during* a challenge, but are regained by the character at different rates *afterward* (see below, *Recovering from Damage*).

6

Failure Ranks

In mental, social, and some physical challenges, this loss of capability is usually fleeting, and is represented by *Failure Ranks*. In athletic contests, this reflects fatigue. In mental challenges, people get confused or exhaust their arguments. In social situations, threats to loved ones can sap the will to fight on, or a person's resistance to seduction can be worn down. In business conflicts, a character's stratagems can be outmaneuvered or their assets can be liquidated, and so on.

All Failure Ranks are recovered at the end of a Scene (see below, *Recovering from Damage*).

Wound Ranks

In many physical challenges (especially duels), the harm is more enduring, and is represented by *Wound Ranks*. This is most often injuries taken in combat, but also includes *environmental damage* taken by running through a fire, falling off a roof, or starting to drown. While most things that do physical injury to a character cause him to accrue Wound Ranks, some physical actions aimed at delaying, tripping, entangling, grappling, pushing, pulling, flipping, throwing, tiring, or confusing an opponent could be seen as Failure Ranks instead.

Only *some* Wound Ranks are recovered at the end of a Scene (see below, *Recovering from Damage*).

The Key to Understanding S7S Damage

Basically, in any S7S challenge or duel, some of a character's Fortes can be thought of as useful for either "attack," "defense," or "absorption." The player has to make choices about what to sacrifice for their character's well-being and effectiveness. It's resource management at a basic level. The player must make a decision on which abilities will be most useful for the remainder of the conflict scene.

As an example, say a character has Good [+2] Rank in the following Fortes: *Acrobatics*, *Fencing*, *Puzzle-Solving*, and *Spice Merchant*.

In combat (a physical challenge), the character will probably opt to keep *Acrobatics* and *Fencing* at Good [+2] as long as possible, and apply Wound Ranks to *Puzzle-Solving* and *Spice Merchant*. In an argument (a social challenge), the character will want to keep *Puzzle-Solving* high for as long as possible, and take Failure Ranks on *Acrobatics* and *Fencing* first. If haggling over something at the market (could be a mental, a social, or even a professional conflict, depending on how the GM spins the situation), the character would protect *Spice Merchant*, and maybe try to keep *Puzzle-Solving* at Good [+2] as long as he could, while sacrificing *Acrobatics* and *Fencing*.

Additionally (and importantly!), a player's selection of which Fortes takes the *first hit* of in conflict gives the GM a powerful tool for generating *Story Hooks* (see p. 240) for future Scenes and sessions.

The abstraction of how Failure or Wound Ranks are applied isn't meant to be a one-to-one relation ("Hey, why does getting punched in the face lower *Spice Merchant*?"), but amusing justifications can be made up anyway ("Well, your black eye makes it hard to see your wares..."), which could become fully-fledged *Story Hooks*. Though the player decides upon which ability the damage affects, either the player or the GM can come up with a rationale, if they want.

Zeroing Out

When a character is forced to reduce the last of his Fortes *below* Poor [-2] Rank, this causes them to *Zero Out* that Forte. A Zeroed Out Forte can no longer be used for any rolls or to absorb more damage. Note, however, a character gets another Story Hook (see p. 240) whenever he Zeroes Out a Forte based on that Forte.

After a character Zeroes Out all of his Fortes, he is at defeat's doorstep: the character is now *Mostly Dead*.

NOTE

This is different from older versions of *PDQ*, where Zeroing Out *any* Poor Quality knocked a character out of a conflict.

ADDITIONAL NOTE

A single damage Rank is enough to Zero Out a Minion.

Mostly Dead

Characters who have Zeroed Out *all* of their Fortes ("Death first!") are *Mostly Dead*. This means two things:

1. The character unconditionally surrenders, and is at the complete mercy of their opponent.
2. For the rest of the session, the character is *Mostly Dead* (for physical damage). Other forms of similar impairment are:
 - *Driven Insane* (for mental damage)
 - *Social Pariah* (for social damage)
 - *Bankrupted* (for business or professional damage)
 - *Soul-burned* (for mystical damage)

In *S7S* games, just because a character is Mostly Dead **does not** mean they die. It **does** mean that the character's opponent can then knock out, clap in irons, or *Coup de Grace* the fallen character. Being Mostly Dead is often just the prelude to an exciting escape from a Villain's dungeon!



Coup de Grace

For physical conflicts, the default assumption in S7S is that characters can *only* be killed once they are unconscious or otherwise helpless. This requires no roll, check, or action, simply a statement on the attacker's next action that he wishes to kill the victim. Only the most monstrous of villains and grimmest of heroes will opt to do this regularly—many characters will have codes of honor, hidden agendas, or mystical limitations that prevent the killing of a helpless foe.

Recovering from Damage

Once a Scene ends, the injured character will begin to recover lost Ranks of damage. However, Mostly Dead characters have a tougher row to hoe (see below).

Failure Rank Recovery

All Failure Ranks are recovered at the end of the Scene, restoring all affected Fortes to their starting Ranks.

Wound Rank Recovery

Only some Wound Ranks are recovered at the end of the Scene; players roll 2d6 to determine the number of Ranks their characters get back. Each player selects which Forte Ranks are restored. However, the character will not recover any more Ranks until the end of the *next* Scene, when the GM tells them to roll again, a Forte comes into play, or the character spends Style Dice to heal (see p. 176).

NOTE

A relevant Forte like "Quick Healer" should allow the character to gain back the standard 2d6 roll, plus their MOD. A Foible like "Slow Healer" would mean that the character only gets one (1) Rank back of normal recovery—but they do gain some Style Dice for the Foible.)





Mostly Dead Recovery

If a character is Mostly Dead, Style Dice *must* be used to restore all of the character's Fortes to Poor [-2] before normal recovery can happen. To restore a Forte to Poor [-2] from zero, a *Style Die per Forte* must be spent. (However, these Style Dice can be spent by any other player on the character's behalf.) Once all of a character's Fortes are at Poor [-2] Rank, normal healing may commence.

Furthermore, the character gains a new Story Hook (see p. 240), related to his recovery.

(Alternately, the character can forego spending the Style Dice and the Story Hook, take some in-story time to recover, and pick up an additional Foible related to their experience of being Mostly Dead.)

Cannons vs. Characters

What happens if a Vehicle or Sanctum's weapons fire and strike a character?

Generally, mayhem.

If a character is unlucky enough to be directly hit with a cannonball (outside of *Vehicular Duels*; see p. 229), treat the amount of damage they take as for *If guns are one-shot kill weapons* in *Setting the Dials*, p. 261.

Vehicular Challenges & Duels

Operating as the crew of a skyship (or other Vehicle, or the staff of a *Sanctum*, see p. 161) in *S7S* is a more constrained situation than freewheeling personal ones. Where on the character-scale, the spotlight is one individual being stylish and awesome, on the ship-scale, the spotlight is on acting together *as a team*. The focus is thus placed on the PC who is the Captain, who acts as a prism to reflect, split, and reintegrate the spotlight amongst his or her Officers (the other PCs).

Some Vehicle Basics

As noted in *Chapter 5*, a Vehicle adds its applicable Modifier to any crew member's roll when the crewmember is performing shipboard actions (see *Using Multiple Fortes*, p. 208). To go fast, for example, a Good [+2] Skysailor in a Cloud-Skiff (Average [0] Skyship, Good [+2] Fast) rolls against a 2d6+2+2, or 2d6+4.

And A Quick Reminder

There are several Officer positions (see p. 115) on a PC ship—the *First Mate* is responsible for damage control, the *Master of Arms* is responsible for boarding and repelling actions, the *Master of Guns* makes attack rolls, and the *Sailing Master* makes defense and movement rolls. Also, a Vehicle has a number of NPC crewmembers equal to the MOD of the Vehicle Forte Rank. These count as Minions (see p. 155), and each have a Name and one Forte at Good [+2] Rank. (If a Forte of Extra Crew is taken, use the TN of the Extra Crew Forte to determine the number of crewmembers.)

6

Vehicular Challenges

Plotting a reasonable course from Barathi to Colrona; keeping watch for foul weather, airborne obstacles, or enemy ships; repairing a mast under adverse conditions; and maneuvering through the Jungle Sky at speed without snagging or destroying one's skyship would all be Vehicular Challenges.

Here are some examples of Vehicular Challenges, along with the Officer most likely to be involved in it (often, but not always, after the Captain's direction):

- ◆ **Basic Travel:** *Sailing Master*. TN set by travel conditions, minimum TN9.
- ◆ **Fancy Navigation:** *Sailing Master* or *Captain*. TN set by difficulty, of course; minimum TN11.
- ◆ **Fancy Maneuvers:** *Sailing Master*. TN set by environmental conditions and difficulty of what is being attempted, minimum TN11.
- ◆ **General Orders:** *Any character*. "Somebody do [SOMETHING] about that [THING]!" TN set by difficulty, again; minimum TN9. (Examples include "Somebody knock some of those ruqriders out of my sky!" or "Somebody fetch me a spyglass!")
- ◆ **Lookout:** *Officer of the Watch*. TN set by environmental and target factors (weather, debris, Stealth Forte of a Pirate skyship, etc.) minimum TN9.
- ◆ **Preparing for Making/Repelling a Boarding Action:** *Master of Arms*. TN set by range between ships; TN9 for "alongside" to TN17 for "long range" (via wingcloak, of course). On successful board/failed repel, and expenditure of a *Vehicle Die* (seep.229), crew melee goes to standard Duel rules (seep.209, and especially the *Boarding Actions* textbox on p. 235).
- ◆ **Non-Combat Gunnery:** *Master of Guns*. TN set by size and difficulty of target, minimum TN7.
- ◆ **Restocking Supplies:** *Captain, First Mate, Purser, or Cook*. (See *Professional Challenges*, p. 201.)
- ◆ **Selling Cargo:** *Captain, First Mate, or Purser*. (See *Professional Challenges*, p. 201.)
- ◆ **Ship Repairs:** *First Mate*. TN set by degree of damage; TN7 for "minor" to TN17 for "barely holding together." Successful roll "heals" one Rank of Vehicle Damage.

Example: At the Captain's direction, Nym Naughtwark, Sailing Master (Good [+2] Skysailor) of the *Arrow* (Good [+2] Skyship) is plotting a radical course from Crail to the minor Island of Hekuba through the Sky of Stones, so as to help the *Arrow* get there as fast as possible. The GM determines that the TN for figuring out such a course is Expert [11] Difficulty.



Nym will be rolling 2d6, +2 (from his Skysailor), +2 (from the *Arrow's* Skyship), for a total of 2d6+4.

Nym rolls a 3 and a 6, +4 (as above), for a total of 13. He easily plots the course!

Vehicular Challenges also serve a role in *Vehicular Duels* (see below).

NPC Officers & Crew

If there are not enough PCs in a group to cover all of the Officer roles, the PCs may “double-up” on duties. Or, these Officer roles might be fulfilled by one of the *NPC Crewmembers* (a Vehicle has NPC crew equal to the MOD of the Vehicle Forte: each has a name and one Forte at Good [+2]).

In some S7S campaigns, the Captain him- or herself might be an NPC! (In this case, the GM issues the Captain's orders.)

Vehicular Duels

Much like character-level Duels, Vehicular Duels are for when skyships engage in combat.

Each Turn, the Captain starts with a number of **orders** he can give to his Officers (see p. 230) equal to the MOD of his *Skysailor* or *Skyship Captain* Forte (plus the MOD of the skyship!). The Captain gives his orders to various Officers to do certain tasks (*Vehicle Challenges*; see above), in the hopes of generating **Vehicle Dice** for the current Vehicular Duel Turn. The Captain starts with *one Vehicle Die*, free and clear.

Vehicle Dice are distributed between attack and defense; while many Vehicle Dice can accrue to skilled Captains, only the best three roll results divvied between attack and defense) can be used.



NOTE

It's recommended that GMs use a different color and/or size of dice to represent Vehicle Dice, so that there's no confusion for players between their Vehicle Dice, the dice they usually roll for tasks, and their Style Dice.

Otherwise, a group could use Poker chips, pennies, or matchsticks to represent Vehicle Dice, if they don't already have a big block of dice.

NPC Ships

NPC Ships are assumed to have 4 Vehicle Dice, and any relevant MODs for NPC character Fortes or NPC Ship Fortes are added to their roll results.

On the upside, NPC Ships get to spend a Vehicle Die to “heal” a Rank of damage (see the *targeted Wound Rank* discussion on p. 237), and can launch boarding actions for free. (Repelling a boarding action is more complicated; see the *Boarding Actions* textbox, p. 235, for more details.)

Minion Ships?

When a Vehicle joins combat with a cloud of smaller opponents (like ship’s boats, gliders, ruqs, enemy Wingmen) that are attacking the Vehicle directly, the rules for fighting *Minion Squads* (see p. 211) can be adapted to Vehicular Duels to help show the deadliness of ship-scale weapons against tiny foes.

If these smaller opponents are focused strictly on the crew of a Vehicle, rather than the Vehicle itself, this can be handled on the personal scale.

1. The Captain gives MOD orders to Officers, including himself. (The Captain starts with 1 Vehicle Die for Vehicle Combat.)

Example: Esteban Erago, Captain (Good [+2] Skyship Captain) of the *Arrow* (Good [+2] Skyship) can give *four* orders to his crew per Turn. These are:

1. “Mister Naughtwark, come hard about to give us a firing solution!” (Fancy Manuever to the Sailing Master.)
2. “Sergeant Ventre, prepare to launch a boarding action by wingcloak!” (Prep for Boarding action to the Master of Arms.)
3. “Load chain shot, Lakwanna!” (Preparation for the upcoming attack to the Master of Guns.)
4. “And I will try to divine the enemy’s tactics!” (Order to himself to determine the foe’s plans.)

(For continuing example purposes, assume all Officers have Good [+2] Rank in relevant Fortes. Thus, they are all rolling at +4.)



2. **The Officers roll** (plus relevant character Forte MODs and relevant Ship MODs) vs. Tasks' TNs (set by the GM).

- *If the result is lower than the TN*, the player narrates how his PC failed in the task, gains a Training Point (see p. 180), and either the Officer or the Vehicle takes damage (the difference between the roll result and the TN).
- *If the result is equal or higher than the TN*, the player narrates how his PC succeeded at the task, how it aids the Captain this Turn, and grants a Vehicle Die to the Captain.

Example:

1. *"Mister Naughtwark, come hard about to give us a firing solution!"* (TN 9; Nym rolls a 5 and a 5, for a total of 14. This grants a Vehicle Die to Captain Erago.) *"Hard about, Cap'n! Your guns are in good position now!"*
2. *"Sergeant Ventre, prepare to launch a boarding action by wingcloak!"* (TN 15; Ventre rolls a 3 and a 6, for a total of 13. This is a failure; no Vehicle Dice, but Ventre gets a Training Point, and decides to take 2 Failure Ranks on one of his Fortes—granting a Story Hook.) *"Sorry, Captain, these lollygaggers aren't wearing their wingcloaks!"*
3. *"Load chain shot, Lakwanna!"* (TN 9; Lakwanna rolls a 2 and a 4, for a total of 10. This grants a Vehicle Die to Captain Erago.) *"Chain shot loaded, Cap. Ready to take out their masts!"*
4. *"And I will try to divine the enemy's tactics!"* (TN 15; Esteban rolls a 4 and a 6, for a total of 14. This is a failure; no Vehicle Dice, but Esteban gets a Training Point, and decides to take the Failure Rank on one of his Fortes—rather than the ship's—which grants a Story Hook.) *"Verdamnn! What is he up to?"*



3. **The Captain collects** all earned Vehicle Dice.

Example: Orders #1 and #3 granted Captain Erago Vehicle Dice; thus, he has a total of 3 dice to distribute between attack and defense.

Fiddly Bits: Extra (Vehicular) Duel Tweaks?

If a PC Skyship Captain can see ways to apply the character-level *Duel Tweaks* (see textbox on p. 220), *let him*.

Optional Rule: Degree of Success in Executing Orders

If a character does very well on a roll for a Vehicular Challenge (i.e., beats the TN by a full Difficulty Rank), **grant an extra Vehicle Die to the Captain for each Rank exceeded**. For example, if the character has an Impressive [15] Difficulty task, but gets a result of 17, this grants the Captain an *extra* Vehicle Die.

Sanctum Siege

The rules for Vehicular Challenges and Duels are applicable to Sanctums—with all necessary common-sense alterations for the stationary nature of Sanctums.

Mass Warfare

The rules for *Vehicular Challenges & Duels* can even be applied to land-war units. The analogue of a skyship captain would, of course, be a unit commander.

4. **The Captain distributes** Vehicle Dice between *attack* (usually rolled by the Gunner or the Captain, or split between several Gunners), *defense* (rolled by the Sailing Master or the Captain), and *other actions* for the Vehicle Duel Turn. Note that a total of 3 dice holds for attacks and defense, just as for *Duels*, see p. 209).

Attack and defense are divvied as per the Strong/Weak rubric of Duels. (No matter how many dice are rolled, keep the best 3, total, as assigned to attack or defense. Relevant character and Ship Forte MODs are added to roll results.)

Also, Vehicle Dice can be spent (or “burned”) on **other actions**. These include:

- *Damage Control*: If the Captain gives a Vehicle Die to the First Mate, he can burn it to repair damage to the ship, per the *Ship Repairs* Vehicular Challenge (see p. 228).



- *Insightful Command*: The Captain can choose to burn a Vehicle Die for a flat +1 to his Vehicle's attack or defense roll.
- *Launching/Repelling a Boarding Action*: See the *Boarding Actions* textbox, p. 235.
- *Mighty Mysticism*: If the Captain gives a Vehicle Die to a crewman with a Gift or the Koldun Forte, he can burn it to affect the crew of the enemy ship at MOD level (darts of flame!) or—with the expenditure of one of his own Style Dice—directly affect the enemy ship (light the sail on fire!).
- *Sniper Fire from the Tops*: If the Captain gives a Vehicle Die to a crewmember with the Firearms Forte, he can burn it to make an attack at a member of the crew of the enemy ship (take out the helmsman!), or—with the expenditure of one of his own Style Dice—directly affect the enemy ship (snap the rudder chain!).
- *Show Some Flair*: If the Captain gives a Vehicle Die to any crewmember who's been previously ordered to do something stylish, but uninvolved in the Vehicle Duel ("Cabin boy—bring me my fancy hat!"), the character can burn that die to turn it into a Style Die and immediately Good Form Gift it to any crewmember (including himself).
- *Something Else?*: Any other action that: 1) shifts a PC's effect from the character-scale to the Vehicle-scale; or 2) does something that's more than simple attack or defense between the Vehicles, can be initiated by burning a Vehicle Die.

While it's not always mandatory for the Captain's distribution of Vehicle Dice to follow his given orders, it is considered Good Form to do so. (**One exception** here is the loading of different types of ammunition by the Master of Guns, which has an effect on assigning damage; see *Violence is Done*, p. 236.)

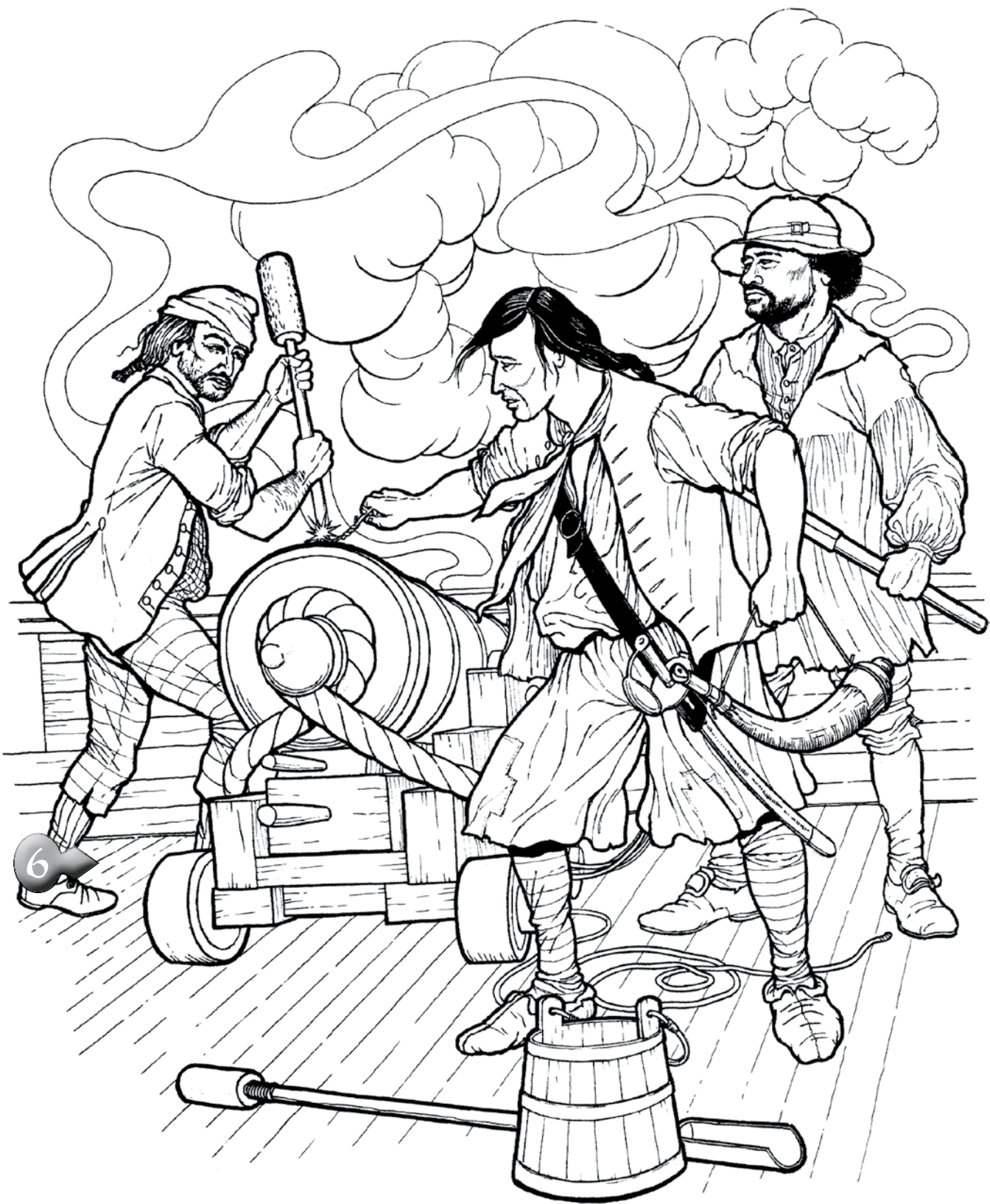


Example: Captain Erago opts for a Strong Attack versus the enemy ship, and assigns 2 Vehicle Dice to the Master of Guns (Lakwanna) and 1 Vehicle Die to the Sailing Master (Nym).

Lakwanna rolls a 3 and a 4 (plus 4), for a total of 11 on the *Arrow's* attack.

Nym rolls a 2 (plus 4), for a total of 6 on the *Arrow's* defense.

(The *Bluebird* launches its own boarding party of wingmen!)



Boarding Actions

There are three main steps to launching or repelling a boarding action:

1. Get “close enough” to strike. One must be fairly near to swing over, slide down zip-warps (see p. 106), or clamber across booms; there can be a fair distance of empty Sky between ships if using wingmen.
2. The Captain must order the Master of Arms to ready the boarding party, as per the *Preparing for Making/Repelling a Boarding Action* Vehicular Challenge (see p. 228).
3. A number of Vehicle Dice must be burned. If the Master of Arms succeeded in the Vehicular Challenge, burn one die to either land the PC party on the enemy ship or turn back an NPC party. If he failed, burn 2. (NPC ships only repel boarding actions if the Master of Arms failed his roll **and** the second Vehicle Die is not spent.) If the Master of Arms wasn’t under orders this Turn, 3 dice may be burned to repel an NPC’s boarding party **only**.

If a boarding party is successful, the crew melee goes to the standard Duel rules, with the character-scale Duel Turns between the Vehicle-scale Turns, starting at the end of the current Turn.

IMPORTANT NOTE

Remember that NPC Ships get to launch boarding actions for *free*.



Characters Acting Outside Orders or On the Vehicle-scale

Since the focus in Vehicle Duels is on the crew acting as a team, crewmembers not directly involved with the battle (under orders, or given a Vehicle Die by the Captain), can only act against the crew of the enemy ship if they spend a Style Die to do so. (If they spend 2 Style Dice, they can directly affect the other ship.)

However, they can **assist** an Officer under orders (see *Using Multiple Fortes for Tasks*, p. 208), without spending Style Dice.

5. **Compare roll results** with the enemy ship's rolls (see *NPC Ships* textbox, p. 230) as per Duels to determine success, failure, and damage done.

Example: The enemy ship (let's call it the *Bluebird*, a Good [+2] Skyship with an Average [0] captain and crew) is opting for Strong Defense/Weak attack (rolling 2 for each); its roll results are 7 for attack and 8 for defense.

Arrow's attack vs. *Bluebird's* defense: 11 vs. 8, the *Arrow* does 3 damage to the *Bluebird*.

Arrow's defense vs. *Bluebird's* attack: 6 vs. 7, the *Arrow* takes 1 damage from the *Bluebird*.

(The *Bluebird's* wingmen are almost to the *Arrow*!)

Airwhales, Gliders, Ruqs, & Wingmen

The assumption here is that these types of PC craft are attacking the *crew* of an NPC ship, rather than the *ship* itself. Against skyships (via grenade, rigging slice, et al.) gliders, ruqs, and wingmen can only do only **one** Rank of damage to the ship itself, without the expenditure of Style Dice. All defense MODs are versus Ship's weapons, not crew's weapons.

When NPCs, count these type of craft as *Minion Ships* (see p. 230).

See also the *Cannons vs. Characters* textbox on p. 226 for ship-scale vs. character-scale damage information.

Airwhales get a +6 to defense rolls due to their speed and maneuverability.

Due to their speed, *gliders* get a +6 to defense rolls.

Ruqs get +4 to their defense rolls.

Due to their small size, *wingmen* get a +6 to all defense rolls.

6. **Violence is Done:** If a PC Vehicle takes damage from a failed defense roll, the Captain assigns which Officer's section gets hit. The Captain can spread damage out between more than one section. Then, the Officer of that section dictates how much of the damage is applied to the vehicle or to the Officer himself (only in this regard is the PC treated on the ship-scale).

*In the case of a PC Vehicle damaging an NPC Vehicle, things work a little differently. Instead of the GM reducing the NPC Vehicle's Fortes, for every point of damage done, the PC Captain places a **targeted Wound Rank**, which acts as a [-2] to a specific function of the enemy ship. Targeted Wound Ranks *can* stack.*

NOTE

While almost mechanically the same effect as the GM reducing the NPC Vehicle's Forte, the extra flavor and precision of the type of damage makes the targeted Wound Rank more interesting.

The targeted Wound Rank is *directly* related to the variety of shot that the Captain ordered the Master of Guns to load (see *Sky War*, p. 125).

A quick reminder of shot types and likely targeted Wound Ranks they can cause (and what effect they may have):

- **Ball Shot:** Hole in Hull (opening for a boarding party; reduce enemy ship's general integrity; no longer seaworthy); Damaged Cannon (penalty to attack).
- **Chain Shot:** Cut Mast/Boom/Cordage (penalties to speed and/or maneuverability).
- **Gas Shells:** Cleared Deck (aids boarding action attempt on next Turn).
- **Grape Shot:** Cleared Deck (aids boarding action attempt on next Turn); Bloody Swath (injuries to enemy crew); Swiss-cheesed Sail (reduction to speed).
- **Harpoon Shot:** Grappled (reduction of speed or maneuverability; aids boarding action attempt on next Turn).
- **Incendiary Shells:** On Fire (many, many uses).

Example: Captain Erago assigns the single rank of damage taken by the *Arrow* to the Master of Arms' section. Sergeant Ventre decides whether or not to apply that rank of damage to his own Fortes, or those of the ship. He opts to take it on the chin, accepting the damage to himself rather than to the ship.

Since the *Arrow* did 3 damage to the *Bluebird*, that gives Captain Erago 3 *targeted Wound Ranks* to apply against her. Since he ordered Lakwanna to load chain shot, he determines that he's stacking all of them as Cut Masts [-6]. Since the *Bluebird* is only a Good [+2] Skyship, she's more or less dead in the Sky! (Any movement or defense rolls she'd make next Turn would start at a -4. The *Bluebird* is close to being disabled, since the total MOD of the targeted negative Wound Ranks (-6) from the *Arrow* is close to her TN of 9.)

However, at this point, the *Bluebird*'s wingmen hit the *Arrow*'s deck! There is a character-scale Duel Turn between the PC crew and the boarding party before the next Vehicle Duel Turn.



OPTIONAL RULE: *Vehicular Story Hooks*

A GM might encourage the use of the *Story Hook* (see p. 240) concept to generate new plot ideas when a ship takes its first Rank of damage—for either the wounded ship and its crew (or both).

Disabling an NPC Ship

When an NPC Vehicle has acquired penalties from *targeted Wound Ranks* (see p. 237) exceeding the TN of her Vehicle Forte, she is disabled. For example, a skyship with a Good [+2] Skyship Forte would be disabled after 5 Targeted Wound Ranks (-10 vs. the TN9 of Good Rank).

Falling!

When an NPC Vehicle has acquired penalties from *targeted Wound Ranks* (see p. 237) exceeding the TN of **two Ranks above** her Vehicle Forte, she is sufficiently damaged that she begins falling towards the Blue. For example, a skyship with a Good [+2] Skyship Forte would start falling after 7 Targeted Wound Ranks (-14 vs. the TN13 of Master Rank).

Note, however, it may take *days* to smash against the Blue—plenty of time to make plans.

On the other hand, when a PC ship Zeroes Out, it starts falling.

Blowing a Ship to Flinders

This generally involves a ship's magazine lighting on fire.

When an NPC Vehicle has acquired penalties from *targeted Wound Ranks* (see p. 237) exceeding the TN of **four Ranks above** her Vehicle Forte, she is sufficiently damaged that she is in danger of explosion. For example, a skyship with a Good [+2] Skyship Forte would explode after 15 Targeted Wound Ranks (-30 vs. the TN13 of Master Rank).



Story Hooks

Several elements of S7S help the players and GM come up with *Story Hooks*: exciting or interesting subplots, complications, and events for their characters to experience.

In Challenges and Duels, whichever ability the player selects to take the *first hit of damage* generates a Story Hook. Also, whenever a Forte *Zeroes Out* (see above), it generates a Story Hook and helps lead to the character being *Mostly Dead* (see p. 224).

When the Forte taking the hit is announced, the GM *should* make a note of what the Forte is, and come up with something interesting related to that trait for the next Scene or game session. This “something interesting” can be good, bad, or mixed, but it should be designed to *capture the player’s interest*.

A quick and easy way to come up with Story Hooks is to compare the selected Forte to the current events of the adventure, the character’s Foible, the character’s Motivation, the character’s Nationality, or the character’s Past. One of these pairs will almost always offer inspiration to a new subplot or event for the game.

Thus, under the S7S rules, the “real” reason Dirty Dirk the Pirate constantly has to ride off to rescue his mother from various dastards is that he consistently uses his Good [+2] Motivation: Loves His Mum! to absorb the first Damage Rank he takes in combat.

Also, some uses of Style Dice (see p. 169) and Training Points (see p. 180) require the generation of Story Hooks.

Example: In the Damage example on p. 219, say that Pyotr took his first Damage Rank on his Skyship Captain Forte, and thus generated a Story Hook. The GM looks at Pyotr’s write-up and sees his Foible is True Love (the fair Yolanda)! This Story Hook combo (Skyship Captain and True Love: Yolanda) could generate a future event where a NPC is courting Yolanda, and Pyotr has a cargo to take halfway across the World! Alas, he must leave his intended to the tender mercies of someone else!



Example of Play

The PC group below is composed of the example characters found in *Chapter 5*, p. 192.

The three players have shown up for a session, and the GM is woefully unprepared. Therefore, he looks at the PCs' Foibles and Motivations for interesting ideas. He latches onto Naku's Foible/Motivation combo of *Revenge against corrupt Crailese Falcons* and Pyotr's *True Love for the fair Yolanda* (counting on Xenia's Foible of *Unrequited Love* to make her sympathetic to the situation).

See also *Chapter 7*, p. 272.

GM: After adventuring together for several weeks, the three of you have become fast friends. You all decide to accompany Pyotr to Crail, where he's supposed to meet his True Love, the fair Yolanda, and her father.

Xenia: Ah, twoo luv!

Naku: Crail, eh? I have some scores to settle there. I'm in.

Pyotr: Yolanda's father often goes to Crail, as it's a hub of commerce. She sometimes accompanies him, to see the latest and most cosmopolitan fashions.

GM: Good Form! Pyotr gets a Style Die (from the Bowl) for helping to define Yolanda.

Pyotr: Yay!

GM: After a relatively uneventful skyship journey, the *Swallow* makes port at Agua Azul on Crail. However, you soon discover that Yolanda and her father are not at their usual lodgings. Indeed, they left them with no notice and some alacrity!

Pyotr: Oh no! What has happened to the fair Yolanda?

GM: You don't know. What are you going to do now?

Xenia: Are there Sha-Ku on Crail?

GM: Certainly.

Xenia: I go to question them, to see if anyone knows anything.

GM: Okay. Naku? How about you?

Naku: Hmm. One of my Fortes is "Friend to the Rugged Tribes." Can I spend Style Dice to make a Rugged Tribesman contact?

GM: Sure!



Naku: Okay... Let's say that I go to see Rabdul, a Rugged Tribesman familiar with the city-folk and their doings.

GM: Okay, that's one Style Die for Rabdul and two Style Dice to give him "Good [+2] Ear to the Ground" or something like that. Three Style Dice, total.

Xenia: I'll spend another Style Die to make him an Expert [+4]!

Pyotr: And I'll spend one to give him a Good [+2] Hook-hand.

Naku: Why?

Pyotr: Because it's cool?

GM: All right! Naku, spend 3 Style Dice; Xenia and Pyotr, spend 2. Naku, add that you're friends with "Rabdul the Hook" in the Miscellany section of your character sheet. (GM scribbles down notes on the details Rabdul the Hook for future sessions.)

Rabdul the Hook

Fortes: Expert [+4] Ear to the Ground, Good [+2] Hook-handed, and Average [0] Crailese Rugged Tribesman.

Naku: Okay!

GM: And Pyotr, what are you doing?

Pyotr: Um. Well, Yolanda's dad is a wealthy merchant, right? I'll go to the market and the docks and see if I can find out any information from other foreign merchants on what's going on.

GM: Okay! This is a Challenge, let's call it Expert [11] Difficulty, to find out what's up with Yolanda and her father. Xenia is rolling 2d6+4 (from Nationality: Sha-Ku and Aristocrat) when talking to the local Sha-Ku. Naku is talking to Rabdul the Hook, and is rolling 2d6+2 (for his Friend of the Rugged Tribes) but because Rabdul's an Expert [+4] Ear to the Ground, I call that a TN of 7. Pyotr is interrogating the foreign merchants of Crail and rolling 2d6+2 (from Merchant) versus a TN13.

Pyotr: Can I add in my Good [+2] Gift: Merhorse to that?

GM: How would you be using it?

Pyotr: Ah, to check around their former lodgings? Peering through walls, seeking images of past events, that sort of thing?

GM: (ponders) That doesn't seem to make sense—you're questioning merchants.



Pyotr: What if I'm looking for the *threads of fate* that connect Yolanda's dad to these other merchants?

GM: Okay, I'll allow it. Everybody roll!

Xenia: A 1 and a 2, plus 4, for a total of 7.

GM: How does Xenia fail?

Xenia: Um... Maybe being a Hakuteka isn't high enough of an Aristocrat to get good answers?

GM: Yes, that must be it. "I'm sorry, Hakuteka Xenia, but we Sha-Ku here on Crail have more important concerns than keeping track of spoiled Colronan ladies." Also, Xenia gets a Training Point.

Naku: I rolled a 3 and a 4, plus 2, is 9. What do I find out?

GM: You succeeded, you tell me!

Naku: The Falcons are involved?

GM: Sure! You find out that Yolanda has been essentially kidnapped by the Commandant of the Falcons, Tren Vye, and is being held in the Tower of Smoke. "The Blackbirds are under orders from the top, my friend. From the very top!" Naku and Pyotr both get a Style Die, because both of their Foibles have been tapped.

Pyotr: Yay, Style Die! I rolled a 4 and a 6, plus 4—that's 14. I bet the Commandant of the Falcons wants money from Yolanda's dad... I see visions of coins!

GM: Yes! You hear that Yolanda has been kidnapped, but also hear that her father is being blackmailed for some sort of business purpose that Tren Vye wants him to participate in.

Pyotr: That cad!

GM: Also, you get an image using your Merhorse Gift—Yolanda is being held at the top of the Tower of Smoke rather than in the dungeons beneath it. Uh, close to Vye's chambers.



Naku: See? The corruption in the Falcons rises to their own Commandant!

Pyotr: The dastard!

GM: So, what are you going to do?

Pyotr: I say we go to the top of the Tower of Smoke and rescue my love!

Xenia: Indeed!

Naku: And maybe put a little smackdown on Vye while we're at it?

GM: Okay, how do you plan on getting into the Tower of Smoke?

Xenia: I don't think we have to. My ruq Chimi can fly us right up there!

Naku: Or I could teleport us up there using the Gift of the Qilin.

GM: Xenia, Chimi can only carry one other person—in his talons—other than you. Naku, you might be able to shift up to the top of the Tower by yourself, but probably not with other people in tow—not without spending a Style Die per person.

Naku: Okay, you guys go up with the ruq, and I'll teleport.

Xenia & Pyotr: Okay!

GM: Let's call this an Master [13] Challenge to get to the top of the Tower, okay? Xenia, roll 2d6+4 for your Ruqrider to guide Chimi up to the top without being seen by the Falcons. Naku, roll 2d6+4.

Naku: What about my Quilin Technique?

GM: You can use that for a re-roll or a flat +1.

Naku: Can I also use my Motivation of Revenge for this?

GM: Sure! Okay, that's 2d6+6, with a Technique for a flat +1 or a die re-roll.

Naku: Sweet!

Xenia: Does Chimi's Fast! Technique help in this?

GM: I'd say no—this is more about being stealthy than being particularly speedy.

Xenia: Okay.

GM: Everybody roll.

Xenia: A 1 and a 3, plus 4—total of 8.

Naku: A 2, a 2, plus 6, is 10. I'll re-roll on those dice using my Qilin Technique—a 5! 2 plus 5 plus 6 is 13!

GM: Okay, Xenia (and Chimi and Pyotr) take (13—8) 5 Failure Ranks in your attempt—how did you fail?



Xenia: Ah... Keeping out of the view of the Falcons is strenuous work. Chimi gets really tired.

Pyotr: Why don't each of us take some of the Failure Ranks? Like two each, plus one to Chimi?

Xenia: Okay!

Pyotr: I'll drop my Merchant from Good [+2] to Poor [-2].

GM: That's a Story Hook!

Xenia: Okay! I drop Aristocrat from Good [+2] to Poor [-2], and Chimi drops his Expert [+4] Smart as a Person to Good [+2].

GM: That's a Story Hook as well!

Xenia: For me or for Chimi?

GM: Maybe both! (evil grin)

All right—remember, Xenia, that you get a Training Point for failing. For Naku, you've succeeded, teleporting to the top of the Tower.

Naku: There is a swirling in the shadows, and Naku coalesces out of them!

GM: Xenia—try again against a TN of 13. Naku, unfortunately, 14 Falcons (Good [+2] Falcon) are guarding the door to the chamber in which the fair Yolanda is kept.

Xenia: No problem!

Naku: Let me at them!

Pyotr: One more Turn before Xenia and I can get there!

GM: Right! Naku, do you want to attack those 14 Falcons by yourself, with surprise, or wait until your comrades arrive?

Naku: I'll wait.

GM: Okay. Xenia—roll vs. a TN of 13 again!

Pyotr: Can I add in a Style Die, if needed?

GM: Sure! Roll, Xenia—TN13.

Xenia: A 4 and a 6, plus 4—total of 14.

GM: You make it!

Pyotr: It looks like my Style Die wasn't needed. Cool.

GM: Chimi lands on the ramparts—all of you are now at the top of the Tower, facing off against 14 Falcons.



Xenia: I can handle—my Ruqrider is Expert—at least 4 of them easily?

GM: Yes—as a Minion Squad!

Naku: My Koldun Rank is Expert—another 4 for me!

Pyotr: My Fencing Forte is Good—so that's 2?

GM: Exactly... four are left over, so let's say... Xenia is facing a Minion Squad of 5, so is Naku, and you, Pyotr, are facing 3 Minions, leaving one Falcon that runs off to tell the Commandant that someone is trying to rescue Yolanda. So, it'll be a bit of a stretch for you.

PCs: Whatever.

GM: Since you all have the same amount of Style Dice, let's go in this order for the Duels—Xenia, Naku, and Pyotr, then your foes. Okay? Okay.

Xenia: Strong Attack against the Falcons. I leap off of Chimi, bust in through the window, flipping around and slicing and dicing with my Saber.

GM: So that's Techniques of *Idiom*: Acrobatic and *Weapon*: Saber, yes?

Xenia: Right.

GM: Okay, 3d6 plus your +4 MOD for Ruqrider (with 2 Techniques that can be used for attack or defense). How are you dividing up your dice?

Xenia: 2d6+4 to attack, 1d6+4 to defense.

GM: Okay, the 5 Falcons are going for Strong Defense, so divvying 2d6+2 to attack (pick best 1 die) and 3d6+2 (pick best 2 dice) to defense. Make your rolls.

Xenia: Attack roll is 5 and 5, plus 4 is 14. Defense roll is 4, plus 4, for 8.

GM: Good! The Falcons roll... 4 and 3 and 6 (taking the 4 and the 6), plus 2, or 12, for their defense. They roll a 3 and a 5 (taking the 5), plus 2, or 7 for their attack.

(Compares roll results.) 14 vs. 12 is 2 Wound Ranks...



That takes out two Falcons completely. With a 7 attack vs. your 8 defense—nothing happens. You easily deflect their attacks.

Okay, Naku!

Naku: Yes!

GM: What are you doing?

Naku: Against the 5 Falcons I face, I blast them with a *jet of fire*, courtesy of the Gift of the Dragon!

GM: You can use your Technique of Dragon for a +1 or a re-roll. Are you spending a Style Die for a big effect?

Naku: No, I'm just hosing them with my MOD. Three dice to attack, zero to defense, one Technique available for re-rolls.

GM: Okay, the Falcons are again going with 2d6+2 to attack (pick best 1) and 3d6+2 to defense (pick best 2). Roll!

Naku: Attack is 5, 2, and 6, plus 4, for a total of 17. Defense is zero, plus 4, for 4.

GM: Good! The Falcons roll... a 3 and a 4. They'll go with the 4, plus 2, or a total of 6 for their attack. Against your defense roll of 4, that's two Wound Ranks.

Naku: Can I use the +1 granted by my Technique of Dragon to reduce that to one damage rank?

GM: Sure!

Naku: Okay, I do that. I'll take the damage on my Grifter Forte—does that generate a Story Hook?

GM: Indeed it does! (makes notes)

For their defense roll, they come up with... 2, 4, and 6—picking the best 2, that's 4+6, plus 2, for a total of 12... (The GM compares Naku's attack roll of 17 vs. 12—that's 5 Wound Ranks.) Holy cow, you totally took out the entire Minion Squad with your attack!

Pyotr's turn!

Pyotr: Strong Attack against these Minions!

GM: Okay.

Pyotr: I'd also like to use my Gift of the Merhorse to see where their attacks will be coming from.

GM: You realize that might make it more difficult to use it in the future?

Pyotr: What? Why?



GM: Looking into the future muddies the waters of Time!

Pyotr: Okay. Sure.

GM: Fair enough. Okay... looks like $2d6+4$ (+2 for Fencing and +2 for your Gift), and $1d6+4$ for defense?

Pyotr: Right.

GM: Again, this Minion Squad of 3 Falcons is going with $1d6+2$ to attack and $2d6+2$ to defense. Pyotr, make your rolls.

Pyotr: Attack is 5 and 6, plus 4, for a total of 15. Defense is 3, plus 4, for 7.

GM: Good! The Falcons roll... 2 and 2 plus 2, or 6, for their defense. They roll a 5, plus 2, or 7 for their attack. (Compares roll results) 15 vs. 6 is 9 Wound Ranks... That takes out *all* of your opponents! You laid them out in one sally! However, before they fell, they had a 7 attack vs. your 7 defense—but you blocked them all as you cut them down with your blade!

Pyotr: Awesome!

GM: Okay... Next turn of the Duel. Xenia is facing three Falcons. Naku and Pyotr have no foes at the moment, having slaughtered the Falcons who stood in his way!

Now... what do you want to do?

Xenia: I'll take care of these three fools who stand between Pyotr and his True Love!

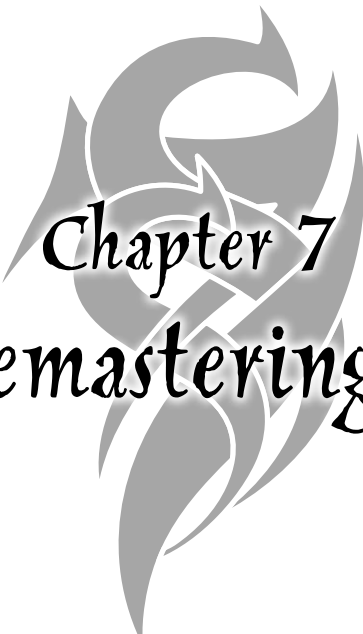
Naku: I'll help Xenia!

Pyotr: I'll rush up the steps to find Yolanda's cell!

GM: Okay. While Pyotr rushes off to find his love, all of a sudden, the Commandant himself appears, accompanied by 20 more Falcons!

Naku: Oy vey...





Chapter 7

Gamemastering S7S

The Atomic Rule

You bought this book: run and play S7S the way *you* and *your players* want to.

Go for it. Make it your own.

This chapter is designed to help you do just that. Take what advice you find useful, and modify whatever isn't to your taste.



What Does the GM Do in *S7S*?

What does a GM do in a *S7S* campaign? He or she:

- ◆ Follows the Basic & Advanced GM Techniques
- ◆ Selects Setting Details
- ◆ Aids in Setting the Dials
- ◆ Helps Players Generate Characters
- ◆ Generates NPCs
- ◆ Crafts Scenes
- ◆ Assigns Difficulty Ranks for Challenges
- ◆ Plays the NPCs
- ◆ Reminds PCs of Their Foibles
- ◆ Modifies Player Narration
- ◆ Awards Style Dice, Training Points, & Ephemera
- ◆ Notes Moments of Bad Form for the Future

Each of these is discussed below.



Basic GMing Techniques

Here are some basic gamemastering principles and processes that—while generally useful—are good to keep in mind for *S7S* games:

- ◆ **Speed:** Prep and play should be fast and exciting. If something isn't important to what the PCs are doing (like buying supplies or traveling to the next point of interest), just say, "It happens." However, if most of the players are interested in something, stick with it until their attention starts to flag, then immediately move the next thing (extra points if that next thing is an area of interest for any players who weren't intrigued by the previous Scene).
- ◆ **Session Outlines:** Instead of exhaustive detailed descriptions, keep the adventures, NPC stats, rumors, bits of setting, and the like as quickly-jotted notes and bulleted lists. Stick to the most interesting and evocative details only.
- ◆ **Inspiration:** Use the starting seeds of early adventures to provide initial plots and characters for the PCs to interact with. Eventually, their own actions in-game and relationships to recurring NPCs will feed into the process, and allow a deeper, richer story.
- ◆ **Improvisation:** Rely on the feedback of the players regarding previous games or sessions, the setting and NPCs details that have been generated, and what the players show interest in at the moment. Then make stuff up on the fly constantly—and take notes of the most important bits to remember for future sessions!
- ◆ **Feedback:** After every session, ask the players what was Good, what was Bad, and what was Ugly (meaning "confusing") about the session. Then try to do more Good stuff, less Bad stuff, and "pretty up" (clarify) Ugly stuff the next time.

Behind the Curtain: The Good Stuff

Always, always, always do more Good Stuff.



Advanced GMing Techniques

This section discusses a few ways to put the *Basic GMing Techniques* from above into practice.

Only Roll When You Have To

Seriously: if something's not important, *don't roll dice*.

"Rolling for everything" seems to be one of the lingering bits of RPGs that stems directly from their tactical simulation wargaming roots. Unfortunately, *S7S* is decidedly **not** simulating tactical battlefield situations most of the time. Instead, *S7S* attempts to simulate swashbuckling stories, both in prose and on film.

That being said, there needs to be some randomness involved in play, otherwise RPGs aren't games, but storytelling. . . not that there's anything wrong with that. Far from it.

Where RPGs depart from stories and movies is that stories and movies are (by the time an audience sees them) intensely crafted and refined. Stories follow a script: when the hero needs to make that one-in-a-million shot, he does. Period. (Or he just plain doesn't; it depends on the script.) Really, there's very little randomness there.

RPGs, on the other hand, are *raw* and *fresh* stories that are being put together **as a group plays**. The gaming group is in the moment of creation, and there's often no opportunity to go back and polish up a situation or event to make the hero cooler or more successful. The roll of the dice can be brutal—in some games, that flubbed roll means the fencing master just stabbed his own foot!—and their effects can break the flow of the story being woven, strain credulity, or throw genre assumptions out the window.

The answer is two part: 1) *don't roll much*; and 2) when you roll, *the result should be interesting, whether the character succeeds or fails*.

So if your cunning courtier makes a faux pas at court in front of the king (i.e., rolls poorly), it's not that he forgot how low he had to bow. No, there has to be some *interesting effect* in **how** the failure happens, and stemming **from** the failure. Perhaps the courtier bowed *too* low, which has a social implication of mockery—the king is displeased, and traitors at court think the character is secretly on their side. Perhaps he didn't bow low **enough**, and the king thinks he's uppity, and decides to volunteer him for the suicide mission du jour. Maybe a Royal Courier burst in, precluding the character's bow. In any case, it's not just a failed roll—it's a new factor that helps drive the story of the game to the next interesting bit.



Behind the Curtain: Who are the Stars?

Remember: the PC are the stars of this movie.

Do everything you can to support that.

Stepping Through PDQ#

The *PDQ#* system at the heart of *S7S* is built to be fast, fun, and flexible. Also, it's pretty fair at mapping how unlikely it is for highly-skilled characters to mess up easy tasks. If you compare Forte MODs to Difficulty Rank TNs, you'll see that it's actually impossible for a Master [+6] Forte character to fail an Average [7] Difficulty Rank task. In non-stressful situations, a GM can just compare Forte Rank to Difficulty Ranks, and run with it.

Why?

Because that's the way swashbuckling stories go. Characters are usually quite competent (or entertainingly incompetent). The script and director conspire to make useless abilities relevant, or even necessary, to the overall plot. Since *PDQ#* focuses on *story-effectiveness* rather than *reality-simulation*, it's a good fit for swashbuckling adventure.

Now, sometimes, gamers get an itchy dice-rolling hand. The knee-jerk response when something happens is to roll. Fine and dandy—if you gotta, you gotta, it's totally understandable. *PDQ#* lets you do something to make it quick and easy: Challenges. Roll your dice, add your relevant MOD(s), compare to TN, and done.

Even things that would normally be considered combat under other systems (like KO'ing a guard before entering the Duke's donjon) can be abstracted back to a basic Challenge if it's *not that important* or *would totally derail the adventure*. After all, the intended adventure is breaking the Princess out of Durance Vile; getting caught by Joe-Bob Man-at-Arms for a traffic violation before you even get to the prison is **not fun**.

Roll only if you have to in order to preserve the fun.

Behind the Curtain: Hawkeye on Techniques

Always remember to remind players to look to their Techniques.



Improvising

Improvisation is a vital GMing skill to learn; it makes things go so much smoother when you don't have to look up references for every last thing or make rolls for every bat in the swarm that's attacking the hero. Just make it up, already.

But how to do this in a fair and consistent way? Aye, that's the rub.

Know Your Genre

The first thing is that you need to know your genre—in this case, swashbuckling stories. You should almost certainly enjoy it. Be familiar with its common features and flows and situations and character types. A good understanding of the genre of a game allows you to dredge up coolness from very sketchy hints and inspirations.

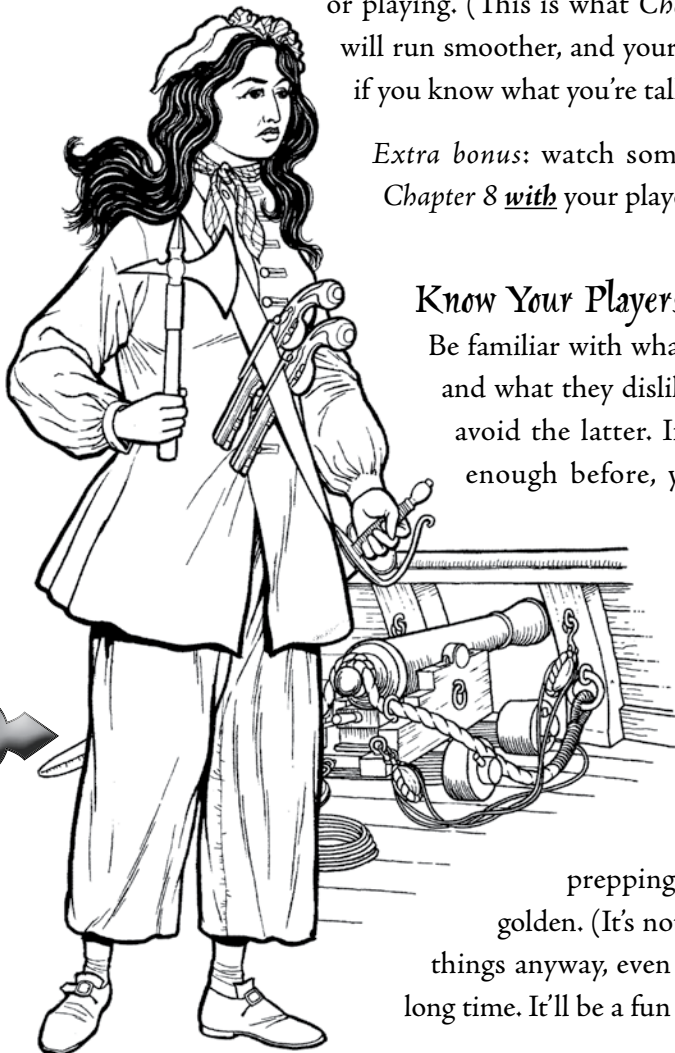
For S7S GMs, if you are not familiar with at least some of the books, movies, and games mentioned in *Chapter 8* (this seems highly unlikely), start reading, watching, or playing. (This is what *Chapter 8* is all about!) Your games will run smoother, and your players will get more enjoyment, if you know what you're talking about.

Extra bonus: watch some of the recommended films in *Chapter 8* with your players!

Know Your Players

Be familiar with what sorts of things your players like and what they dislike. Try to include the former and avoid the latter. If you've played with them often enough before, you'll have an idea. (Fritz likes magic powers like S7S Gifts, and Otto hates villains giving monologues.)

If you haven't played with them enough before, *ask them what they like and dislike in games*. Simple. Just keep what they say in mind while you're prepping and running, and you should be golden. (It's not a bad idea just to ask folks these things anyway, even if you've been gaming together a long time. It'll be a fun conversation, at the very least.)



Know Your PCs

Pay attention to what the PCs have on their character sheets. This is the representation of how the player wants his character to be; this is how the PC is *cool*.

Indulge the PCs' coolness. Give them opportunities to use their Fortes and suffer from their Foibles. Connect some dots between Motivations to find things that are either inside or just outside the interests on their sheets. If one PC is a Good Singer and another is a Good Dancer, maybe a chance to tread the boards in a royal masque put on for the Duchess' birthday is in their future.

Behind the Curtain: Who in the What Now?

Some of the most fun I have as a GM is when NPCs *misinterpret* PC actions—*ascribing* goals to them that are utterly unintended.

Know Your NPCs

Keep exactly the same thoughts in mind for your NPCs as was mentioned for PCs immediately above. Remember that they have their own goals, methods, and perspectives. That last bit is the most important: NPCs have *limited perspectives*—perhaps even more limited than PCs do. They can only operate on the information and ideas that you as GM permit them to have. Make sure they act from their limited understanding and remain in character.

Offer Both Opportunities & Obstacles

Nothing is more boring than getting absolutely everything with no effort, except maybe never getting anything despite insane amounts of effort (and the latter comes with a side order of frustration).

A good GM offers the PCs *opportunities* (a chance to get or do something good) and *obstacles* (stuff that gets in the way of something the PC wants). The actions of the PCs can cause either or both of these to arise within the game due to the ramifications of what was done. Usually that's more satisfying than simple GM fiat raining good fortune or bad luck down on the PCs' heads. Do not neglect Story Hooks here!

Over the life of the campaign, the amount of *opportunities* and *obstacles* should be in proportion. Of course, the exact ratio depends on what sort of campaign you're running—if it's a bleak one, there are more obstacles than opportunities; if it's a



bright one, there are more opportunities than obstacles. For bleaker campaigns, a 25-75 split between opportunities and obstacles is about as far as you should go; for a notably bright campaign, a 75-25 split may be better.

Behind the Curtain: Commentary

When I run games, I tend to aim for a 50-50 split between obstacles and opportunities, but I shift the emphasis on an *ad hoc* basis. Sometimes, most of the opportunity is up front, then everything goes to hell and it's a lot of obstacles. More often, there are a lot of obstacles up front, and opportunities start piling up as the PCs move into the home stretch.

Divvy the split up in the way that feels best to you.

Listening More Than Speaking

Listen to what your players say, in-character and out-of-character. Whatever they smile over and get excited about, *do more of that*. Whatever they frown about, sound frustrated about, or get exercised over, *do less of that*.

This is exactly like asking them what they like or dislike, only you're on passive sonar mode rather than active.

Never Say No

If players want to try something, never say "no" outright. Instead, make sure they understand the situation and hint at the ramifications at whatever weird or unexpected idea they have. Sometimes, it's the players misunderstanding something about what's going on. Sometimes it's you, the GM, misunderstanding what they actually want to do.

If the action is a violation of the character, genre, tone, history, or whatever of the game, feel free to offer suggestions or alternatives—what we could call the “**Maybe, but...**” option. “We want to kill the Empress of Barathi for revenge,” the players say. Fine and dandy. Outline the difficulties and probable aftermath of this course of action; if the players still want to attempt this, *let them*.

“We want to kill the Empress of Barathi (just because),” the players say. Not nearly as fine and dandy. Outline the difficulties and probable aftermath of this course of action, then *underline the difficulties* and *point out any contradictions with relevant character Foibles that might exist*. Offer alternatives, like “Maybe you could do that, but

what about just deposing her?” or “Maybe destroying House Vanadi would serve the same purpose?” If the players still want to attempt this, *let them—but don’t make it easy for them*.

If the players want to stick with what they’re saying without deviation, then strap yourself in, throw caution to the winds, and hit them with a “**Yes, but...**” That lets the chips fall where they may. It may very well change the course of the campaign, and that’s fine: the players are part of the creative force of the game’s story, right alongside you as GM.

“Yes, you can try to kill the Empress. . . **but** you’re going to have to dedicate a lot of time, effort, and gold to even get into position to try this. Like, the rest of the campaign. Still want to go for it?”

(However, if a player is just being a blatant ass—like demanding to be able to fly without any relevant Forte, Gear, Gift, or rationale—feel free to say “no.” Never Say No only applies to people who are playing fair.)

Never Say No also applies to *Modifying Player Narration*; see p. 277.

Build Suspense

To build suspense, mention a threat at least a Scene before it shows up. It’s not very pulse-pounding for a GM to say “All your nightmares are about to come true!” when those nightmares had never been mentioned previously. Bystanders should mention Count Dustin’s ability with the blade, how he sliced off a man’s moustache without drawing a single drop of blood (stuff like that), before a PC faces off with him for a duel behind the convent. Put a gun on the wall so that it can be used later.

Reintegrate Dangling Threads

After every session—every other session at the very outside—reintroduce elements related to outstanding, unresolved threads that are still hanging out there in space. What happened after Count Jellasco fell off of the deck of his skyship and into the Mists? What does the Queen do when she hears that her Lady-in-Waiting is pregnant with the Pirate King’s child? What happened to that wacky koldun they sold that gigantic duzha crystal to?

While letting some threads dangle for a short time is a good way to make their reintroduction a surprise, disinterring a long forgotten leftover bit is a risky thing—sometimes, it blows up in your face; sometimes, it ties the campaign together very neatly. Be warned!



You're More the Cruise Director than the Captain

As a GM, you have two responsibilities: 1) making sure everyone—including you—is having fun; and 2) making sure the story as you and your group are creating through play has some sort of cohesiveness. But the order these two things are listed in is *exactly* the order of importance. Remember it.

While it's best if fun and the artistry of the tale the players are writing walk hand in hand, if push comes to shove, fun is more important than art.

Setting Details

The setting material of *S7S* is vast—it takes up four chapters of this book!—so one of the primary duties of the *S7S* GM is to filter this information to the players. It is often the case with RPGs that the GM is the only one with a copy of the book. (Please encourage them to purchase a copy—I need to pay my rent!)

Tell the players **what** they need to know, **when** they need to know it. Don't overburden them with extraneous details, *unless they are interested in them*.

If some players seek out the information on their own, *all the better!* The game will have a richer and deeper texture if the players already know what the Barathi are like, the tragedy of Lost Kroy, or the abilities of the average Sha-Ku Ruqrider.

Players might be overwhelmed by getting handed the first four chapters of this hefty tome, but specific, targeted reference sheets can be a great source for player-driven idea-making. (Check the ASMP website for some free handouts you can use for this purpose!) Once your players have chosen to take on some part of the setting as their own, if you have this game in an electronic form, print out the few pages of setting information that will be relevant for them (or, if you're a paper fan, hit the local copy shop with your book in hand).

7

Focus Your Play

Think about the *focus* for the game you wish to run. Here are some useful questions to ask yourself and the players to determine what is important in this campaign:

WHAT DO YOU WANT YOUR INDIVIDUAL S7S UNIVERSE TO CONCENTRATE ON?

Is it *action* (fencing duels, skyship chases, climbing up sheer cliffs, swinging on chandeliers, sultry seductions), *adventure* (thrilling exploration, the risks of commerce, wide vistas, man against the elements, races against time, mighty quests, discovery of the new, recovery of the old), *heroism* (facing unbelievable odds, because it's the right thing to do), *intrigue* (nuanced mysteries, deep plots, hidden goals, skullduggery, cloak-and-dagger work), *romance* (the ups and downs in tempestuous relationships, the pursuit of True Love), *villainy* (combating corrupt and powerful forces that lack Good Form), or a mix of all of these?

WHAT'S THE UNDERLYING AESTHETIC OF THE CAMPAIGN?

Is it a *musketeer-style* campaign (order, civilization, law), a *pirate-style* campaign (chaos, liberty, justice), or a combination? (Normally, in musketeer-style S7S games, pirate-types are often the Bad Guys; in pirate-style S7S games, musketeer-types are often the Bad Guys; in highwayman-style games, anyone can be a foe.)

WHAT THEMES DO YOU SEE AS IMPORTANT?

One word concepts are good choices for themes—any basic Motivation works well (Honor, Revenge, Status, Wealth, etc.), as do ones like Friendship, Responsibility, Loyalty, Kindness, Hatred, Desperation, Self-Reliance, Cooperation. Themes are the winds that fill the sails of your adventure ideas, and you can always drop canvas and check the compass to see if they're not blowing in the direction of fun. The Major Islands of the S7S setting have some underlying "cultural motivations" that can set up themes nicely, if running a campaign based on one of them (the Barathi cultural imperative towards revenge, for example).

Behind the Curtain: Drift

Adapting S7S to another setting might be difficult, since there are a lot of setting-specific issues in play. However, S7S can easily be "drifted" to similar swashbuckly settings or genres—space opera, for example. (One of these days, I'm going to run a straight-up Flash Gordon/Buck Rogers riff on S7S, I swear!)

If a group wants to re-set S7S, I'd suggest starting from the free PDQ# freebie, then adding in the Vehicle Rules in *Chapter 6*, just to start. Then, maybe look at the rules for the Gifted and koldun (if psychic powers are a big part of the desired genre/setting).

(And, hey, swing by the S7S Yahooogroup and tell us about it!)



WHAT SETTING PIECES DO YOU WISH TO USE?

Look over the setting chapters and make a list of the places you think your group will find fun to visit. Keep the list handy. Determine who the Good Guy and the Bad Guy nations are (see textbox, p. 262). Add new islands, or eliminate canon ones. The setting of the 7 Skies is *not* historical, though it *is* influenced by history—don't let finicky historical detail get in your way. Use *whatever* interests you and your group, and toss the rest.

HOW POWERFUL ARE MYSTICAL TALENTS, MYSTICAL ITEMS, AND FIREARMS IN YOUR CAMPAIGN?

Gifts and koldun abilities are a wild card: depending upon the S7S campaign, they could be incredibly powerful and present, or weak and vague (See also *Limiting Koldun Abilities*, p. 153, and *Assigning Difficulty Ranks to Challenges*, p. 273). The discussion in *Bringing a Musket to a Sword Fight*, p. 263, can be useful for various options on setting the lethality of firearms in a campaign.

HOW AND IN WHAT WAY WILL GAME SESSIONS BE RUN?

Will S7S sessions be stand-alone *episodes*? A group of episodes linked into a single *miniseries*? Or an ongoing *series*?

- ◆ For groups that cannot meet regularly, stand-alone **episodes** are probably the best bet; if adventures can be completed in a single session, everyone will feel as if they've gotten the most bang for their buck.
- ◆ For groups that can meet regularly, but tend to have scheduling problems, a **miniseries** design can work well: short story-arcs that require a handful of sessions (usually around 3 to 5) to complete.



- ◆ For groups that can meet regularly and have little problems with scheduling, an ongoing **series** might be preferable: character arcs and goals can intertwine, branch, separate, and spark subplots or new plots as the game progresses week-to-week, month-to-month, year-to-year. Serial campaigns often become densely detailed, familiar, and much-enjoyed.

WILL THE GAME INVOLVE STANDARD GMING, ROUND-ROBIN GMING, OR TROUPE PLAY?

Essentially, *round-robin* GMing is where each of the group members takes a turn being the GM. This helps spread the GM-fun and player-fun around, and gives everyone a turn in the driver's seat, but it has some pitfalls. (Some folks *don't* want to be in the driver's seat. Don't make them.) So long as each GM runs an *entire* scenario before handing over the reins, troupe play can work well.

Troupe play is a nifty variant on typical group play, where each player can control multiple characters. In *S7S*, the Sidekicks and Minions of a PC can be brought to life if another player (who is not the GM) controls and characterizes them. However, many players enjoy playing their own Sidekicks and Minions themselves—talk to your group before suggesting this, to see if they're open to the idea.

Setting the Dials

For maximum enjoyment, all players and the GM should sit down to discuss the sort of swashbuckling game they'd like to play, and cover some important questions. This is *Setting the Dials*.

Aesthetics

- ◆ **Concentration?** Action, Adventure, Heroism, Intrigue, Romance, Villainy, or a mixture of all.
- ◆ **Underlying aesthetic?** Musketeer (Order), Pirate (Chaos), or Highwayman (Chaos in defense of Order, or Order in defense of Chaos).
- ◆ **Themes?** Honor, Revenge, Status, Wealth, Friendship, Responsibility, Loyalty, Kindness, Hatred, Desperation, Self-Reliance, Cooperation.
- ◆ **Session Style?** Episodes, Miniseries, Series.



Firearms

- ◆ *Are guns just another weapon?* Pistols and muskets do damage as normal.
- ◆ *Are guns more powerful weapons?* Firearms do damage as normal, *plus additional Damage Ranks equal to the MOD of the attacker's Firearms Forte.*
- ◆ *Are guns one-shot kill weapons?* Firearms do damage as normal, *plus additional Damage Ranks equal to the TN of the attacker's Firearms Forte.*

Good Guy vs. Bad Guy Islands

- ◆ Define one island (or island faction) as *good*, and one as *bad*.

Good Guy vs. Bad Guy Nations

The major nations have been described as morally neutral; each has positive aspects and negative ones. In your S7S campaign, you can either leave this ambiguity, or emphasize the good and/or bad aspects of each as you choose. It is entirely likely that in one campaign, the Zultanate will be a “good guy” and in another, it will be a “bad guy.”

And that's okay.

Justify Why PCs are Together?

Cosmopolitan Friends, Noble Household/Family Affair, Pirate Crew, Regimental Comrades, Someone Done Us Wrong, The Sovereign's Troubleshooters, or something else?

Mysticism

- ◆ When will Gifted or koldun PCs need to make a mystical Challenge roll?
 - *On occasion*, when warranted by the situation.
 - *Whenever* spending a Style Die for effect.
 - *Every time* they use their power(s), including “simply for MOD.”
- ◆ Are mystical Challenge TNs relatively standard, or can they fluctuate wildly—high or low—at GM's whim? (Tides of mana...)

Poison

- ◆ **Does poison harm?** Apply the MOD of the poison to the damage total after a *successful attack* or *failed Challenge roll*.
- ◆ **Does poison weaken?** Characters cannot heal normally, gain a Story Hook of “Poisoned!”, and the cost of Style Dice-based *Catch Your Second Wind* is doubled, until they find the antidote.
- ◆ **Does poison incapacitate or kill?** Failing a Challenge roll versus the TN of the poison makes the character instantly become *Mostly Dead* (or its equivalent).
- ◆ **Is the poison one-shot or enduring?** A *one-shot poison* does its work and is gone; an *enduring poison* hangs around until it’s removed from the victim’s system (a Story Hook).

Team Sanctum or Team Vehicle?

- ◆ Is the GM giving the play group a free Team Sanctum or Team Vehicle?

Bringing a Musket to a Swordfight

GMs and players need to determine how potent **firearms** are in their S7S campaign. Consider: is having a gun be more powerful than a sword (or even *vastly* more powerful, like a one-shot kill weapon) any fun? Think deeply about this before you decide which way to go; it will definitely affect the nature of your S7S game.

If guns are just another weapon like a sword or a dagger, then that’s no great shakes—pistols and muskets do damage as normal.

If guns are a more powerful weapon than a sword or a dagger, then pistols and muskets do damage as normal, *plus additional Damage Ranks equal to the MOD of the attacker’s Firearms Forte*.

If guns are one-shot kill weapons, then pistols and muskets do damage as normal, *plus additional Damage Ranks equal to the TN of the attacker’s Firearms Forte*. This means that almost **any** successful hit from a musket or pistol will probably **instantly zero** a character. While PCs have Style Dice on their side, most NPCs—including Named Foes—will treat a gun pointed at them (or by them) as a conflict-stopper.

See also *Setting the Dials*, p. 261.

Bringing Magic to a Swordfight

Everything said above regarding firearms and poison should be considered with regard to mystical damage (alchemy, Gifts, and koldun) in a campaign as well.

See also *Setting the Dials*, p. 261.

The Purposes of Poison

Just as for firearms, GMs and players also need to determine how potent **poison** is in their S7S campaign. (Note that the Barathi—see p. 157—have a cultural understanding of poisons unmatched by the rest of the average peoples of the World.)

Does poison harm? If poison simply does more damage, then apply the MOD of the poison to the damage total after a *successful attack* on a character (or *failed Challenge roll* by a character).

Does poison weaken? If poison weakens a character, they do not heal normally (see p. 225), gain a Story Hook of “Poisoned!”, and the cost of Style Dice-based *Catch Your Second Wind* is doubled (i.e., spend 2 Style Dice to heal 1d6 ranks), until they find the antidote.

Does poison incapacitate or kill? Failing a Challenge roll versus the TN of the poison makes the character instantly become Mostly Dead (see p. 224)—or its equivalent—for other types of threat. For example, a sleeping draught could be a “mental damage” version of poison.

Is the poison one-shot or enduring? A *one-shot poison* does its work and is gone; an *enduring poison* hangs around until it’s removed from the victim’s system (a Story Hook). Harming and Incapacitating/Killing poisons are usually one-shot, while Weakening poisons are usually enduring.

All of the above qualities of poison can be combined, increasing the poison’s toxicity, cost, and rarity.

One final note, in S7S, all poisons **do** have an antidote... but the higher the poison’s Rank and/or the more complex the poison is, the more rare the antidote!

See also *Setting the Dials*, p. 261.

Helping Players Create Characters

It's part of the GM's job to help the players create characters that are not only fun for them to role-play, but that also won't cause problems for other players. Here's some general advice on how to do this.

Talk About the Game Beforehand

The GM should talk to each player—separately and together—about his general ideas for the game. This could be as simple as “I'd like to have a kind of ‘*Gilligan's Island*’ in the 7 Skies’ game with the characters needing to work together to escape being marooned” to “I'd like to do a detailed and epic game involving characters who rise from less than nothing to the heights of the aristocracy” to “Guys trying to colonize a new Island just-risen from the Blue” or “Searching for sponsors for an exploratory mission below the Blue into the rumored Unexplored Skies.”

The next words out of the GM's mouth should be “And what do you think about that?” and he should *listen* to what kind of game the *players* want. After all counties are heard from, the GM can decide if he's good to go, needs to compromise or alter his starting idea, or toss out his idea and go with an idea the players came up with.

Once this short, preliminary discussion happens, everybody should be on the same page on the types of characters that would fit in the prospective game.

Refining Choices During Character Generation

The optimum way to fashion a character for a new S7S player is for the GM to step the player through Character Generation as detailed in *Chapter 5* as a dialogue. The GM should ask the player things like—“so, what has this character experienced?” (Past) and “where is he from?” (Nationality) and “what does he want most in life?” (Motivation) and “what trips him up, more often than not?” (Foible).

By collaborating in this fashion, a GM can offer suggestions on focus, characterization ideas, back-story ideas, identify adventure hooks, and suggest the scope and limits of Forte selection. For an example of the latter, say a player is building a Merchant character, and wants to know if the Merchant Forte would let him own shares in several trading ships. If the GM says no, and the player really wants to possess other mercantile interests, he can take a Commercial Investments Forte. If the GM says sure, then the player doesn't have to worry about covering those bases, freeing up a Forte slot.



The GM should also suggest to (especially first-time) players when to broaden up their Fortes to take advantage of the S7S game mechanics. Why take Fortes of Hide, Climb, Sneak, and Lockpick when you can take a single Burglar Forte? Throughout the process of Character Generation, GMs should point out ways to make their players' characters more efficient under the game system, more fun to play (and to watch play), and generally more interesting for the player.

The most single powerful ability of the GM should be used rigorously during character generation: the *GM Veto*. Anything that seems like it will lead to less-fun for everyone involved should be struck down if the player cannot describe how the thing they envision benefits everybody's playing experience. Just because Vince wants to play a dimension-tossed Melnibonean and thinks it'd be cool is *not enough*: how does Vince being able to play Schmendrick the Depressed make Vivian's time around the gaming table better? (Not that it can't or shouldn't be done; everyone playing S7S variants of popular genre protagonists could be a really intriguing idea for a PC group.)

Lastly, if after a session or two the player isn't happy with their character's performance, it is highly recommended that he and the GM sit down to see if any Fortes can be changed, collapsed, or added to reflect the way the character's been played. Whatever maximizes everybody's fun is okay.



Using Story Hooks as Flashbacks

GM's take note: In addition to being used to help shape future events, *Story Hooks* (see p. 240) can also be used as flashbacks to a character's—or characters'—past, to help fill in exposition and details about that character. This sort of on-the-spot backstory often churns up just as many ideas for future NPCs and events as a regular Story Hook. It's also exceptionally useful for one-shot or standalone S7S adventures, to add texture to the setting, PCs' histories, and the relationship between the PCs and NPCs.

Behind the Curtain: Quick Things to Think About

NATIONALITY

Minor Island: Don't neglect the opportunity to put some creativity into your game. Come up with additional islands of your own to insert into the 7 Skies, or allow your players to do so for their characters!

Infodump: GMs with the PDF of this book may wish to consider printing out a copy of a PC's Island from *Chapter 2* for the player to peruse at their leisure, so that they can get a feel for the history, culture, and mindset of his character's people.

Multi-National Heritages and Expats: What if the PC is half-Colronan and half-Barathi and raised on Colrona? What if the PC is half-Barathi and half-Ilwuzi and raised on Sha Ka Ruq? What if the child of two Crailese is born and raised in the Zultanate? Which Nationality should these PCs be? You can either have the player make a call—which Nationality does the PC most associate with, or consider themselves as?—or you can suggest that they take a second Nationality as one of their other Fortes.

MOTIVATION

PC Motivations are perfect adventure hooks: in many ways, they are the engine that drives the character forward. By paying attention to a PC's Motivation, the GM can craft better Scenes to interest the player and the character. For example, if a pair of PCs have the Motivations of Freedom and Revenge, waving a sack of treasure (Wealth) in front of them will probably not interest their characters... unless the treasure can be portrayed as *a way to gain Freedom or Revenge*.

GIFTS

They are powerful and versatile: Take care when designing Scenes that an Average [7] Difficulty Rank use of a Gift won't totally bollix the plot. For example, if the villain is interacting with the PC group, and one of them possesses the Gift of the Basilisk, give the villain a Ward (see p. 96) to help protect his thoughts!

"Passive use" is the GM's friend: Visions, omens, and portents are great ways to dangle plot Seeds and red herrings in front of PCs. Misheard thoughts, confusing visions, strange vibes... it's all there for you to use.



Generating S7S NPCs

First, see the discussions in *Chapter 6, Duel Opponents*, p. 210. Recall that there are five “threat-levels” of NPC opponents in S7S: **Minion**, **Sidekick**, **Lieutenant**, **Villain**, and **Archvillain**.

Minions and *Sidekicks* are easily developed on the fly—feel free to stat them out ahead of time, but they can easily just be instantly created by associating a *Forte* and a *Name*.

Lieutenants, *Villains*, and *Archvillains* require more thought and deliberation. They should be started up beforehand (though if you can stat up a creditable villain on the fly—kudos to you!).

There should probably be only one—or at most two—active Archvillain per S7S campaign, otherwise, the PCs might feel like they are simply puppets jerked to and fro by the mighty.

A key thing to keep in mind: S7S PCs are *awesome*. If you want to really challenge them, you’re either going to have to throw *buckets of lesser foes* against them, or *a few smart, stylish, resourceful high-threat enemies*.

Villains’ Use of Style Dice?

Swashbuckling villains are especially prone to use Style Dice for things like impossible escapes, encouraging Vexing Misfortune, summoning more Minions, “really” being an impostor when captured, etc. Swashbuckling villains generally start with a bunch of Style Dice and whittle them down while the heroes are building their own points up—this is one reason the good guys usually win.

While normally a GM simply assigns Style Dice to his NPC villains, there is an alternative that some groups might want to utilize. If the gaming group is amenable, perhaps Style Dice are given to the GM *by the players* at the end of a session, for particularly interesting play.

Then, the GM can apply those points to any of his antagonists in the next session.

Some example NPCs for your S7S campaign appear starting on p. 283.

Crafting S7S Scenes

Designing good adventure *Scenarios* for players is a large part of a GM's craft. Even if the design is something as simple as "Let the PCs work out how to throw a surprise party for their patron" or as complex as "map and detail a Flying Fortress from which the PCs must rescue Count Buriidi."

Below is some general advice for designing your own S7S adventures; take what is useful and leave what is not.

Adventure Checklist

Before sitting down to design a new adventure for his S7S group, a GM should sit down and review the following checklist. Using these principles *should* make for an enjoyable session, all around.

- ◆ **Seeds:** Seeds are the basic ideas, situations, or images that serve as the starting point for design. A Seed can be a thought problem ("What happens when an irresistible force meets an immovable object?"), a situation ("A Viridese, a Barathi, and a Zultanista walk into a bar..."), or an image ("A man kneeling in front of a woman, offering an goblet to her, which she refuses to take"). Seeds are developed into *Scenes* by asking "what's going on here?" followed by "why is this happening?"
- ◆ **Staging:** This includes the basic history of how the Seed concept got to this specific point of interest, the locations, the stuff lying around, and any NPCs who would be involved.
- ◆ **Cast:** Which existing NPCs are likely to be involved? Should new ones be introduced? What do they want to do? What are they currently doing? How would they react to people (i.e., the PCs) or events that interfere with their goals?
- ◆ **Scenery:** Describe the place and the people in it using a few evocative descriptions, paying attention to what all five senses (plus Gifts) could tell someone about it.
- ◆ **Props:** What sorts of things are lying around? Make a short list, for descriptive and Scene-setting purposes.
- ◆ **Obstacles:** What sorts of things stand in the PCs' way?



- ◆ **Opportunities:** What sorts of things might benefit the PCs' plans?
- ◆ **Choices:** Choices offered in Challenges, whether they be obstacle or opportunity, shouldn't simply be logical or tactical—they should also have emotional, moral, and ethical aspects that play on the PCs' Foibles and Motivations. Being asked to choose between *the lesser of two evils* (do we let the murderous Pirate Captain Greenbeard escape, or let the skyship he just attacked burn?) or *the greater of two goods* (do we use the Prince's favor to advance ourselves at court, or do we ask him to release a comrade from the dungeons?) are great ways to get players engaged in a situation.
- ◆ **Story Hooks:** Any Story Hooks generated in previous sessions should be integrated. Are there blank spots in a character's back-story? Fill 'em with Story Hooks.
- ◆ **NPC Plans:** Try to figure out the individual storylines of the key NPCs for each session.

Campaign Cartography (The Map of Scenes)

Here is a quick technique that makes generating Scenes and Scenarios for S7S a snap: *The Map of Scenes*. (It takes longer to describe than to do!)

Consult the Stars

Take a piece of blank paper. Write down a character's name, Foible, Motivation, and any Story Hooks from the last session. Repeat for all PCs and spread out—use the whole sheet. Put a box around each chunk of character info.

Check Your Bearing

Draw lines between character boxes. Note obvious similarities (e.g., same or related Foibles and Motivations) and differences (especially ones with opposed elements like "Loves the Prince" and "Hates the Prince" or "Generous" and "Greedy").

In any case, think about how the characters' pairs of Foibles and Motivations intersect. Run through both sides of the combinations and see if any ideas are sparked:

- ◆ *Foible + Foible:* A major complication where two characters' weaknesses become entangled, producing a critical predicament.



- ◆ *Foible + Motivation*: A significant obstacle, where one character's weakness intersects with another character's driving inspiration; this is indicative of an *important* goal to pursue—possibly an opportunity for one character, and an obstacle for the other.
- ◆ *Motivation + Motivation*: When characters' Motivations align, that is *powerful* mojo. A major opportunity should open up for both of them in this case.

Remember that each pair-combination is going to have specific characteristics of its own. Motivation provides *direction and goals* and Foible provides *obstacles and complications*. (Remember to take into account the **Rank** of Motivations!)

Take a Sounding

Above each line, write a short phrase or sentence on how the connection between the two boxes generates an obstacle. Below each line, write a short phrase or sentence on how the connection between the two boxes generates an opportunity.

Test the Wind

Circle the obstacles and opportunities that seem to be both interesting (visually and in terms of plot) and able to be expressed in an action-, intrigue-, or adventure-based Scene. Consider the NPCs, Locations, and Challenges that may be associated with these Scenes.

Sketch a Course

A GM should then select 2 to 5 Scenes that fit together well and seem like they'll be fun for the players. Depending upon how the GM assembles the above components and their resulting Scenes, the campaign could *meander* (focusing on picaresque exploration and discovery) or *dash* (focusing on action, reaction, and result). The stringing of some or all of the Scenes thus generated together makes a *Scenario*.

Set Sail!

Scenarios should be more like a map than a railroad. Instead of following in sequence with no deviation, Scenes should be scattered like cloud-islands in the 7 Skies, ready to be visited, altered, changed, pillaged. PCs can get to a Scene by following their own course, in their own time. If they want to go the long way around, *let them*. . . just note if they're running low on food and water.

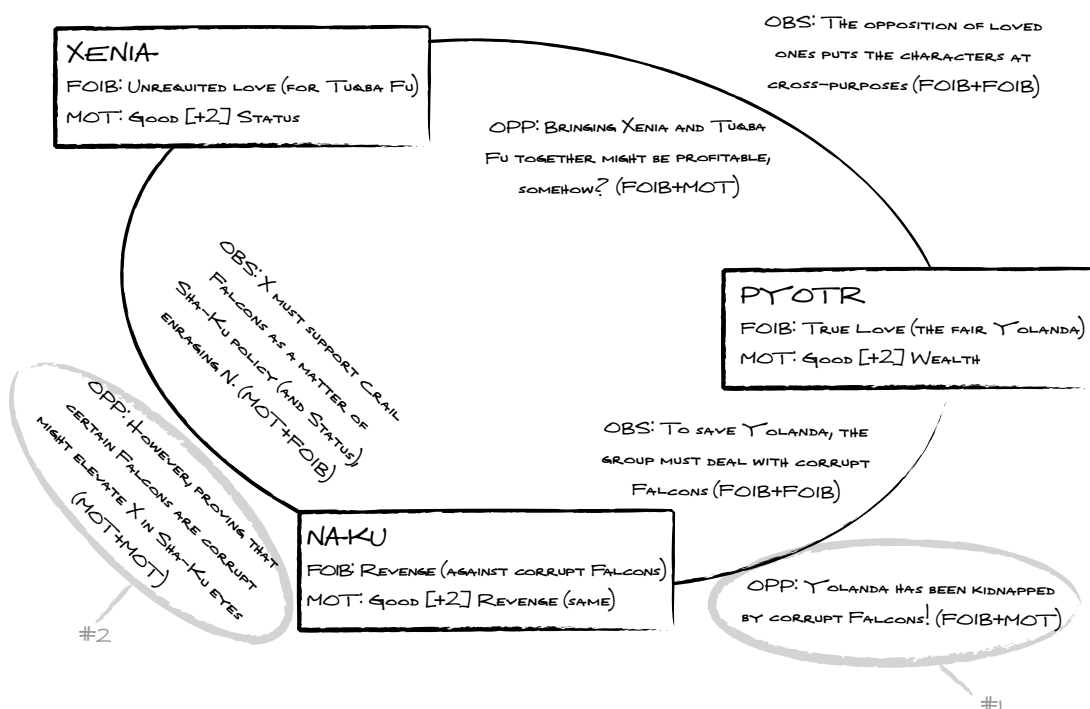


That being said, there's nothing wrong with having a few Scenes that must be passed through to get to later ones—if the Sky of Stones must be successfully navigated to find the Treasure World at its heart, no amount of flying around the Mists will get the PCs there. (But use such direct linkages sparingly.)

The GM draws the map, but the PCs set the destination, navigate, and fly.

Example of a Map of Scenes

Here's an example of the Map of Scenes, using the characters generated in *Chapter 5*, starting from zero—that is, no Story Hooks gained in play, just what's on their starting character sheets.



This Scenario looks like our PCs are intriguing a bit against the corrupt Falcons of Crail that are Naku's special enemies. The individual Scenes look to be:

1. Yolanda has been kidnapped by corrupt Crail Falcons.
2. Proving that at least some Falcons are corrupt benefits Xenia's status.

Scenes 1 and 2 can be presented hand-in-hand to the players—"Okay, your characters are on Crail. Pyotr's True Love—the fair Yolanda—has been kidnapped by

corrupt Crail Falcons. Naku yearns to destroy such individuals, and Xenia thinks she'll gain status by exposing them."

While the players discuss these things, the GM stats up some bad guy Falcons. He determines that a Villain, two or three Lieutenants, and a half-dozen Minions is probably a decent amount of opposition for the PCs. He considers some locations where the PCs and NPCs will meet—the Falcons' quarters, the docks, Pyotr's skyship *The Sparrow*, and so forth, and scribbles down some notes or makes rough sketches of maps.

When the players tell him their idea—an assault against the Tower of Smoke, to rescue Yolanda—the GM nods.

"How do you plan to do this?"

And the session is off and running (see *Chapter 6*, p. 241). . .

Assigning Difficulty Ranks to Challenges

In an *S7S* game, the main tools a GM needs to use in setting Difficulty Ranks for Challenges are his or her *Common Sense*, *Game Sense*, and *Story Sense*.

- ◆ **Common Sense:** Evaluate characters, scenery, and situations in terms of "Is this reasonable, given the situation?" Depending upon the current status of these three elements, what is "reasonable" may change drastically.
 - **Likely:** Average [7] Difficulty.
 - **Probable:** Good [9] Difficulty.
 - **Possible:** Expert [11] Difficulty.
 - **Improbable:** Master [13] Difficulty.
 - **Unreasonable:** The sky's the limit. (See the Master Chart on p. 133.)
- ◆ **Game Sense:** Evaluate characters, scenery, and situations in terms of "Should I make the PC(s) roll for this?" Depending upon what your players' characters are up to, and the way you run your game, this can vary wildly. Know when to apply rules and when to abstract them for the comfort of your players.



- ◆ **Story Sense:** Evaluate characters, scenery, and situations in terms of “**What would be the coolest thing that could happen at this point in the game?**”

In many ways, having good Story Sense allows you to chuck your session notes and fly by the seat of your pants when the players come up with something cooler than you did.

- **Boring:** Increase the Difficulty, add complications.
- **Repetitive:** Increase the Difficulty, *definitely* add complications.
- **Horrible:** Make it happen, and let the PCs react.
- **Interesting:** Decrease the Difficulty (no more than a Rank).
- **Awesome:** Keep the Difficulty at the same Rank, but dole out lots of Style Dice.

Since S7S is a relatively simple system, it is easy to flip the math around and find out what’s “just out of reach” for a character in terms of Difficulty Ranks—and thus what will push them particularly hard to use Techniques, combine multiple Fortes (their own and those of their allies), and spending Style Dice.

In general, any Difficulty Rank that is below a Forte’s MOD+2 for a character is an automatic success; any Difficulty Rank that is above a Forte’s MOD+7 is challenging—there’s a good chance of failure there. A Difficulty Rank that’s above a Forte’s MOD+12 is almost impossible, and will require multiple Fortes, relevant Techniques, or a whole bunch of Style Dice.

For example, consider a character with Master [+6] Climber. This character should be given several opportunities to overcome climbing challenges pretty often, since a Master [+6] Forte is a big investment during character generation. Average [7] or lesser climbing Challenges don’t even need a roll. Expert [11] climbing Challenges are still pretty easy; Master [13] climbing Challenges carry some risk, but not a lot. To really stretch this character, Impossible [19] Difficulty climbs have to be in his future. He must roll a 12 to hit that target, or find some way to get his Motivation, other Techniques, or Foibles into action to scale that obstacle. That’s going to make him sweat, but it’s also going to make him proud as hell when he pulls it off.



Mystical Difficulty

Ranks

See the *Mystical Challenges* (p. 202) textbox in *Chapter 6*.

Some quick reminders:

- ◆ **High Mysticism:** When the Difficulty Ranks and TNs to use Alchemy, Gifts, and Koldun abilities are *minor* (Average [7] to Good [9]), mystical abilities will be extremely common and powerful.
- ◆ **Medium Mysticism:** When the Difficulty Ranks and TNs to use Alchemy, Gifts, and Koldun abilities are *significant* (Expert [11] to Master [13]), mystical abilities will be somewhat common and somewhat powerful.
- ◆ **Low Mysticism:** When the Difficulty Ranks and TNs to use Alchemy, Gifts, and Koldun abilities are *major* (Impossible [19] on past Inconceivable [25+]), mystical abilities will be extremely rare and weak.
- ◆ **Fluctuating Difficulty:** Mystic abilities can be more mysterious and/or frustrating if the Difficulty Ranks for the same sort of application change over time. This can be a feature or a bug, depending upon the gaming group!
- ◆ Indeed, a GM who wishes to may come up with a schedule or algorithm for how these “alterations in the aether” work can make these inconsistencies consistent! The changes could be calendrical (related to time of day or season), related to how many other people are using the same ability at the moment, related to the local “mana supply,” related to how many times a session a particular ability is used (especially useful with regard to the Gift of the Merhorse, by the way), or any other rubric the GM can come up with.
- ◆ **Versus (Target):** Against a Minion, probably a *Challenge*. Against a Gifted Minion, a Minion with a Ward, Sidekick, or Lieutenant, probably a *Duel*, but could be a *Challenge*. Against a Gifted Sidekick/Lieutenant, a Sidekick/Lieutenant with a Ward, Villain, or Archvillain, definitely a *Duel*.



Playing NPCs

The GM plays the NPCs in the game. In addition to the other NPC advice spread throughout this chapter, the GM should make an effort to make each NPC memorable—a turn of phrase, an accent, a focus of interest, a manner of dress or taste, etc. Do not discount the value of a good recurring NPC—they add texture and depth to a campaign. If an established NPC can fill a new role in a campaign, *use them!* And, importantly, some NPCs should be enemies, some should be allies, and some should have the potential to go either way.

Some quick things to keep in mind for NPC characterization:

- ◆ How does the NPC talk? (Fast, slow, thick accent, high-falutin', quietly, etc.)
- ◆ How does the NPC act? (Nervous, confident, oblivious, thoughtful, etc.)
- ◆ What does the NPC want?
- ◆ How far will the NPC go to get it?
- ◆ What abilities does the NPC have that they will use to get what they want?

Reminding PCs of Their Foibles

See Chapter 5, *Player-Initiated vs. GM-Initiated Foibles*, p. 138.

Some quick reminders:

- ◆ **If the player specifically notes that he's playing to the character's Foible,** that's a Style Die.
- ◆ **If the GM tries to activate the Foible by reminding the player of it,** the PC can:
 - *Accept:* PC gains a Style Die.
 - *Decline:* No award, but GM can try to *Sweeten the Pot* by offering multiple Style Dice for following the Foible. The player can still decline.

Always, *always*, **always** bring the PCs' Foibles to the party. Their players put them on their sheets for just that purpose; don't disappoint them!

GMs should also remind PCs of their Motivations, Fortes, and Techniques, if they seem to be forgetting about them.



Modifying Player Narration

For Rolls

S7S players narrate both the successful and failed rolls of their characters (see *Chapter 6, Challenge Results*, p. 206). This is great all around—it invests the player more into their character’s actions and can give the GM more ideas for action and future events.

The GM should repeat the player’s narration of success or failure in rolls, embroidering, inserting, revising, or deleting minor elements such that the result makes sense and is consistent with what’s going on. And the GM should feel no compunction about totally *vetoing* a player’s description if they are trying to do something *egregious*, like making a failure into a success.

Behind the Curtain: Who Said What?

Player narration of success and failure is an important and useful S7S rule. It has a lot of benefits.

However, in practice, I often found myself fluctuating between the more common method found in the majority of RPGs of “Players roll, GM narrates results.” This often happened in Duels (where there are a lot of rolls in quick succession to account for) or late in the session (after a couple hours of play).

And that’s totally okay.

Indeed, sometimes there’s an advantage to the GM taking over narration duties for awhile, just to mix it up, inject some suspense, and ease the burden on the players.

As the GM, you should do your best to assess your players’ *comfort level* with getting the responsibility to narrate. As the GM you’re the person who has the most experience grabbing the narration ball and running with it. So (as always) orient on your players *having fun*—if they don’t want to narrate, don’t *force* them to. But if they’re itching to say something, barely restraining themselves, sitting forward in their seats, don’t *silence* them either—you may be the primary narrator of the game in some ways, but the players are more invested in their characters than you are.

Narration is one of those things that can be a good thing to talk about with folks before the game gets started. An explicit idea of your players’ comfort levels regarding narration of their characters’ actions is always good.

Aim for *interesting failures* and *intriguing successes* when modifying player narration of roll results. Remember, *Never Say No* (though you can say *Maybe, but...* or *Yes, but...*; see p. 256).

For Style Dice Usage

Everything stated above as regarding the GM modifying the players' narration of their roll results holds true for their narration of Style Dice usage, with one proviso: so when a player is spending Style Dice, it's best to modify with an even lighter hand than usual.

Behind the Curtain: Ye Olde Perception Roll

In some RPGs, perception rolls (used to detect someone sneaking up on the characters, to find hidden clues, or to avoid traps) can be very frustrating. The GM either has the character's perception abilities written down and rolls in secret, or announces "Make a perception roll!"—which warns the players that something is up; if they fail that roll, the knowledge that the characters missed something is extremely annoying to the players.

In my S7S campaigns, I have found that "Ye Olde Perception Roll" can be fun and rewarding. In S7S, these rolls pay off in two ways:

1. **"Everyone make Ye Olde Perception Roll at TN 9 to see if you hear the assassin sneaking in through the kitchen window. If you succeed, tell me how and why you succeeded. If you fail, tell me how and why you failed."** Because the players narrate both their PC's successes and failures (with slight GM modification, see p. 206), they have to know what it is they're being asked to detect. They've already lost, so they may as well make the loss entertaining—or set themselves up for being cool in the next Turn. "Xenia didn't hear the assassin because I was arguing with Pyotr over his inability to cook, complaining loudly at the dryness of his roast, and jabbing my fork at him for emphasis." (And the next Turn, when the assassin comes in, Xenia has a sharp and pointy weapon already in her hand to do something impressive with.)
2. **Failed rolls grant Training Points.** Indeed, the majority of my alpha playtesters didn't take any type of perception-related Fortes. The closest they got were a few who had the Gift of the Merhorse, which allowed me to throw in random visions and mystical sensory hoo-hah on top of perception-stuff. So they were always and forever failing Ye Olde Perception Roll, and gaining Training Points for them.

The PC is spending hard-won resources to dictate how something will be, don't clamp down on his or her happiness. Many Style Dice come from navigating complications the players or the GM have brought to bear, after all—so when players spend a Style Dice, they're finally getting *payback*!

Awarding Style Dice, Training Points, & Ephemera

See *Style Dice* (p. 169), *Training Points* (p. 180), and *Ephemera* (p. 183).

Style Dice

Some quick reminders for awarding Style Dice:

- ◆ **Good Form:** Acting heroically or stylishly.
- ◆ **Good Roleplaying:** Staying in character, aiding a fellow player's character in a classy way, saying something funny, and so on.
- ◆ **Affected by Foible:** Having a Foible come into play. (See also *Foibles*, p. 137, and *Reminding PCs of their Foibles*, p. 276).
- ◆ **Vexing Misfortune:** When the GM hoses a character (3 Style Dice).
- ◆ **Feeding the Plot:** Advancing the plot or action of the session, or giving the GM new ideas and insights.

Remember that Style Dice can be awarded in the form of *Temporary Gear* or *Temporary Wealth* (see p. 178); this is especially apropos for ill-gotten booty from piracy and well-earned profits from adventure trading. And, frankly, sometimes a well-timed windfall of “tangible” equipment or loot is welcomed by players.

NOTE

While Style Die and Training Point awards should be announced to the players immediately, it's an interesting idea for the GM to also keep track of points earned and spent by the PCs. Then, at the end of the session, the GM can announce the running total as a reminder to the players. (This is often more useful for Training Points than Style Dice.)

7

Training Points

For Training Points, the GM must remember and remind players that failed rolls grant Training Points.

Ephemera

If at all possible, every PC should get the option to receive an Ephemera (see p. 183), based on what they did during the session. Again, Ephemera are a combination of Temporary Fortes and Story Hooks. They should reflect a tangible, important benefit that the character gained through the course of the events of a session.

We're talking about something that will add to the character's reputation or ultimate glory: if the PC saves the life of the Dread Pirate Radu, or tricks the Zultan into giving them a sinecure, or becomes a paramour of the Empress of Barathi—well, that's worth making an Ephemera.

Behind the Curtain: Temporary Fortes vs. Ephemera

The basic difference between Temporary Fortes and Ephemera is best explained by going a little off-genre. Apologies.

Let's talk classic *Star Trek*.

In the episode "Plato's Stepchildren," it is discovered that a sufficient amount of kiro-nide in a person's system gives them psychokinetic powers. This fact is never, ever mentioned again. Under S7S, that's a Temporary Forte.

In the episode "Balance of Terror," the Romulan cloaking device is introduced. This eventually leads to the episode "The Enterprise Incident," where Captain Kirk performs a covert operation to steal one for the Federation. Under S7S, that's an Ephemera.

In short, if a result of a PC's actions will have a wider effect on the game, go with Ephemera. If that result is less consequential to the game, go with Temporary Fortes.

(Note that some GMs might want to dispense with one or the other of Temporary Fortes or Ephemera... and that's okay.)

Some quick reminders for Ephemera:

- ◆ **Lasts** until the end of the *following* session.
- ◆ **Are Ranked at Good** [+2], and *can* absorb damage like other Fortes.
- ◆ **Ephemera as a Forte:** The MOD of Ephemera adds to relevant rolls for the session.
- ◆ **Cashing In:** One time bonus of +TN of the Ephemera's Rank to a roll; immediately removes it from the character's sheet.
- ◆ **Maintain:** Spend a Style Die, and carry-over Ephemera to the *next* session. PCs can have several Ephemera at a time, if they can spend the Style Dice to maintain them.
- ◆ **Formally Purchase:** Spend 4 Training Points plus a Style Die, and the character can permanently add the Ephemera to the character's sheet as a Forte.

Judging Bad Form

Bad Form is the opposite of Good Form (see *Chapter 5*, p. 171). If a PC is displaying Bad Form openly, people (i.e., NPCs) and the universe (i.e., the GM and thus the setting, the NPCs, and the action) will start to notice, and treat him accordingly.

For example, if the PC is. . .

- ◆ **Displaying *too much* caution:** Something explodes, an NPC busts in, something breaks from being fiddled with too much. The watchwords of swash-buckling are *style* and *action*!
- ◆ **Killing an innocent or a helpless foe:** Can lead to new enemies seeking revenge, or a reputation of not being honorable (never good!). And don't expect mercy the next time you are found dead to rights.
- ◆ **Taking *undue* advantage of a situation:** Again, new enemies and rumors of being dishonorable. And the next time someone has you over a barrel, expect to be taken advantage of yourself.
- ◆ **Betraying loyal friends (PC or NPC):** Dishonor, definitely, and the enemies made are going to be just as impressive as the betrayer. You've made your bed, traitor, now sleep in it as they tie you to it, set it on fire, and drop it off the side of a skyship.



- ◆ **Gloating (but not in the fun stylish villain way, more like the annoying little kid way):** A bad reputation as a braggart—perhaps a new Foible to replace the current one. And, no doubt, the next time you’re in a villain’s clutches, he may not even speak to you—and then how will you discover the details of his dastardly scheme?
- ◆ **Breaking one’s word:** Dishonor! Once a character’s given bond is broken, who will ever trust them (or keep their own promises) to them?

Behind the Curtain: Between a Rock and a Hard Place

PC displaying Bad Form can be good fun. Someone who is known for keeping his word breaking that word *once* is a huge event for the story and is worth highlighting for the rest of the campaign. An unexpected betrayal of your friends for *very good reasons* (my wife has been kidnapped, but I’ve been told that if I ask anyone for help, she’s dead) can be at the root of a great, heart-wrenching plot.

Remember that all of the above should be thought of as *reasonable, entertaining consequences* for actions of Bad Form. Fun is still the goal at the table, and so long as everyone is still entertained by those moments of Bad Form, having the occasional touch of it on your game can—for some—be the just-right amount of spice.

Note that the protagonists of swashbuckling fiction have historically not participated in much Bad Form (see *Chapter 8*); the melodramatic aspects of sticking to their ideals, rain or shine, has been a big part of the genre. However, some of the more “psychological” swashbuckling tales often include this sort of challenge, where the hero is caught between the rock of his ideals and the hard place of what’s expedient.

That said, keep an eye on your players whenever Bad Form occurs. Talk to them about it—explicitly and quickly—as soon as you can. If the player feels that his character’s Motivation trumps his Foible (or vice-versa), leading to a moment of Bad Form, it’s probably okay. But **run with it!** This is a character-defining moment, when two of the PCs’ aspects have come into conflict. Explore the ramifications!

However, when Bad Form makes the leap into *bad feelings* on the part of the players (from less-than-heroic actions or backstabbing amongst the group), the game stops being fun and starts having pesky social issues. As the caretaker of the game’s health, it’s your job to make sure that Bad Form doesn’t become social poison.



S7S Non-Player Characters (NPCs)

Here are a selection of NPCs to help populate your S7S campaign, based on the characters mentioned in the fiction pieces found in *Chapters 1* through *4*, using the different “threat levels” mentioned in *Chapter 6*, p. 210.

Minions

See *Chapter 5*, p. 155 and *Chapter 6*, p. 210.

NOTE

Quick reminders:

- ♦ A lone Minion is probably best handled as a Challenge rather than a Duel.
- ♦ A PC can easily handle a Squad composed of a number of foes equal to his Fencing MOD+1. At numbers higher than that, each additional Minion added to the Squad adds another die to the Squad’s total.)

Fencing Fops & Rakes: Good [+2] Fencing.

Fencing Fops & Rakes Squad: Four fops or rakes, young blades with nothing better to do than duel in the streets, all with Good [+2] Fencing. [Uses 4d6, divvy best 3 (remember +2 from Forte) in Duels.]

Guardsmen: Average [0] Soldier.

Guardsmen Squad: Five guardsmen, patrolling the fortress walls and corridors, all with Average [0] Soldier. (Uses 5d6, divvy best 3, in Duels.)

Pirate: Good [+2] Pirate.

Pirate Squad: Six pirates, leaping onto the foredeck with cutlasses swinging, all with Good [+2] Pirate. [Uses 6d6, divvy best 3 (remember +2 from Forte) in Duels.]

Sidekicks

See Chapter 5, p. 163.

Mother Amily Godsjan of Sunseer Freehold (Good [+2] Sidekick)

Foible: Pacifist.

Fortes: Good [+2] Priest, Good [+2] Reputation: Trustworthy, Average [0] Viridese.

Techniques: Priest: (free) Domestic Craft: Brewing; also Cenobite and Virtutoir.

Miscellany: Amily is in her late forties: a large, buxom woman with white hair. Oddly for a Viridese, she's a pacifist (though she has occasionally slipped); however, this is a personal feeling, and she does not necessarily advocate it to her parishioners. Amily's Priest Forte contains the free Technique of *Domestic Craft: Brewing*.

Jamin of Ostrich Alley (Good [+2] Sidekick)

Foible: Twitchy.

Fortes: Expert [+4] Burglar, Average [0] Escape.

Techniques: Burglar: Situation: the Grapevine of Crime and Maneuver: Backstab.

Miscellany: Jamin is a weedy little crook that is under the protection of Crail Falcon Lieutenant Viktor Straussberg (see p. 288). His Technique of *the Grapevine of Crime* helps him when seeking out information on illicit activities.



Red Devil (Expert [+4] Sidekick)

Foible: Arrogant.

Fortes: Good [+2] Warhorse; Expert [+4] Smart, Average [0] Perfect Timing.

Techniques: Warhorse: Smart and War-Trained

Miscellany: Red Devil's *Perfect Timing* Forte means that while not the fastest horse around, he often arrives at the right or appropriate moment.



Lieutenants

See Chapter 6, p. 210.

Rikaard Ayemson, King of the Mandolin

Foible: Nosy.

Motivation: Good [+2] Entertain.

Nationality: Good [+2] Crailese.

Past: Good [+2] Colronan Royalist.

Swashbuckling Forte: Good [+2] Bard.

Other Fortes: Good [+2] Fencing, Good [+2] Perceptive, and Good [+2] Streetwise.

Techniques: *Bard:* Tool: Mandolin, Location: Bars & Taverns, Location: Camello Neighborhood; *Fencing:* Location: Bars & Taverns.

Miscellany: Apprenticed as a child in a counting house in the Kingdom of Colrona, Rikaard ran away to Craile to become a bard. While he considers himself Crailese, his *Colronan Royalist* Past represents contacts and knowledge he retains from his land of birth. His *Nosy* nature and *Streetwise* smarts have made him one of the most informed people in the Camello neighborhood of Agua Azul.

Jelissa Knott, First Mate of the Viridese trader *Black Turtle*

Foible: Hard-hearted.

Motivation: Good [+2] Run a Tight Ship.

Nationality: Good [+2] Viridese.

Past: Good [+2] Merchant.

Swashbuckling Forte: Expert [+4] Fencing.

Other Fortes: Expert [+4] Skysailor.

Techniques: *Fencing:* Idiom: Acrobatic, Maneuver: Whip Entangle, Location: Shipboard, Weapon: Cutlass, and Weapon: Whip.

Miscellany: Jelissa is a tall and slender woman with black hair; her skin is tanned bronze by the sun. She is of the Paxjan caste of Viridese society. Her Foible of *Hard-hearted* means that she is particularly resistant to emotional entreaties, and rarely shows any emotions herself (other than anger and annoyance). Her Fencing Maneuver of *Whip Entangle*, if successful, means that an opponent must spend their next combat action in a Fencing Challenge (vs. her roll) to get their entangled weapon free.



Allan Firedirk, Lunatic Pirate

Foible: (Insanity of the GM's choice).

Motivation: Good [+2] Cause Mayhem.

Nationality: Good [+2] (Minor Cloud-Island of GM's choice).

Past: Good [+2] Pirate.

Swashbuckling Forte: Expert [+4] Gift: Dragon.

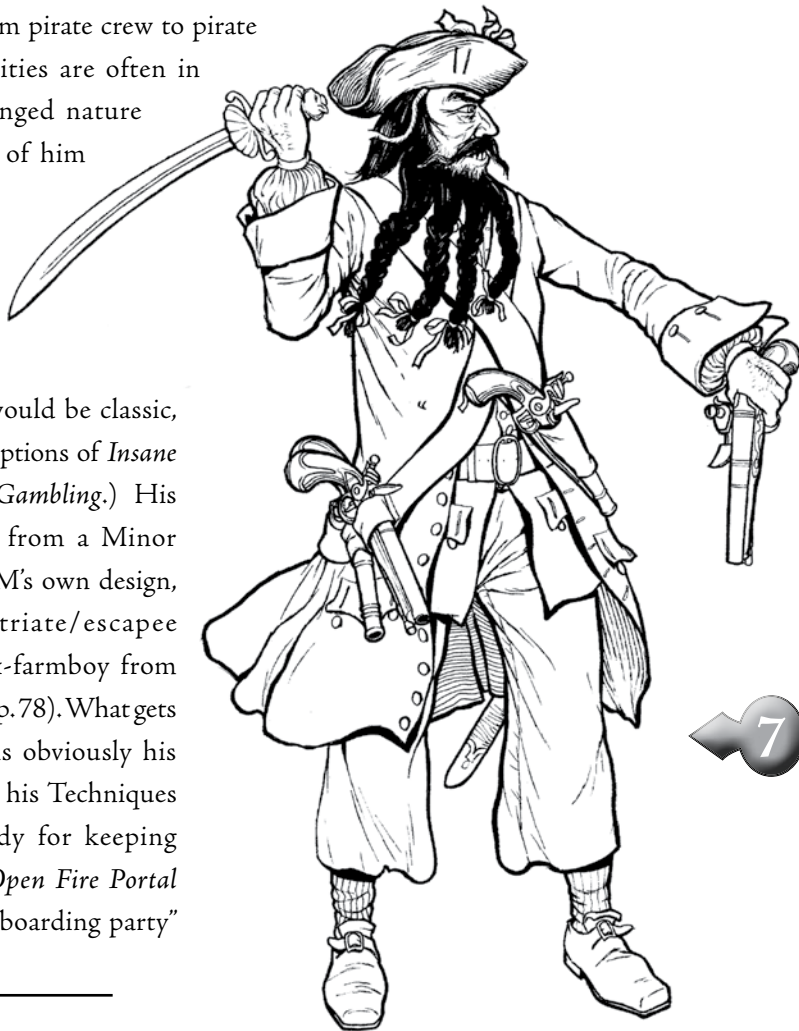
Other Fortes: Expert [+4] Knife-Fighting.

Techniques: *Dragon*: Maneuver: Flaming Weapon, Maneuver: Douse Flame, Maneuver: Open Fire Portal; *Knife-Fighting*: Weapon: Flaming Weapon.

Miscellany: Allan Firedirk stands 5' 10" tall, and weighs around 150 lbs. His skin is nut-brown, and is heavily tattooed with skulls, spiders, knives, and fiery tribal symbols. His brown hair is thinning, and he wears a goatee. He roams from pirate crew to pirate crew—his dragon abilities are often in demand, but his unhinged nature usually gets the better of him eventually.

Allan is *Insane*—but the expression of that insanity is up to the GM.

(*Pyromania* or *Sadist* would be classic, but don't overlook the options of *Insane Bravery* or *Compulsive Gambling*.) His *Nationality* should be from a Minor Island (either of the GM's own design, or perhaps an expatriate/escapee from Hekuba or an ex-farmboy from Molnar—see *Chapter 2*, p. 78). What gets him on a pirate crew is obviously his *Gift: Dragon*, especially his *Techniques* of *Douse Flame* (handy for keeping the ship whole!) and *Open Fire Portal* (incredible for “instant boarding party” action!).



Heroes & Villains

See Chapter 6, p. 210. (Also, the example characters in Chapter 5.)

Leftenant Victor Armandson, King's Musketeer, Knight of Grande Dellaluna

Foible: All His Mistresses Get Him Into Trouble.

Motivation: Good [+2] Romance.

Nationality: Good [+2] Colronan Royalist.

Past: Good [+2] Aristocrat.

Swashbuckling Forte: Good [+2] Musketeer.

Other Fortes: Good [+2] Charming, Good [+2] Handsome, and Good [+2] Sidekick: Kenneth (see below).

Techniques: *Fencing:* Idiom: Acrobatic, Situation: Close Combat, Location: At Court; Weapon: Main-Gauche, and Weapon: Saber

Style Dice: 1

Training Points: 0

Miscellany: Victor is a tall, broad, and handsome Musketeer, popular at court and with his comrades. His hair and mustaches are red, though he wears no beard.

He has dozens of mistresses/lovers (and boy, does he fall into their plots often). His *Sidekick: Kenneth* is a former nobleman himself (fallen on hard times and forced to enter service), but his advice has helped Victor navigate court functions with relative aplomb.

Kenneth: *Foible:* Secret (Ex-Nobleman), *Fortes:* Good [+2] Manservant, Good [+2] Fencing, and Average [0] Contacts Amongst the Servant Class. *Techniques:* (Manservant) Always Prepared and (Contacts) Especially Grooms.

7

NOTE

Interestingly, Victor has a Crailese cousin named Viktor (the Handsome) Straussberg; they are identical in appearance except Viktor's hair and mustache is black. Use Victor's stats with the following changes: *Dirty Cop* rather than *All His Mistresses Get Him Into Trouble*, *Wealth* rather than *Romance*, *Crailese* rather than *Colronan Royalist*, *Crail Falcon* rather than *Musketeer*, and *Sidekick: Jamin of Ostrich Alley* (see p. 284) rather than *Sidekick: Kenneth*.

Father Fehrad Djezuni

Foible: Fire Prone.

Motivation: Good [+2] Convince others to be Honorable.

Nationality: Good [+2] Ilwuzi.

Past: Good [+2] Skyship Navigator.

Swashbuckling Forte: Good [+2] Priest.

Other Fortes: Good [+2] Fencing, Good [+2] Gift: Merhorse, and Good [+2] Co-Owner of Vaoz's Chalice (see below).

Techniques: *Fencing:* Idiom: Thoughtful; *Priest:* Domestic Craft: Teacher, Peregrinator, Ritual of the Cleansing of Honor, and Virtutoir.

Style Dice: 1

Training Points: 0

Miscellany: Fehrad is a slim man of medium height. His hair and beard are salt-and-pepper, and both are worn short. He favors simple robes, but the symbol of Vaoz he wears is pure silver.

Fehrad was raised on Ilwuz by his Zultanista mother and Kroyu father. He learned honor from his mother (not from his largely absent father), but a tolerance for other views from Ilwuz. He believes there are many ways of being honorable, and Vaoz recognizes them all. This isn't heresy exactly.

In his youth, he used his *Gift of the Merhorse* to navigate the 7 Skies, paying his way as a *Skyship Navigator*. Following his heart, he joined the Church. Now, in middle-age, he more often uses his Gift to see into the hearts of men and women (as well as to protect his own skin). Mostly, though, Fehrad uses his Gift to help craft his message of honor and service to Vaoz. His Foible of *Fire Prone* means that things tend to problematically light on fire in his vicinity (especially when he gets emotional); it has been suggested that this is due to Fehrad having a "stunted" Gift of the Dragon.

Vaoz's Chalice is a combination chapel and tavern in Port Gulliver on Ilwuz, co-owned by Fehrad and his adventuring comrade *Alma Fulkesdar* (see p. 290).

Team Sanctum: Vaoz's Chalice

Vaoz's Chalice is a combination chapel/tavern in Port Gulliver on Ilwuz, colloquially known as the "Puke 'n' Pray." It is co-owned by *Fehrad Djezuni* and his adventuring comrade *Alma Fulkesdar*. (Technically, Fehrad is the majority owner/"elder partner"—which suits Alma just fine.) It is a fairly popular place amongst skysailors and pirates that have retired to Ilwuz (who tolerate Fehrad's

Team Sanctum: Vaoz's Chalice (continued)

relaxed ministry), but it can still get rather lively when a Brethren skyship comes into port.

It is a Good [+2] Team Sanctum, with a Good [+2] Chapel, a Good [+2] Tavern, and a Foible of You Got Your Patrons in My Parishioners (and Vice-Versa). (See also Chapter 2, p. 70.)

Alma Fulkesdar, Merhorse and Duelist

Foible: Impulsive.

Motivation: Good [+2] Adventure.

Nationality: Good [+2] Ilwuzi.

Past: Good [+2] Skysailor.

Swashbuckling Forte: Expert [+4] Duelist.

Other Fortes: Good [+2] Athletic, Good [+2] Gift: Merhorse, and Good [+2] Average [0] Co-Owner of Vaoz's Chalice (see below), and one extra chained Technique for Duelist.

Techniques: *Duelist*: Idiom: Acrobatic, Idiom: Fierce, Location: Shipboard, Location: Taverns, Situation: Semi-Clad, and Weapon: Rapier.

Style Dice: 2

Training Points: 0

Miscellany: Alma is a largish woman, moderately attractive in a disheveled sort of way. She likes flashy clothes, but is rarely all that well-groomed. She is generally jovial and good-natured, and decidedly tomboyish.

Alma's mother had been a Viridese Warmaster, but lost status when she fell in love and married a foreigner—a Colronan Royalist. Her father was ostracized by his noble family for letting himself be “emasculated by a tattooed barbarian girl.” They settled on Ilwuz, but they couldn't completely escape their dramatically different backgrounds, and had little domestic tranquility: crockery was often broken. Alma is their second child and eldest daughter.

Her Swashbuckling Forte of *Duelist* includes Fencing and Firearms. Her Technique of *Semi-Clad* comes from years of being surprised in bed with a willing partner by that willing partner's lover, madam, or pimp and being forced to fight with not much more on than boots and a hat.

Vaoz's Chalice is a combination tavern and chapel in Port Gulliver on Ilwuz, co-owned by Alma and her adventuring comrade *Father Fehrad Djezuni* (see p. 289).

Sandman Rahimat

Foible: Overconfident.

Motivation: Good [+2] Honor.

Nationality: Good [+2] Colronan Zultanista.

Past: Good [+2] Courtier.

Swashbuckling Forte: Expert [+4] Colronan Sandman.

Other Fortes: Expert [+4] Gift: Griffin.

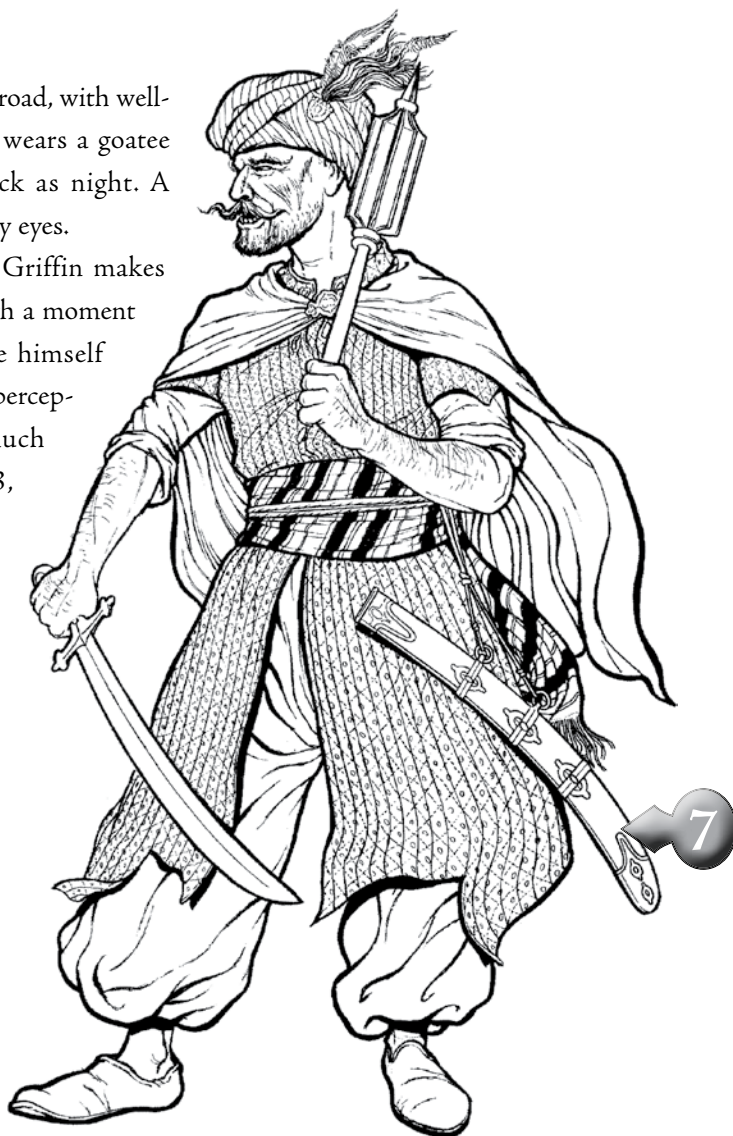
Techniques: *Sandman:* Idiom: Precise, *Foe:* Koldun, *Foe:* Named by the Zultan, *Maneuver:* Cyrano Gambit, and *Weapon:* Scimitar.

Style Dice: 5

Training Points: 0

Miscellany: Rahimat is tall and broad, with well-tanned skin. He is bald, but wears a goatee and mustache; both are black as night. A subtle humor dances in his gray eyes.

His powerful Gift of the Griffin makes him incredibly dangerous: with a moment of concentration, he can give himself superhuman strength, agility, perceptions, healing speed, and much much more (see *Chapter 3*, p. 86). He is the most feared and respected Sandman in the entire Order.



Shien of the Thunders, Colronan Koldun

Foibles: Hates the Church and Crackly Voice.

Motivation: Good [+2] My Honor, Not Yours.

Nationality: Good [+2] Colronan Zultanista.

Past: Good [+2] Ex-Falcon.

Swashbuckling Forte: Expert [+4] Koldun.

Other Fortes: Good [+2] Secrets of Crail, Good [+2] Skysailor, one extra chained Technique for Koldun, and an extra Foible.

Techniques: *Koldun:* Basilisk, Dragon, Foci: Thunder Rod, Merhorse, Pegasus, and Thunderbird.

Style Dice: 5

Training Points: 0

Miscellany: Shien is a little taller than average (but has a slight stoop), with a thin, wiry build. He has unruly black hair and swarthy skin, slanted black eyes, and is usually wearing a sour look. He grew up in the Zultanate, and even as a very young child he had a fascination with the mystical rather than the religious. Whenever possible, he sought out the Gifted and secret koldun who would visit the area, despite the beatings this earned him.

His parents, who were devout followers of the Church of Vaoz, were convinced that his interest in koldun was unhealthy, unnatural. When he was 14, he was caught taking secret lessons from a foreign koldun. He was publicly whipped and exiled for heresy.

For several years, Shien knocked around the 7 Skies, working for his passage on skyships, giving him a *Skysailor* Forte. When he turned 21, he settled on Crail and became a *Falcon*. He served with them for several years before receiving an honorable discharge. His experiences during that term of service have proved fruitful: his Forte of *Secrets of Crail* covers things from knowing dirt on prominent citizens to knowledge of hidden tunnels beneath the streets. Today, he hangs around in a gambling den/bordello named *The House of Sour Kisses* (see p. 63).

His extra Foible of *Crackly Voice* means that when he speaks, there is an odd, electric nature to his words that is very disturbing.

Shien can use his *Foci: Thunder Rod* for a bonus when slinging thunderbird energies around.



Ram Snakemind, Warmaster of Helkirk Freehold

Foible: Compulsive Dueling.

Motivation: Good [+2] Do the Job.

Nationality: Good [+2] Viridese.

Past: Good [+2] Mail Courier.

Swashbuckling Forte: Master [+6] Warmaster.

Other Fortes: Good [+2] Brilliant Tactical Mind.

Techniques: Warmaster: Idiom: Calculating, Weapon: Axe, Weapon: Saber, Weapon: Paired (Axe and Saber), and Situation: Unarmed Combat.

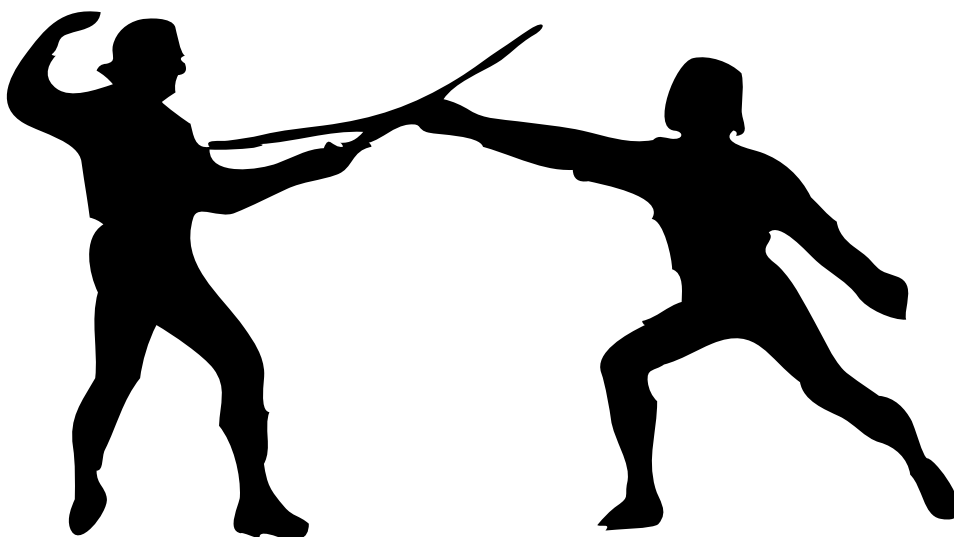
Style Dice: 5

Training Points: 0

Miscellany: Ram Snakemind is an average-sized fellow in his 50s, well-muscled, youthful, rather scarred, with long blonde hair and mustaches (both usually worn in braids).

In his youth, he served as a *Mail Courier*, riding long distances, as fast as he could, through dangerous territory on Viridia, carrying sensitive dispatches,

He is one of the most skilled mercenary captains in the entire World, though he is currently without an army. At the moment, nobles across the 7 Skies are courting him for his services.



Archvillains

See *Chapter 6*, p. 210.

Captain Greenbeard (5 Extra Fortes)

Foible: Green-haired.

Motivation: Good [+2] Wealth.

Nationality: Good [+2] Ilwuzi.

Past: Good [+2] Alchemist.

Swashbuckling Forte: Good [+2] Captain of the Brethren of the Skull.

Other Fortes: Good [+2] Acrobatics, Good [+2] Fencing, Good [+2] Firearms, and Expert [+4] Vehicle: Skyship (the *Emerald Flame*; plus 3 extra Fortes, see below).

Techniques: *CotBotS*: Idiom: Commanding, Idiom: Fierce, Location: Shipboard, Situation: In Ship Combat, and Situation: Outnumbered.

Style Dice: 7

Training Points: 3

Miscellany: While an alchemical accident may have changed his blond hair permanently to a sickly green color, Captain Greenbeard is not dismayed. Six foot, three hundred pounds, long hair, beard, and mustaches (all *green*), he sails the Skies for booty!

Emerald Flame: Fortes: Expert [+4] Skyship, Expert [+4] Nimble, Good [+2] Alchemical Lab, and Good [+2] Extra Crew.

NOTE

Since *Captain of the Brethren* includes acrobatics, fencing, and firearms, remember to count the collective MODs for Greenbeard when rolling.

NOTE

Quick reminder—4 extra Fortes (i.e., 8 points) makes a challenging Archvillain; more than 8 extra Fortes (i.e., 16 points), and you're probably better off just writing a bit on what this "Plot Device" Archvillain is like in prose (like the Empress of Barathi or the King of Colrona).

Markiz Caius Ophidi (5 Extra Fortes)

Foible: Enemy: Markiz Donaldo Vanadi (heir to the Barathi throne!).

Motivation: Good [+2] Power.

Nationality: Good [+2] Barathi.

Past: Expert [+4] Aristocrat.

Swashbuckling Forte: Expert [+4] Fencing.

Other Fortes: Good [+2] Wealthy, Good [+2] Minions: Wingmen, Good [+2] Wingman, and an unchained Technique of Revenge (whoever crosses him).

Techniques: *Fencing:* Idiom: Languid, Situation: Aerial, Foe: Barathi, Weapon: Paired (Rapier & Main-Gauche), and the unchained Technique of Revenge.

Style Dice: 7

Training Points: 3

Miscellany: Caius is a tall fellow, and broad. He wears his black hair short and is clean-shaven. His skin has a slight olive tone. His favorite color is green, and most of his clothing is in shades of that hue. He is a player in Barathi politics—ruthless and sharp; some say he wishes to be Emperor!

His Forte of *Minions: Wingmen* means he has nine Good [+2] Wingman Minions (designated Unus, Duo, Trey, Quatro, Quintus, Hexius, Septimus, Octavian, and Nonius). His unchained Technique of *Revenge* means that anyone that he gets a bonus against any foe that can be said to have crossed him.





7

Gold-Eyed Niko, Sha-Ku Koldun (6 Extra Fortes)

Foible: Bad-Tempered, Powers Don't Work on Women, and Glowing Golden Eyes.

Motivation: Good [+2] Discover what happened to Melli (and rescue her, if necessary).

Nationality: Good [+2] Sha-Ku.

Past: Good [+2] Ageless.

Swashbuckling Forte: Master [+6] Koldun.

Other Fortes: Good [+2] Been Everywhere in the World, Good [+2] Minions: Apprentice Koldun, 2 new Foibles, and six chained Koldun Techniques.

Techniques: *Koldun*: Archkoldun (see p. 155), Basilisk, Chimera, Dragon, Griffin, Manticore, Merhorse, Pegasus, Qilin, Thunderbird, and Unicorn

Style Dice: 10

Training Points: 4

Miscellany: Niko is a short man, quite broad. His brick-red skin is much wrinkled and scarred. *Glowing Golden Eyes* peer out beneath bushy brows. He wears his pure white hair in a strange triple-mohawk, but is otherwise clean-shaven. He is strangely *Ageless*, and claims to have been alive when Sha Ka Ruq rose up out of the Blue over 120 years ago.

His Foible of *Powers Don't Work on Women* generally means just that—his mystical abilities cannot affect women—or female creatures of any sort. (If Niko wishes to attempt to affect women, treat his Koldun Rank as Poor [-2], with no extra die for any Techniques.) His Forte of *Minions: Apprentice Koldun* means he has nine Good [+2] Koldun Minions (designated Alf, Beth, Gammi, Delton, Eppy, Zeta, Ethan, Thetius, and Iona).

Captain Alexei Rostand (Plot Device)

Born Alexei Xavierson long ago on Colrona, he left the Kingdom at an early age to become a skysailor. Later, he was a most notorious pirate, chased by all the major nations of the World at one time or another. He amassed quite a fortune—and any number of enemies—in piracy.

Now, at age 70, he has retired to the Kingdom of Colrona. Somehow, he wangled a full pardon from the King. He has published an autobiography (*Memoirs of a Sky Pirate*) that is much-read and much-beloved. He lives in a castle on the shores of the Sea of Glass (see p. 42) with his long-time companions *Mr. Scissors* (his Ilwuzi



navigator) and *Mr. Gunn* (his Crailese Master-at-Guns). These three old boys have given up adventuring due to age (and, in Mr. Gunn's case, possible senility), but there is no doubt they're still extremely dangerous foes.

Captain Rostand is welcome at Court. Indeed, rumor has it that King Gyorg considers the old pirate as an "unofficial Lord of the Admiralty" on matters of international trade and piracy. It is said that Captain Rostand handles "discreet" (read: espionage) issues for the Throne. . . and often recruits young heroes interested in adventure for escapades in that vein.

NOTE

Captain Rostand has no stats, because he's rich, famous, political, and deadly, with extreme Forte Ranks, two very competent Sidekicks, and an unknown number of Minions. He's a powerful individual, useful as a patron or an enemy for a PC group.

Behind the Curtain: the Dark Reflection

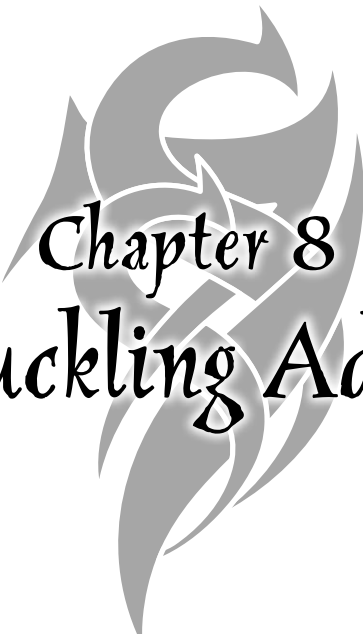
A great method for quickly coming up with memorable NPC rivals and nemeses for the PCs is to simply take the PCs' write-ups, copy them, then fiddle with them.

I usually leave Forte selections and Ranks alone for the most part, but alter Foible, Motivation, and/or Nationality (sometimes only one, sometimes all) to get a new, eerily challenging opponent for the PC. (I always select new Techniques, though.)

These "dark reflection" NPCs have become long-term enemies, allies, or both to the PCs in *all* of the campaigns I've used them in.

The Play's the Thing!

Good luck on your *S7S* voyages: May they be full of adventure, action, heroism, intrigue, romance, and style!



Chapter 8

Swashbuckling Adventure

Swashbuckler is a term that developed in the 16th century to describe rough, noisy and boastful swordsmen. It is based on a fighting style using a side-sword with a buckler in the off-hand, which was filled with much “swashing and making a noise on the buckler”.

Today the term “swashbuckler” has changed, and refers to both a type of fictitious character and to a fiction genre, especially in the world of film.

—Wikipedia entry on Swashbuckler

Play the Movie

The play is the thing. A swashbuckling game works best if the gaming group tries to work *with* rather than *against* the cool bits. It's a Hollywood blockbuster or a rip-roaring novel that glosses over inconvenient facts in favor of fun, not a documentary on candle-making in Bulgaria or a Macroeconomics 101 text.

The key to keeping highly cinematic games on the beam is maintaining a sense of *verisimilitude* (the appearance of being real or true) to the *genre* rather than shoe-horning or kit-bashing elements of the genre into the real world.

In swashbuckling movies, for example, a hero can out-fence a dozen guardsmen, but still be hard-pressed by a single devilish antagonist. He takes wounds that would drop a rhino but gets back up for another helping. He jumps off cliffs and—depending where he is in the picture—miraculously survives or dies heroically. He tries stunts that no sane person in a rational universe would ever attempt. He has catchphrases, witty dialogue, cool outfits that get repaired and dry-cleaned between scenes.

He's having fun, and not sweating the details.

Play the movie.

Swashbuckling Romances

Swashbuckling romances are full of action, adventure, heroism, intrigue, and style. Traditionally, a *romance* is a medieval form of fiction along the lines of the marvelous adventures of chivalrous knights or the heroic tales of the Icelandic sagas. Critic Northrop Frye further distinguished the “romantic mode” from other literary modes (like the mythic, mimetic, and ironic) in his book *Anatomy of Criticism*; in Frye's scheme, a romance is a type of story where the hero is superior in degree to other characters and his environment, and involves miraculous or marvelous adventures and actions. While romantic heroes are “superior in degree” they are not “superior in kind,” as the demigod heroes of myth would be; romantic heroes may be larger-than-life, but they are still human.

In most classic swashbuckling romances, the “miraculous violations of natural law” that Frye mentions in the quote above have eschewed out-and-out fantastic elements, instead focusing on outrageous coincidences and improbable events. (However, see the *Supernatural Swashbuckling* textbox, p. 302.)

The hazards in swashbuckling romances tend not to be world-threatening ones; instead, the stakes are usually personal—or at the most *worldview*-threatening or *society*-threatening ones.

In any case, swashbuckling romances are melodramatic. *Melodrama* implies a world of moral absolutes, stock characters, and formulaic plots. These elements are thrilling, with plenty of action, combat, confrontations, detective work, athletic feats, explosions, weird threats, and so forth. Yet melodrama often lacks realism: everything is black and white, no shades of gray; characters have one-dimensional personalities and motives; and most of the plots are extremely basic—villain threatens, hero responds, day is saved. If you can get into the mindset, it’s a very satisfying thrill-ride; many Hollywood action movies today contain these elements (though, arguably, with slightly more characterization).

Swashbuckling Settings

The settings for swashbuckling stories are always exotic, elaborate, and stylized. They are spectacles, full of sumptuous costumes, colorful vistas, and memorable features. They are active and vital. They excite the imagination.

Swashbuckling tales are most popular during times when people feel the need to escape from the drudgery of their daily life. Those times when it seems like the world, its laws, and those steering the ship of state are incompetent, corrupt, or both.

“The hero of romance moves in a world in which the ordinary laws of nature are slightly suspended: prodigies of courage and endurance, unnatural to us, are natural to him, and enchanted weapons, talking animals, terrifying ogres and witches, and talismans of miraculous power violate no rule of probability... Romance divides into two main forms: a secular form dealing with chivalry and knight-errantry, and a religious form devoted to legends of saints. Both lean heavily on miraculous violations of natural law for their interest as stories.”

—*Anatomy of Criticism*, pp. 33-34

Vallo: “Remember: in a pirate ship, in pirate waters, in a pirate world, ask no questions. Believe only what you see. No, believe half of what you see.”

—*The Crimson Pirate* (1952)

This impulse is summed up by H. L. Mencken: “Every normal man must be tempted at times to spit on his hands, hoist the black flag, and begin to slit throats.”

A swashbuckling setting is magnified reality. There may be a fairy-tale quality to it, owing to the melodramatic basis of the genre. It is more poetic than realistic, an idealized world. Justice, courtesy, and honor prevail. It is a place of wish fulfillment and romantic fantasy, where a heroic soul finds freedom from restraint.

Supernatural Swashbuckling

While for the most part, outright supernatural or fantastic elements have traditionally been absent from most swashbuckling books and movies, there has often been an undercurrent of the magical in the genre. Most recently, the *Pirates of the Caribbean* trilogy of films has infused the genre with substantial supernatural elements.

Chinese *wuxia* (like *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and *Zu Warriors*) and *arabesque fantasy* (à la *The Thief of Bagdad* and the various *Sinbad* films)—both stories and films—have their fair share of fantasy elements; monsters and magic powers have certainly played their part in tales of Eastern derring-do.

Swashbuckling prose has often included magic and monsters. One should probably start with JM Barrie’s *Peter Pan*, of course. Tim Powers’ *On Stranger Tides* directly incorporates voodoo magic into a horrific pirate story. William Goldman’s *The Princess Bride* and John Barnes’ *One for the Morning Glory* fold swashbuckling and fairy tale into delightful adventures. Steven Brust’s *Khaavren Romances*, Scott Lynch’s *The Gentleman Bastards Sequence*, and—to a lesser extent—Guy Gavriel Kay’s *The Lions of Al-Rassan* all go for full-bore swashbuckling fantasy.

Swashbuckling stories are often enhanced by supernatural elements; it is up to the taste of the individual viewer and reader (and, in our case, gamer) how much should be included.

Swashbuckling Tropes

Swashbuckling tales, as a genre, have evolved a number of common motifs, or *tropes*. These populate the background of the stories and can seem a little odd when looked at dispassionately. However, they are often beloved elements of the swashbuckling experience, and should be considered and addressed in swashbuckling games. Use of them wholesale can give a real Douglas Fairbanks/Errol Flynn/Basil Rathbone/Ronald Colman flavor to a game setting.

The main swashbuckling tropes are *action*, *adventure*, *heroism*, *intrigue*, *romance*, *style*, and *villany*.

Action

What is *action*? Action is athletic feats, exciting chases, and scintillating swordfights.

Sword fights between masters of fencing. A ship hurtling uncontrollably towards a maelstrom. Duels of witty repartee that can leave reputations bleeding on the ballroom floor. Sneaking into impregnable fortresses to rescue a feckless prince. A slave, chased by the Empress' guard, crossing your path.

Acrobatics & Athletics

Climbing up a wall or ship's rigging, swinging on a chandelier or ratline, leaping over tables or sliding under them, holding up the ceiling of a collapsing tunnel with bodily strength alone—adventure stories often have great *acrobatic* and *athletic* displays. In part, this is to show the larger than life physicality of swashbuckling heroes, but also it is to

Fencing. Fighting. Torture. Poison. True love. Hate. Revenge. Giants. Hunters. Bad men. Good men. Beautifullest ladies. Snakes. Spiders. Beasts of all natures and descriptions. Pain. Death. Brave men. Coward men. Strongest men. Chases. Escapes. Lies. Truth. Passion. Miracles.

—*The Princess Bride*,
by William Goldman

Inigo: “You’re using Bonetti’s defense against me, eh?”

The Man in Black: “I think it’s fitting, considering the rocky terrain.”

Inigo: “Naturally, you must expect me to attack with Capo Ferro.”

The Man in Black: “Naturally, but I find Thibault cancels out Capo Ferro. Don’t you?”

Inigo: “Unless the enemy has studied his Agrippa. . . (backflip) . . . which I have.”

—*The Princess Bride* (1987)



display their lack of regard for danger or failure. A swashbuckling hero doesn't worry that the rope he's swinging on may snap or that he may catch a boot on the balustrade as he leaps off the balcony: he just *acts*, and amazes the audience with his feats.

The Five Principles of Swashbuckling

1. If it can be lifted or shifted, it can be used as a weapon.
2. If it moves and it can support your weight, it can be used as transportation.
3. If it's opaque or solid, it can be used for hiding behind or protection.
4. If a surface is angled and smooth, you can slide down it.
5. If you can swing on it or jump from it, it's a launching platform.

(adapted from Matt Riggsby's "Thrust! Parry! Spin!: Tactics for Cinematic Combat" article; see *Ludography*, p. 322).

Fencing & Fighting

The delicate and deadly dance of the fencing duel is a way for the conflicts of ideal and character to be expressed. Using swords, daggers, punches, kicks,

athletic feats, and witty banter, internal conflicts are externalized. There is also a not inconsiderable amount of wish-fulfillment at play here: who has not wished to thoroughly thrash the villains that populate one's life, with cold steel in one's hand and a witticism upon one's lips?

Plus, fencing duels look very flashy and are fun to watch (and, to swash-bucklers, to *participate* in).

Adventure

What is *adventure*? Adventure is taking risks for great reward, seeking lost or undiscovered knowledge, seeing sights and having experiences most people will *never* undergo. Swashbuckling heroes are *drawn* by adventure; they seek it out.

Adventure (trading) is taking a gamble that the cargo that you bought cheap in one port—or plundered from a passing galleon—will sell for an exorbitant price in the next port. Slipping subtle bribes to the customs officials and portmasters, you can bring your ill-gotten gains into harbor, or smuggle contraband or fugitives (escaping princesses or pirate kings) past blockades. Putting your charts aside, you explore the unknown seas and lands beyond the edges of the map. You find a drunken—or wounded—baron asleep on your doorstep. You

Rupert of Hentzau: *Touché, Rassendyll! I cannot get used to fighting with furniture—where did you learn it?*

Rudolph Rassendyll: *That all goes with the old school tie.*

Hentzau: *Well, then, here's your last fencing lesson. Look out for your head. Why don't you stand and fight?*

Rassendyll: *He who fights and runs away, remember?*

Hentzau: *I see. You want to let the draw-bridge down. I just killed a man for that.*

Rassendyll: *An unarmed man, of course.*

Hentzau: *Of course!*

[. . .]

Hentzau: *You'd be a sensation in a circus. I can't understand it. Where did you learn such roller skating?*

Rassendyll: *Coldstream Guards, my boy. Come on now, when does the fencing lesson begin?*

Hentzau: *Stand still and fight, you coward!*

Rassendyll: *Bad-tempered fellow, aren't you, underneath the charm?*

Hentzau: *Why don't you let me kill you quietly?*

Rassendyll: *Oh, a little noise adds a touch of cheer. You notice I'm getting closer to the draw-bridge rope?*

Hentzau: *You're so fond of rope, it's a pity to finish you off with steel. What did they teach you on the playing fields of Eton, puss in the corner?*

Rassendyll: *Oh, chiefly not throwing knives at other people's backs.*

—*The Prisoner of Zenda* (1937)

discover a hidden room in your grandfather's home, containing a mysterious book, telling of secret treasure beyond the horizon.

In a swashbuckling romance, either you pursue adventure, or it pursues you.

Sir Robin of Locksley: *I'll organize revolt, exact a death for a death, and I'll never rest until every Saxon in this shire can stand up free men and strike a blow for Richard and England.*

Prince John: *Are you finished?*

Sir Robin of Locksley: *I'm only just beginning. From this night forward I'll use every means in my power to fight you!*

—*The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938)

lenging corrupt leaders or heartless and harsh laws. He supports individuality, liberty, and equality. The quality of mercy is not excluded from the swashbuckler's determination of what is just. A hero seeks what is right and equitable.

See also *Revenge* (below).

Andre Moreau: *[to De Maynes] Yes, you're going to die, but not by a bullet. You're going to die as he died, by the sword. You'll be driven back, step by step, until you stand helpless, as he did. And then I, Andre Moreau, will kill you as you killed him. I swear it, Philippe, by all that I hold sacred—I swear you this man's death.*

—*Scaramouche* (1952)

Justice

An underlying element of much of the motivations and drives of the swashbuckling genre is a sense of *justice*. Whether this is enforcing justice in support of a rightful authority or against a tyrannical one, a sense of fairness, righteousness, and integrity pervades swashbuckling tales.

A swashbuckling hero is often the champion of the oppressed, chal-

Revenge

Revenge is a popular motivation in the swashbuckling genre, for both heroes and villains. Sometimes, based purely on revenge, it's hard to determine if a character is a hero or a villain. Here are some quick rules of thumb, related to the *victim(s)*, the *initial crime*, and the *target(s)* of the revenge.

Who is the *victim*—or *victims*—that sparked this revenge? While in some regards the character is in and of himself the ultimate victim of the crime that initiated the declaration of revenge, one must peer deeper. If the victim of the crime was a truly innocent sort (a relation or friend of the character), then the revenge is probably heroic. If the sole victim is the character himself, then there is a strong tendency

towards the antiheroic (see p. 308) or the villainous (see p. 315).

What was the *crime* that sparked this revenge? If the crime was impious, deliberate, dishonorable, and/or illegal, this tends towards a heroic revenge. If the “crime” was perfectly legal, ethical, moral, honorable, or even simply by omission, then the revenge leans towards the villainous.

Who or what is the *target*—or *targets*—of this revenge? If the target is simply an individual, or a corrupt system, the revenge is probably heroic. If the target is vast and numinous, as in “the whole world” or “those who mocked me,” then the revenge inclines towards the villainous side.

The differences between a son eager to avenge the wrongful and dishonorable death of his father, versus the desire to punish all those who would not recognize one’s inherent superiority are rather clear, one trusts.

Heroism

What is *heroism*? A swashbuckling *hero* is a man or woman (the latter often called a *heroine*) who possesses abilities in greater measure than the typical person, be it fighting or athletic skill, utter courtesy, special talents, widespread renown, mighty motivations, coolness and classiness under fire, a love of justice, or immense courage. These extraordinary capabilities allow the performance of heroic deeds like rescuing the lost, protecting the innocent, and thwarting the villain.

True swashbuckling heroes laugh at death, take daredevil risks, and find peaceful endeavors maddeningly dull. They need action and adventure to shine.

Some of the most common aspects of heroism shown in swashbuckling tales are: *courage, honor, humor, motivation, and passion.*

Inigo Montoya: *Hello, my name is Inigo Montoya. You killed my father: prepare to die. Now, offer me money. (slices Count Rugen’s cheek)*

Count Rugen: *Yes.*

Inigo Montoya: *Power too. Promise me that. (slices Count Rugen’s other cheek)*

Count Rugen: *All that I have and more. Please...*

Inigo Montoya: *Offer me everything I ask for.*

Count Rugen: *Any thing you want.*

Inigo Montoya: *I want my father back, you son of a bitch. (stabs and kills Count Rugen)*

—*The Princess Bride* (1987)

He was born with a gift of laughter and a sense that the world was mad.

—*Scaramouche*, by Rafael Sabatini

Elizabeth Swann: *There will come a time when you'll have the chance to do the right thing.*

Captain Jack Sparrow: *I love those moments. I like to wave at them as they pass by.*

—*Pirates of the Caribbean:
Dead Man's Chest* (2006)

Antiheroes

An *antihero* does heroic acts with questionable—or outright unheroic—methods or motivations. He follows his own moral compass, unconcerned with social mores—indeed, the morality and ethics of an antihero are often in stark opposition to those of society, and usually involve pragmatic or selfish decisions made in situations where a more mannered or traditional response is expected.

A swashbuckling antihero is a selfish sort, focused on his own goals and desires, to the exclusion of the issues and problems of the world. He stands between the hero and the villain, partaking of both natures. Generally, however, by the end of a swashbuckling tale, an antihero has chosen heroism or villainy, and the fate reserved for such.



Courage

Courage is not the absence of fear, but the ability to take a stand or a risk *in the face of fear*. A swashbuckling hero holds his life lightly, but will always sell it dearly. Often, this courage expresses itself in boldness and audacity, a devil-may-care attitude.

A swashbuckling hero is game for anything the world might throw at him.

Honor

Honor is all about integrity and reputation. A swashbuckling hero keeps his word, remains loyal to those ideals, persons, and authorities he has sworn himself to. Honor is nobility of soul, a sense of fair play, a general excellence of character. It often includes patriotism, not becoming involved in—and not ignoring—unrighteous acts, and doing the right thing (even if it's not the pragmatic thing).

Allowing a disarmed foe to pick up his sword, not stabbing people in the back, remaining loyal to one's friends and allies no matter the odds—all are drenched in honor.

See also *Courtesy & Manners* (p. 313).

Humor

A swashbuckling hero has a sense of humor about himself, his situation, and the world around him. He often has witty comments upon all three.

A hero laughs—at hardship, at danger, at death, at enemies, at himself. His mind is always seeking

out an insightful perspective on the situation, and snappy dialogue is always on his lips. As he enjoys the exercise of his body in physical pursuits, he enjoys the exercise of his mind in mental puzzles, the exercise of his charm in romantic and social affairs, and the exercise of his sense of humor in badinage.

The verbal gymnastics of repartee displays the greatness of soul, the superiority to his situation, that the swashbuckling hero possesses. No matter how dire the circumstance, he can make a quip, and so properly prepare himself to make the attempt to overcome any obstacle, however great.

See also *Comedy* (p. 313).

Athos: *The fact is that they said to me, "You are M. d'Artagnan." I replied, "Do you think so?" My guards said they were sure of it. I did not wish to contradict them; besides, I might be mistaken.*

—*The Three Musketeers*,
by Alexandre Dumas pere

Motivation

The purest forms of heroic action in swashbuckling stories are those “in defense of noble ideals” like truth, justice, true love, courage, or honor. In these cases, the hero has overwhelming perseverance—a burning drive that pushes them to go on even when things are their grimmest.

Swashbucklers often follow a strict personal code that includes the willingness—the *readiness*—to risk one’s own life, liberty, and welfare in the service of what they most desire. This *motivation* may spring from a sense of responsibility, duty, or guilt, or a desperate need for something (like justice, revenge, money, an object, a position). One of the things that makes a swashbuckler romantic (in Frye’s sense; see above) is the fact that he will pursue these motivations to the extreme—even unto death.

See also *Justice* (p. 306), *Revenge* (p. 306), and *Romance* (p. 311).

Passion

Swashbuckling heroes are *passionate* about their lives and travails. Mostly, this comes out as a sense of bravado or gusto; a love of adventure. They are deeply involved in their goals and current situation. They are utterly and completely *alive* in the moment. They are 100% engaged in what is going on at any time.

Indeed, even if one’s situation is bleak, it’s almost as if the swashbuckling hero is *enjoying* his horrible situation.

See also *Romance* (p. 311).

Intrigue

What is *intrigue*? Intrigue is adventure that turns on some point of social punctilio or secrets. The heroes are not pitted against fierce monsters or marauding armies, but against the agendas of their neighbors and peers. The action in a tale of intrigue takes place within a society, rather than being directed against an external foe. Duels with swords may be fought (when a dagger in a darkened colonnade is more impolitic than practical), but the chief weapons in the

Pintel: *How’d this go all screwy?*

Ragetti: *Well, each man wants the chest for hisself, don’t ’e? Mr. Norrington, I think, is trying to regain a bit of honor. Old Jack’s looking to trade it, save his own skin. And Turner there—I think ’e’s trying to settle some unresolved business twixt him and his twice-cursed pirate father.*

—*Pirates of the Caribbean:
Dead Man’s Chest* (2006)

clashes are wit and blackmail. Good manners, social class, intelligence, perception, and popular and private regard are key in issues of intrigue.

Whispered plots overheard behind a tapestry. Secret letters, betraying agents of foreign governments. The marshalling of allies in court to support a rise to predominance. Mysteries twisted into riddles, wrapped in enigmas, ready to be unraveled. Aristocratic factions in a subtle dance of advantage, arranging marriages and pregnancies with secret agendas. Forged genealogies and patents of nobility.

Swashbuckling stories are often soaking in intrigue, and all characters must swim with or against its tides.

Social Class

While realistically, nobles and commoners don't socially mix, a low-born swashbuckling pirate can discover love with an aristocrat lady. In the swashbuckling genre, love conquers all.

Additionally, given the romantic nature of swashbuckling stories, the inherent nobility of soul and action of a hero can be recognized—elevating him out of his birth class and into a higher and wider one, due to his services to the crown or somesuch.

A difference in social class, in swashbuckling tales, is usually simply an obstacle to be surmounted rather than an unscalable height.

Romance

A swashbuckling hero is not afraid of sex or love. Indeed, he grabs hold of it (whichever it may be), and follows its thread wherever it leads. He is bold, willing to subject himself to the acmes and nadirs of romance, in return for the sweet rewards.

Rudolph Rassendyll: *[to Flavia] I love you more than truth or life or honor!*

—*The Prisoner of Zenda* (1937)

Swashbuckling tales are romantic, in both the literary and the usual sense of the word. The heroes and heroines are sentimental, and concerned with love (in an ideal form), passion, pleasure, and affection. Swashbuckling heroes have lovers that they care for, if only but for carnal pursuits. (But see below.)

A forbidden romance could easily bleed over into *Intrigue* (see p. 310)—being in love with someone of an “inappropriate” social class, for example. Any romance can easily be co-opted by *Adventure* (see p. 305): just kidnap the loved one.

Westley: *Hear this now: I will always come for you.*

Buttercup: *But how can you be sure?*

Westley: *This is true love—you think this happens every day?*

—*The Princess Bride* (1987)

A swashbuckling hero who has tasted True Love can surpass his limits, and do extraordinary things in the name of love.

Porthos: *Champagne?*

Athos: *We're in the middle of a chase,*
Porthos.

Porthos: *You're right—something red.*

—*The Three Musketeers* (1993)

the swashbuckler from more ordinary adventure heroes. It might be argued that the underlying philosophy of swashbuckling stories is that a life lived with style is How Things Should Be Done—and a swashbuckling hero is just following that philosophy.

In a swashbuckling world, reality is very forgiving of flashy acts of derring-do. Style trumps Newton's Laws far too often to be coincidence; in any given situation, either the absolute worst thing that could possibly happen at the moment does, or the absolute best thing that can happen at the moment does. Reality likes to mix it up to keep the action moving.

Life is exciting and melodramatic: fate doles out great rewards and great failures, for purely dramatic reasons. Amazing stuff—both bad and good—happens to people *all the time*, provided it makes a good story. Fall out of a second story window, and (depending upon how big a player in the current story you are) you could break a limb, get a scrape, be essentially unharmed, or even appear to die—though actual death is unlikely from such a mundane, dull event (but if you'd jumped, or been pushed. . . well that could be a whole other kettle of fish). However, while the laws of nature can be more mercurial than those of the real world, they are self-consistent.

True Love

If a swashbuckling romance touches upon True Love (whether the tale is fantastical or not), it is powerful mojo. True Love is something more than simple dalliance for pleasure: it is a union of mind, heart, and soul. It is inspiring, energizing, a palpable force.

Style

Style is one of the most important concerns in a swashbuckling story—if a hero does something with panache, the universe will smile upon him. Style is what separates

Swashbuckling heroes are concerned about their style—the type of clothes they wear, the provenance and splendor of the weapons they wield, the gallant actions they perform, the risky exploits they recount around the campfire. . .

The exact hang and cut of a wine-red cloak. Handing back an enemy's sword when you've disarmed them. The ready quip; the heartfelt plea; the impassioned poem spoken to a lover at midnight. You can have unshakeable chivalry or mercurial morals, so long as your manner is flashy. Good Form conquers all.

Comedy

Given the sense of humor (see p. 309) that swashbuckling heroes tend to have about themselves, comedic scenes and situation are natural to the swashbuckling genre.

Montfleury: *Sir, I will not allow you to insult me in this manner.*

Cyrano: *Really? In what manner would you prefer?*

—**Cyrano de Bergerac (1950)**

However, while elements of comedy usually enhance the overall story (especially when in the context of character or situation), if the humor becomes too broad, the adventurous tone of a swashbuckling tale can become diluted.

So long as comedic aspects do not intrude or overpower the main plot, all should be well. If they happen to take over the story, then perhaps the story has moved into the realms of parody.

Courtesy & Manners

A swashbuckling hero is often a gentleman, educated in the dictates of courtesy and manners. They are—even if a dread pirate or highwayman—invariably gallant and chivalrous. Thus, they will not often attack unarmed opponents, speak rudely to fine ladies, ignore the complaints of the weak or innocent, and will show all courtesy to those in their power.

Don Diego de la Vega: *You have passion, Alejandro, and your skill is growing. But to enter Montero's world, I must give you something which is completely beyond your reach.*

Alejandro Murrieta: *Ah, yes? And what is that?*

Don Diego de la Vega: *Charm.*

—**The Mask of Zorro (1998)**

Swashbuckling heroes evince a carefree charm. They are suave, graceful, and dashing—not rude or unmannered. They appreciate a gesture, whether it be honorable or romantic, and return gestures in kind.

The breakdown of courtesy in favor of pragmatism is one of the ways to distinguish a swashbuckling hero from a swashbuckling villain: the hero will hold to the forms eternally, while the villain will break from them at earliest opportunity that promises gain.

Fezzik: *Why do you wear a mask? Were you burned by acid, or something like that?*

Man in Black: *Oh no, it's just that they're terribly comfortable. I think everyone will be wearing them in the future.*

—*The Princess Bride* (1987)

What do the peasants think of him? What does the Queen think of the dashing young highwayman that confounds her greedy, unloved tyrant of a husband? Why does Le Renard wear a mask and cloak? Is it to protect his loved ones, allowing a high noble to operate against the king without being summarily executed? Is it to cause fear? Was his face burned by acid? Can he best the King's Salle Master, if they meet by night? Who is the best swordsman in town? Who is the most honorable woman in the Empire? These are the sorts of questions that buzz from the lips of the public in a swashbuckling tale, and it's mother's milk: every character of import collects a cloud of innuendo, reputation, and rumor that helps make them larger than life.

Alejandro Murrieta: *I miss my brother, sir.*

Don Diego de la Vega: *Your brother is dead. We lose the ones we love; we cannot change it. Put it aside.*

Alejandro Murrieta: *How? How can I do what is needed, when all I feel is... hate.*

Don Diego de la Vega: *You hide it.*
[Holds up black mask]

Don Diego de la Vega: *With this.*

—*The Mask of Zorro* (1998)

A masked identity—especially if it includes a *trademark* (a sign or symbol left to indicate the hero has been there and done that)—definitely adds to the masked identity, making it a legend. And—more often than not—in the swashbuckling genre, a legend is impossible to kill.

Often, only some—a trusted few!—of a hero's associates know of the hero's double life. Most only know the hero in one identity or the other.

Fame & Renown

An important aspect of style is one's reputation—encompassing one's fame and renown.

What does the man or woman on the promenade think about Le Renard? Is he a secret angel or a shadowy devil?

Masks & Trademarks

Especially in the need to antagonize a so-called “lawful” authority, swashbuckling heroes may *mask* their identity, either behind an unusual sobriquet or an actual mask. This permits them to operate within “the enemy's” territory, while undercutting any efforts that they may learn of while masquerading as part of the establishment.

Villainy

A swashbuckling *villain* is much like a swashbuckling hero: larger than life. However, they are always flawed by greed, ambition, hubris, or lack of manners or ideals. A villain is ultimately concerned with winning, to the exclusion of any finer or more noble concerns.

A true swashbuckling villain is *at least* a match for any swashbuckling hero, and often is even *more* capable or established than the hero—with allies, infrastructure, intelligence, or “legitimate” authority. They are a dark reflection of the hero. For heroes to achieve victory, villains must be destroyed. . . and they will resist this with all that they have.

They are ruthless, competent, unscrupulous, and arrogant. Where a hero is often focused on the needs and concerns of others, a villain is more often selfish, focused only on their own needs and desires. (However, there are swashbuckling villains—like Cardinal Richelieu—who are arguably focused on the good of others. . . and these sorts of villains are often the most terrifying; see also *Antiheroes*, p. 308.)

Like heroes, swashbuckling villains also have style, usually a certain panache of their own, a facility with the sword, repartee, and/or political machinations; lacking those tools to hand, they invariably have a certain flair at malevolence. Their evil acts are those that are writ large: all-encompassing, world-changing. Usually, swashbuckling villains are deliciously wicked (due to the melodramatic nature of the genre). They are dyed black, to the heart—and they *revel* in this iniquity.

Deathtraps & Durance Vile

A penchant of swashbuckling villains, *deathtraps* and *durance vile* are all about the wicked style that emanates from the dark side of the psyche. Villains set up complicated (or lingering) methods of execution, or immure their foes in inescapable prisons, for two main reasons: *sadism* and *egotism*. They like seeing their enemies suffer, and they love showing off.

(Interestingly, *deathtraps* and *durance vile* are a great way for heroes to display how cool or creative they are when they figure out how to escape. It’s a win-win situation from a gaming perspective. Depending upon the campaign, a deathtrap can be all Rube Goldberg knives, acid, and poison, or simply being manacled to a bare promontory and exposed to the elements and wild beasts.)

King Phillip III: *This is treason!*

Queen Margaret: *You will never succeed.
The people will rise against you!*

Duke de Lorca: *Shepherds may change, but
sheep remain sheep.*

—*Adventures of Don Juan* (1948)

A good death justifies anything, any life.

—*The Fencing Master*,
by Arturo Perez-Reverte

heroes tend not to kill with impunity (not even the villain's minions), preferring to wound and incapacitate; killing is a last resort. After all, mercy is a component of true justice.

For their part, villains usually *don't kill* heroes if they're unconscious—they want to see them suffer, after all, or wish to have an audience to writhe in horror and failure as their nefarious plans come to fruition!

Remarkably, swashbuckling characters *do not die*—at least, not without *purpose*. Heroes and villains can fall off of a cliff in one scene, and return a number of scenes later—usually with new scars, new motivations, and new knowledge. Only if there's a good reason—which is most often the absolute success or utter destruction of their hopes and dreams—will a swashbuckling character bow to the scythe of the Grim Reaper.

Killing & Death

Some swashbuckling characters try not to kill their opponents, while others carve bloody swathes through hordes of lesser foes. In any case,

Minions & Lieutenants

Swashbuckling villains need lots of nameless *minions* to do their bidding. While a few notable specimens have names and remarkable skills of their own, for the most part minions are interchangeable tools, individually worthless and valuable only en masse. Minions carry out the will of the villain, and can usually keep background characters cowed with a show of force. However, in the face of a true swashbuckling hero, they are like straws in the wind.

Lieutenants are the more capable foes of swashbuckling heroes. They are usually a challenge far beyond the typical guardsman or pirate—a Lieutenant can delay or injure a hero, all to the end of promoting the villain's goals.



Monologues

Much like *Deathtraps & Durance Vile*, a common swashbuckling trope is for swashbuckling villains ramble on in long ranting speeches to show off—or emotionally hurt!—their (usually captive) audience of heroes. They may even be trying to persuade their audience to follow a particular plan of action, or be trying to get their prisoners to understand their motives.

Heroes aren't exempt from monologuing, though generally they use the tactic to intimidate a foe or whip up support of an audience. Some heroes do orate out of self-aggrandizement (like Cyrano de Bergerac).

Recurring Villains

You can't—and you *shouldn't*!—keep a good villain down. An established villain—especially one of high status, great power, or both—in swashbuckling stories is a godsend: *all* the nasty plots and subplots can be laid at his or her feet. This enhances the threat level of the villain and deepens the interest and attention of the heroes in a swashbuckling tale.

Rochefort: *I failed. One does occasionally.*

Cardinal Richelieu: *If I blundered as you do, my head would fall.*

Rochefort: *I would say from a greater height than mine, Eminence.*

Cardinal Richelieu: *You would?*

Rochefort: *The height of vaulting ambition.*

Cardinal Richelieu: *You have none?*

Rochefort: *No.*

Cardinal Richelieu: *Do you fear me, Rochefort?*

Rochefort: *Yes, I fear you, Eminence. I also hate you.*

Cardinal Richelieu: *I love you, my son. Even when you fail.*

—*The Three Musketeers* (1973)

Bellarion: *Risk sweetens enterprise ... and wit can conquer it.*

—*Bellarion*, by Rafael Sabatini

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Buck, William (trans.). *Ramayana*.

Chabon, Michael. *Gentlemen of the Road*.

Ch'eng-en, Wu. (Arthur Waley trans.). *Monkey: Folk Novel of China* (translation of *Journey to the West*).

Cohen, Richard. *By the Sword*.

Cordingly, David. *Under the Black Flag*.

Crowley, John. *Lord Byron's Novel—The Evening Land*.

David, Peter. *Tigerheart*.

Defoe, Gideon. *The Pirates! in an Adventure with Scientists* and *The Pirates! in an Adventure with Ahab*.

Dumas, Alexandre (pere). *The Count of Monte Cristo*.

—. The D'Artagnan Romances [*The Three Musketeers*; *Twenty Years After*; and *Le Vicomte de Bragelonne, or Ten Years Later* (composed of *The Vicomte de Bragelonne*, *Louise de la Valliere*, and *The Man in the Iron Mask*)].

Duncan, David. *The Gilded Chain: A Tale of the King's Blades*.

Forester, CS. *Beat to Quarters*.

Fraser, George MacDonald. *Pirates*.

—. *Royal Flash*.

Gaiman, Neil. *Stardust*.

Goldman, William. *The Princess Bride*.

Hearn, Lafcadio. *Kwaidan: Stories and Studies of Strange Things*.

Herbert, Frank. *Dune*.

Hope, Anthony. *The Prisoner of Zenda* and *Rupert of Hentzau*.

Kushner, Ellen. *Swordspoint*.

- Lawhead, Stephen R. The King Raven Trilogy (*Hood* and the sequel, *Scarlet*; I assume that the forthcoming third book, *Tuck*, will be just as good).
- Leiber, Fritz. The Fafhrd & the Gray Mouser series (*Swords And Deviltry*, *Swords Against Death*, *Swords in the Mist*, *Swords Against Wizardry*, *Swords of Lankhmar*, *Swords and Ice Magic*, and *The Knight and Knave of Swords*).
- Lynch, Scott. The Gentleman Bastards Sequence (*The Lies of Locke Lamora* and *Red Seas Under Red Skies*).
- McCulley, Johnston. *The Mark of Zorro* (recent reprint of “The Curse of Capistrano”).
- Pérez-Reverte, Arturo. *The Adventures of Captain Alatriste* (*Captain Alatriste*, *Purity of Blood*, *The Sun over Breda*, and *The King’s Gold*).
- . *The Club Dumas*.
- . *The Fencing Master*.
- Potocki, Jan. *The Manuscript Found in Saragossa*.
- Powers, Tim. *On Stranger Tides*.
- Raspe, Rudolph. *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen*.
- Reaves, Michael. *The Shattered Realm*.
- Reeve, Philip. *Larklight*.
- Richards, Jeffrey. *Swordsmen of the Screen*.
- Rohan, Michael Scott. *Chase the Morning*.
- Rostand, Edmond. *Cyrano de Bergerac* (also see the recent translation by Barry Kornhauser).
- Sabatini, Rafael. *Bellarion*.
- . *Captain Blood* (and *Captain Blood Returns* and *The Fortunes of Captain Blood*).
- . *Scaramouche* and *Scaramouche the King-Maker*.
- . *The Sea Hawk*.
- Sakai, Stan. *Usagi Yojimbo*.
- Stevenson, Robert Louis. *Treasure Island*.
- Thorndike, Russell. *Dr. Syn: A Tale of the Romney Marsh*.
- Vance, Jack. The *Lyonnesse* trilogy (*Lyonnesse: Suldrun’s Garden*, *Lyonnesse II: The Green Pearl*, and *Lyonnesse III: Madouc*).
- . *The Dying Earth* (and *The Eyes of the Overworld*, *Cugel’s Saga*, and *Rhialto the Marvellous*).
- Wells, Martha. *The Element of Fire*.
- Weyman, Stanley. *A Gentleman of France*.
- Wolfe, Gene. *Pirate Freedom*.

"Offer me everything I ask for."

"Yes. Yes. Say it."

"I WANT DOMINGO MONTOYA, YOU SON OF A BITCH," and the six-fingered sword flashed again.

The Count screamed.

"That was just to the left of your heart." Inigo struck again.

Another scream.

"That was below your heart. Can you guess what I'm doing?"

"Cutting my heart out."

"You took mine when I was ten; I want yours now. We are lovers of justice, you and I—what could be more just than that?"

The Count screamed one final time and then fell dead of fear.

Inigo looked down at him. The Count's frozen face was petrified and ashen and the blood still poured down the parallel cuts. His eyes bulged wide, full of horror and pain. It was glorious. If you like that sort of thing.

Inigo loved it.

—*The Princess Bride*, by William Goldman

Filmography

The Adventures of Baron Munchausen (1988)

The Adventures of Don Juan (1948)

The Adventures of Robin Hood (1938)

Blackadder II (1986) and *Blackadder the Third* (1987)

The Black Pirate (1926)

The Black Rose (1950)

The Black Swan (1942)

Brotherhood of the Wolf (2001)

Captain Clegg (1962) [also known as *Night Creatures*]

Captain Horatio Hornblower R.N. (1951)

Castle in the Sky (1986)

The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian (2008)

The Count of Monte Cristo (several)

The Court Jester (1955)

The Crimson Pirate (1952)

Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon (2000)

Curse of the Golden Flower (2006)

Cutthroat Island (1995)
Cyrano de Bergerac [both the 1950 Ferrer and the 1990 Depardieu]
Don Q, Son of Zorro (1925)
Firefly (2002) [and movie sequel *Serenity* (2005)]
Flash Gordon (1980)
Gunga Din (1939)
Hero (2002)
Hook (1991)
House of Flying Daggers (2004)
Iron Monkey (1993)
Jack of All Trades (TV, 2000)
The Man in the Iron Mask (1998)
The Mark of Zorro (1920 and 1940 versions)
Master and Commander: the Far Side of the World (2003)
The Mask of Zorro (1998) [and *The Legend of Zorro* (2005), albeit much less so.]
The Mummy (1999) and *The Mummy Returns* (2001)
On Guard aka *Le Bossu* (1997)
Peter Pan (1953) [also the excellent live-action version (2003)]
The Phantom (1996)
Pirates of the Caribbean: Curse of the Black Pearl (2003) [and sequels, *Dead Man's Chest* (2006) and *At World's End* (2007)]
The Pirates of Penzance (1983)
Popeye (1980)
Popeye the Sailor: 1937-1938 (vol. 1) [DVD]
Prince of Foxes (1949)
The Princess Bride (1987)
The Prisoner of Zenda (1937)
Raiders of the Lost Ark (1981) [and sequels]
Royal Flash (1975)
The Saragossa Manuscript (1965)
Scaramouche (1952)
The Scarlet Pimpernel (especially the 1934 Leslie Howard and the 1982 Anthony Andrews)
The Sea Hawk (1940)
Sinbad: Legend of the Seven Seas (2003)
Sinbad the Sailor (1947)
Stardust (2007)
Start the Revolution Without Me (1970)

Star Wars (1977) [and sequels/prequels, especially *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980) and
Attack of the Clones (2002)]
Swashbuckler (1976)
Tales of the Gold Monkey (TV, 1982)
The Thief of Bagdad (1924)
The Three Musketeers [several versions, especially the 1921 Douglas Fairbanks, the
1948 Gene Kelly, the 1966 Jeremy Brett (TV, BBC), the 1974 Michael York, and
the 1993 Disney version (if only for Oliver Platt as Porthos), plus sequels *The*
Four Musketeers (1974) and *The Return of the Musketeers* (1989)]
Treasure Island (1950)
Treasure Planet (2002)
Yellowbeard (1983)
Zu Warriors (2001)

Cyrano: *It's true,
I don no foppish rigmarole.
I choose instead to wear my adornments on my soul.
A simple plume shows spirit. But a peacock's tail—absurd!
I care not at all for such frills, but rather deed and word,
and twirl my pointed wit like a mustache.
You see, what suits me best is my panache.
. . . But then you mentioned gloves. You have me there.
I do have an old one, left from a pair.
But of the other, there is not a trace.
You see, I left it in some Vicomte's face.*

—Cyrano (Barry Kornhauser translation)

Ludography

Baker, Vincent. *Dogs in the Vineyard* (lumpy games).
Bates, Andrew, Bruce Baugh, Kraig Blackwelder, Ken Cliffe, Rob Hatch, Clayton A.
Oliver, Richard Thomas, Fred Yelk (et al.). *Adventure!*
Bohm, Cliff, Geoff Bottone, and Colleen Skadl. *En Garde!* (Slugfest Games).

Donoghue, Robert, with Fred Hicks and Leonard Balsera. *Spirit of the Century* (Evil Hat Productions).

Gray, Tim. *Questers of the Middle Realms* (Silver Branch Games).

Griffen, Christian, with Lisa Griffen. *Beast Hunters* (Berengad Games).

Hany, Darryl, with Frank Chadwick, John Harshman, and Loren Wiseman. *En Garde! Being in the Main a Game of the Life and Times of a Gentleman Adventurer and his Several Companions* (Game Designers' Workshop).

Hensley, Shane Lacy. *50 Fathoms* (Pinnacle Entertainment Group).

Karlman, Judd. *Dictionary of Mu* (Paka's Thread Games).

Laws, Robin. *The Dying Earth Roleplaying Game* (Pelgrane Press).

Leker, Andrew, Miles Teves, and Amy Leker. *SkyRealms of Jorune* (SkyRealms Publishing, Inc.).

von Munchausen, Karl Friedrich Hieronymous (Baron), James Wallis (ed.). *The Extraordinary Adventures of Baron Munchausen* (Hogshead Games).

O'Sullivan, Steffan, with Russell Godwin and Brian Maloney. *GURPS Swashbucklers*, 3rd ed. (Steve Jackson Games).

Pettigrew, Mark. *Flashing Blades* (Fantasy Games Unlimited) [plus the supplements *High Seas*, *Parisian Adventure*, and *The Cardinal's Peril* (with Andrew Keith)].

Pondsmith, Michael. *Castle Falkenstein: High Adventure in the Steam Age* (R. Talsorian Games).

Riggsby, Matt. "Terra Incognita: Aulos: City in the Sky," *Pyramid* , < <http://www.sjgames.com/pyramid/login/article.html?id=2782> >

—. "Thrust! Parry! Spin!: Tactics for Cinematic Combat," *Pyramid* , < <http://www.sjgames.com/pyramid/login/article.html?id=2941> >

Schroeck, Robert, and Peggy Schroeck. *GURPS Robin Hood* (Steve Jackson Games)

Snyder, Matt. *Nine Worlds* (Chimera Creative).

Tassie, Stephen. *The Scurvy Musketeers of the Spanish Main* (Z-Man Games).

Wick, John, et. al. *7th Sea* (Alderac Entertainment Group).

Wilson, Matt. *Primetime Adventures* (Dog-eared Designs).

Will Turner: *You cheated!*

Captain Jack Sparrow: *(shrugs) Pirate.*

—*Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl* (2003)



STEP LIGHTLY, BILLY — YOU'VE GOT SOME CHOICE INFORMATION IN HERE ABOUT NICODEMUS, NOT TO MENTION PLENTY OF OTHER CREATURES THAT WON'T TAKE TOO KINDLY TO YOU LEAKING ALL THEIR PRECIOUS INFO.

ESPECIALLY WHERE THEIR WEAKNESSES ARE CONCERNED.

— HARRY

Hey boss —

Here's the latest draft of the role-playing game I've been working on with the other Alphas. I figure you'd like to get a crack at making sure we're not going too far out of line in here. I think we've got a chance of giving old Mr. Stoker a run for his money with this one.

— Billy



wouldn't worry about it too much, Harry. It's a game! What's the worst that could happen?

Billy

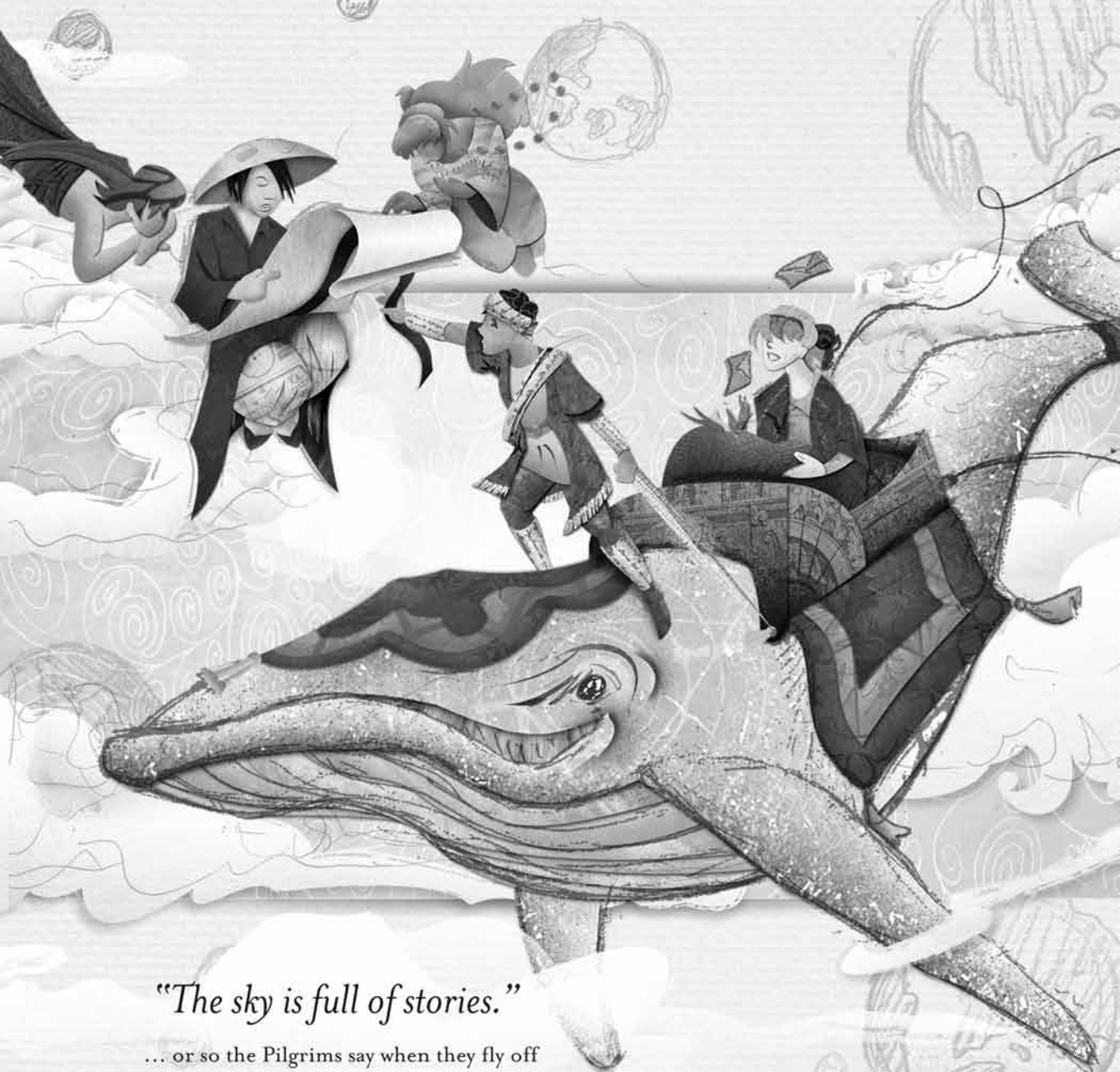
WHAT'S THE WORST THAT COULD HAPPEN? WELL, FOR STARTERS, NICODEMUS COULD KIDNAP ME, AND THEN THEY'LL FIND ME AND I'LL BE DEAD.

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My **Name?** They call me ...

I must confess, I'm known to have a **Foible** or two ... (p. 137)

My strongest desire, my greatest hope, my **Motivation** is ... (p. 156)

+6 +4 +2 +0 -2 Z

WHAT IS IT

RANK

I'm proud to say my **Nationality** is ... (p. 157)

+6 +4 +2 +0 -2 Z

WHAT IS IT

RANK

... and my **Past**, which has helped make me what I am today, is ... (p. 158)

+6 +4 +2 +0 -2 Z

WHAT IS IT

RANK

You might say that my **Swashbuckling Forte** is ... (p. 137)

+6 +4 +2 +0 -2 Z

WHAT IS IT

RANK

Swashbuckling Techniques (p. 139)

roll an extra die, keep best; or a flat +1

Fortes? Why, yes—I've several! (p. 132)

+6 +4 +2 +0 -2 Z

WHAT IS IT

RANK

+6 +4 +2 +0 -2 Z

WHAT IS IT

RANK

+6 +4 +2 +0 -2 Z

WHAT IS IT

RANK

+6 +4 +2 +0 -2 Z

WHAT IS IT

RANK

And **Techniques?** Certes, monsieur! (p. 139)

roll an extra die, keep best; or a flat +1

In my adventures, I've acquired some interesting **Ephemera** ... (p. 183)

+6 +4 +2 +0 -2 Z

WHAT IS IT

RANK

+6 +4 +2 +0 -2 Z

WHAT IS IT

RANK

+6 +4 +2 +0 -2 Z

WHAT IS IT

RANK

Miscellany

Training Points

(p. 180)

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SWASHBUCKLERS
OF THE 7 SKIES

Master [+6]

Expert [+4]

Good [+2]

Average [0]

Poor [-2]

ZEROED OUT

Using Style Dice

(p. 176)

- **Be Impressive:** Roll an extra die, keep best or a flat +1
- **Catch Your Second Wind:** Roll a Style Die, recover that many Ranks of damage.
- **Continue Ephemera:** See p. 183.
- **Create the World:** Minor Fact (0 dice), Significant Fact (1 die), Major Fact (2 dice);
Create a Named NPC (1 die);
Giving a Named NPC Specific Fortes (+1 die per Rank);
Temporary Fame, Gear, Sidekick, or Wealth (+1 die per Rank).
- **Good Form Gifting:** As many as you want!
- **Hexing (Koldun only):** See p. 154.
- **Use Mystic Powers:** Color Effect (0 dice), Simple Usage (0 dice), Advantage Effect (1 die), Great Advantage Effect (2 dice).