

# THE AETHER SEA



EDWARD TURNER

A WORLD OF  
ADVENTURE FOR

**FATE**  
CORE SYSTEM

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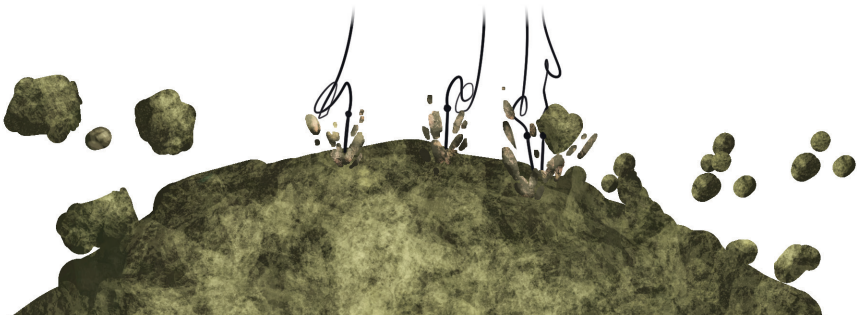
This is a game where people make up stories about wonderful, terrible,  
impossible, glorious things. All the characters and events portrayed in this work  
are fictional. Any resemblance to real people, spacefaring goblins, hegemonic  
human empires, spaceships made of wood and magic, dashing young asteroid  
farmers, or scruffy nerfherders, is purely coincidental, but kinda hilarious.



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## WADING INTO A GREAT BIG SEA

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Used to be, there was a planet that went by a half-dozen names. Nobody who lived there called it Homeworld, so that's what we call it now. It seems fair.

The different kinds of folks who lived on Homeworld didn't much care for one another, and they all scabbled for elbow room; elves, dwarves, goblins, trolls, humans, and orcs, all crammed together, most of 'em convinced they deserved to be the rulers of this little rock. So they fought, in piecemeal skirmishes and all-out wars. But there were so many sides that nobody could ever win, not really; there was some comfort in knowing that, though a tribe of orcs might sack your city, they'd be driven out by an elven strike force in a decade or so.

It was magic that caused the trouble. The better we got at it, the longer and darker those skirmishes became, and the longer the damage lasted. Five hundred years ago, Homeworld ended up a scorched wasteland, half of it so thick with magical fallout that you could flip a coin and have a fifty-fifty chance of surviving long enough to see it land.

That's when folks started fighting over little things like food and drinkable water.

But one day, a human by the name of Albus Fletcher did the thing that humans are good at: he talked to people. He met with a couple of clever elves who'd become hotshots in academia and pulled a dwarven artisan out of one of their slums to do a little assembly. Heck, he even purchased the service of some trolls and goblins to do the heavy lifting and calculations. Together, the group made an aethership. It was the first of its kind, a ship that could drag itself off the planet and into the sky without being torn apart by the aether.

And because Albus Fletcher was very, very good at talking to people, he managed to get all the patents in his name.

It wasn't long before every seaworthy vessel on the planet was fitted with a couple very expensive enchantments, and everyone who could buy, beg, or steal a ticket joined the great exodus. Folks took off into the unknown, putting down roots on new planets—after centuries of killing each other, they finally got their wish: ruling their own little rock.

...o'course, now they're elbow to elbow in a great big sea, fighting over whole planets instead of little tracts of land.



## What is the Aether Sea?

We call it a sea, but that ain't exactly right. Aether's not well understood, and what we know about it's not too useful: it's invisible, it's intangible, it tears leaky ships apart, and if you walk into the aether without protection, you'll explode. That's what the universe seems to be made of.

As far as we can tell, the aether goes on forever; we know there's at least millions of stars and billions of worlds out there. When most folks talk about the aether sea, they mean the bit we've colonized so far, which is tiny compared to the whole deal. About a thousand worlds, we think. Not many records were kept in those first few years of the exodus from Homeworld, so the numbers aren't as exact as we might like.

One thing's for sure, though: every planet that's occupied is occupied by the descendants of Homeworld. There's no life in the sea outside of us and what we put there—nothing that we've found in five hundred years of looking, at least. That's one of the things that's put a damper on exploration: no stores, no allies, and no planets you can live on without taking a year or more to make 'em habitable. Don't stop people from looking or rumors from forming, of course.

The biggest chunk of the sea is Royal space, the territory claimed by the Royal Hegemony. It's in the dead center of the known universe, and best guess is that it's got two-thirds of the occupied worlds within its borders. Outside of Royal space is the deep sea: dozens of little territories claimed by nascent emperors and warlords, and a hundred more worlds chugging along, trying not to be affiliated with anyone except themselves.

## Mapping the Aether

The aether sea is broken into **quadrants**, **sectors**, and **planets**.

Quadrants are large chunks of space, more useful for navigation than anything else: crossing a quadrant is, roughly, a week's travel time. Ages ago, Royal territory was exactly four quadrants—hence the name—but these days it's a bit less exact. Quadrants only really matter when it comes to getting from place to place; look at page 31 for more on that.

Sectors are political divisions; planets within a sector are all part of the same government. Most of the time, people sayin' sector or star system mean the same thing. Sometimes a sector will cover a few systems, but they're never larger than a quadrant; it's hard to keep a government together over such distances. The Royal Hegemony isn't a sector itself, but a whole mess of sectors that happen to fly a Royal flag above their own.

A planet is, of course, a planet, but things that aren't exactly planets in the scientific sense get called planets too: moons, big old asteroids, even some artificial stations. It's just a term for a spot in the sea where folk can live that ain't a ship. Even the largest and most colonized planets tend to be pretty homogenous, culturally speaking; we've only been colonizing for a couple centuries. There's no colony planet that's full to bursting, but there's plenty whose only livable terrain is overpopulated—habiforming takes a while, you know.

### Sector and Planetary Aspects

GMs, you'll do right by the players by making sectors and planets interesting and dangerous. Part of that comes from their **issues**. These issues work much the same as the issues from page 22 in the *Fate Core System*: come up with a major problem for an area, and make it into an aspect ripe for compels and invokes.

A **sector issue** is usually a political problem or something that affects a huge region of the sea, either a **current issue**—such as *In the Midst of a Civil War* or *Under a Naval Blockade*—or an **impending issue**, such as *Pirates Gathering at Our Borders* or *Slowly Dying Star*.

A **planetary issue** is a problem just for one planet. It's also either current—such as *Constant Earthquakes* or *Powerful Crime Family*—or impending, like *Whisperings of a Revolution* or *Running Out of Clean Water*.

A planet's issues are in play while the PCs are on a planet, and sector issues are in play while they're within a sector, including planets in the sector. Once the PCs move on, they leave their issues behind. That's the great thing about an aethercraft: there's a lot of room behind it.



## The Royal Hegemony

It's a big sea. Describing everyone who swims in it is an exercise in futility, not just because it'll take forever, but because it's impossible to collect it all. Paperwork is a nightmare within the Royal Hegemony, and usually ignored outside of it. There's self-sufficient planets out there that haven't contacted the rest of the sea in centuries. But there are some big powers who almost everyone has heard of, and none more important than the Royal Hegemony.

In the dying days of Homeworld, just before the first aethership was created, a whole mess of human kingdoms put themselves together in a sort of union. They figured that pooling their resources and information would work to everyone's benefit.

Nowadays, Royal space encompasses roughly two thirds of the sea. So it seems that worked out.

Planets within the Hegemony are technically self-governing, and on paper the system seems strong: if you're a part of the Hegemony, you pay some taxes and obey a few mandates from on high—usually well-meaning stuff like “no slaveholding”—and in return you get the support of the Royal Navy and a few other benefits, like emergency aid and a good working relationship with the Spellcasters' Union.

In practice, if it seems a little suspicious that a collection of starving monarchs went on to run the better part of the universe—well, yeah. It is. The Royals have been a relentless force of expansion for centuries, partly because they have the money and power to just demand that folks obey them—plus it doesn't hurt to have the Royal Navy, who are more than willing to explain to an errant planet just how dangerous life is without their protection—but mostly the Hegemony's power comes from their stranglehold on magic use in the sea.

## The Spellcasters' Union

In the center of every Spellcasters' Union station you'll find a statue—solid gold and twice life size—of Albus Fletcher. There's a plaque that says something about how he founded the SCU, and how his pivotal role in the creation of aetherscraft is an example to us all about how all people are stronger when they work together.

But that's not why he gets a statue. He gets a statue because, amidst all the chaos of inventing the aetherscraft, he held on to the patents. History's written by the victors, right?

The SCU is an organization of magic users, and within Royal space they are the one way to legally practice any form of magic or spellcraft. Technically they're independent from any government, but they are Hegemony-subsidized and have a very close relationship with the Royals. Fact is, ever since Fletcher was crowned into the Hegemony, the head of the SCU has always been a member of a Royal family. The SCU openly claims it's a strict meritocracy. Make of that what you will.

On paper the SCU has no power outside of Royal space, but they still have outposts where they provide magical services at heavy markups, outposts that let them keep a close eye on the largest powers operating out in the deep sea.

Within the Hegemony, the SCU is the only legal source of magical education, and all professional magic-users must be SCU-licensed, with the fees and oversight that implies. But that's just a portion of their influence: the Spellcasters' Union owns the spells that make aether travel possible, and anyone discovered attempting to re-create those spells is tried for "actions with the potential to destabilize the economy of the region." Outside of Royal space, such folks generally just disappear. That's what keeps the SCU in power.

## **The Great Bureaucratic Integration**

The Spellcasters' Union is in bed with the Royal Hegemony, the Hegemony controls the planets in Royal space, and the planets mostly govern themselves, but everybody lives in the shadow of bureaucracy.

If you want to deal with the SCU, your ship must be registered and licensed with the Royal Shipping Registry. You've got a name on top of your forms that complies with the Royal Naming Statute—that is to say, a human-styled first name and family name, regardless of how your folks like to name themselves. Cargo gets tagged and registered with the Royal Trade Commission, and your route is covered by the Board of Aether Travel—and that's just on the government side; the SCU has its own internal divisions to track its customers and what they move. A dozen different acronyms poke their noses in every aspect of life in the Hegemony, and that's just if you're traveling through. Planetside, those technically self-governing sectors in Royal space tend to have governments made of 50% Royal red tape by volume.

Near enough everything a person does is recorded, and filed away, somewhere. A lot of money is spent on that. And a lot of money is spent keeping things from being filed away so neatly. Now, part of that is because folks need illegal things moved from planet to planet: drugs, people, unapproved spells, and such. More than that, some things need to move quickly and efficiently, things not conducive to scrutiny by a dozen low-level employees. Royal warehouses, after all, are full of rotting food and medicine addressed to dead people.

The closer you get to the edge, the slower the wheels of bureaucracy turn: the home office for all those departments is in the Homeworld system, and they don't trust employees on the outskirts to think for themselves. The benefit, such as it is, is that this runs as true for the SCU itself as for the planets and ships in the area: they're a little slow to act and a little blinder to the black markets and illegal shipping in their midst.

## THE FOLKS WHO TRAWL THE SEA

Here's where we get down to the business of looking at characters and what they can do. This assumes you're familiar with the basics of character creation from *Fate Accelerated Edition (FAE)*. Making characters for an adventure in *The Aether Sea* runs much the same, with three major additions: a species (page 8), a ship (page 23), and the opportunity to use magic (page 23).

### Creating a Character

Making a character for *The Aether Sea* takes a bit more effort than in *FAE*. You'll deal with a couple more bells and whistles, but that don't mean it should stand in the way of a proper adventure. If you haven't fleshed out every last aspect or picked every last stunt, but you want to get your feet wet anyway, please do. Y'all won't be the first ones to take to the sea to figure out who you really are.

### High Concept and Trouble

First off, how does your character, by and large, fit in the sea? The **high concept** and **trouble** aspects answer this.

**High Concept:** This here's a brief phrase that sums up the core of your character. Something like *Dashing Freighter Pilot* or *Trollish Loremaster* or *Apprentice Necromancer*.

**Trouble:** It's somethin' that complicates your life. Make sure you'll enjoy butting heads with it. Something like *Flies Into Fits of Rage* or *A Whole Planet's Worth of Gambling Debts* or *Wanted by the Royal Navy for Spreading Seditious Texts*.



## Species

There's six intelligent sorts of people that managed to crawl off of Homeworld:

- **Dwarves:** Short but sturdy underground dwellers with a particularly crazy king back on Homeworld. Good at being Careful.
- **Elves:** Forest folk with a knack for magic and some power in the SCU. They've got a reputation for being Clever.
- **Humans:** A widespread and altogether sociable group, they run the Hegemony and can't be overlooked. Skilled at being Flashy.
- **Goblins:** The scrawny green folks, a long-time servant caste among other species. Adept at being Sneaky.
- **Orcs:** The scary green folks, known for being an ever-looming threat among other species over the generations. Made for being Quick.
- **Trolls:** Massive and ponderous and much-abused, they've lost most all their history. Profoundly Forceful.

Pick the one that sounds most interesting. Humans might think of themselves as the default kind of person, but they really ain't. Want to know more about the species? Read *"The Folk of the Aether Sea"* starting on page 9.

### "RACES"

In Royal space, the different sorts of folk are sometimes called "races." That ain't a popular term in the deep sea; it's something used by the all-human Royals to imply that everyone else is just a different sort of human at their core, and that non-humans are all the same, without races of their own. "Species" is a safe option, but even more popular is "folk," which does that "happy shared banner of personhood" thing without the baggage: the folk might all be different, but they're all still folk.

## Approaches

Use the approaches straight out of *FATE*: Careful, Clever, Forceful, Flashy, Quick, and Sneaky. Take one at Good (+3), two at Fair (+2), two at Average (+1), and one at Mediocre (+0).

Each species has a **favored approach**, the way they're used to doin' things. Put a star next to your favored approach. It doesn't have to be your highest-ranked approach, and in fact it's better if it isn't. Here's how it works:

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When you roll with your favored approach, treat any final results of Poor (-1) or below as Mediocre (+0).

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It's not that a favored approach is something you're especially good at, it's just something that's hard for a creature like you to fail at too much.

## Name and Appearance

Figure out what you look like and what folks call you—and, if it's different, what name is attached to your SCU records.

## Additional Aspects

Now, you've got room for three more aspects:

- **Background:** This says something about where you're from. Something like *Runaway from a Rich Elven World* or *Retired Klebnaki Pirate*.
- **Ship:** This one ties you to the ship, something you have in common. Like *Rock-Solid Construction* or *Never Backs Down*.
- **Free:** This here you can make whatever you want.

You can fill in your background aspect and free aspect right now if you'd like, or leave them blank and fill them in while you play. Your ship aspect, that's something you need to have a ship to make; you can deal with that when you make your aethercraft on page 23.

If you don't want to be saddled with a ship of your own, just take another free aspect instead of a ship aspect. See page 23 for the pros and cons of going on without a ship.

## Stunts and Refresh

You start with 3 free stunts and 3 refresh, just like in *FAE*. If you do desire, you can spend your free stunts or refresh on magic abilities. Scan over page 16 for more information on what magic can do and how you can pay for it.

## The Folk of the Aether Sea

One thing to keep in mind about folk on the sea: everyone knows the stereotypes attached to 'em. Stereotypes ain't true just 'cause they exist. There are antisocial humans and peacenik orcs out there, after all. But they don't come from nowhere, either. You might match a stereotype or defy it, but you can't ignore it entirely; if nothing else, it's what other folk'll tend to think when they meet you. By the same token, even if you're not a part of the notable organization associated with your token species, strangers will tend to assume you are.

### HYBRIDS

There are no hybrids on the aether sea. Sure, there are rumors and vague reports, but nobody's ever confirmed a mixed species. Plus—in Royal space, at least—couplings that might produce hybrids are pretty taboo, even outright illegal on some planets. Terms like half-elf do exist, but only as slurs. This particular one means an elf who was raised by different folk or who just isn't "elfy" enough.



## Humans

The dominant species on the sea, humans are political leaders in Royal space, and they've got the force of numbers outside of it. They're the most social of the species by a wide margin, with a reputation for being nice and, honestly, a bit dopey—especially given those silly-looking round ears of theirs. But they're adaptable as anything, trickier than they let on, and a force to be reckoned with when riled.

**Names:** Human naming conventions are the standard the Royal bureaucracy runs on: a traditional first name and a family name, like Jonathan Smith or Amanda Robertson.

**Favored Approach:** Flashy

### THE ROYAL FAMILIES

There's no set of humans more notable than the Royal Families. House Fletcher, Makepeace, Beauclerk, and Clarence are the best known ones, but there are smaller families of less renown. While the actual reigning monarchs stay out of the public eye, Royal statute requires that every sector in Royal space house a duke, who acts as the voice of the Royals. The families have stayed fairly small; there's no more than a thousand living humans of Royal blood. Even so, they soak up a lot of resources. The family, staff, and servants all live tax-free, and they're all human.

That last bit is a major point of contention on planets settled by other folks, and it means there's few places in the sea that a human can't just waltz into like they belong there.

## Goblins

The goblins of old were scavengers and prey animals who figured out the quickest route to survival: hook up with a bigger, tougher species. They became a servant race to the other folk on Homeworld, mostly orcs and humans. Now, post-exodus, some goblin groups are struggling to create their own identity.

**Names:** Most goblins use the naming conventions of their host cultures, sometimes pulling from different backgrounds to create odd names like Mateji Fletcher or Rebecca Darkblade.

**Favored Approach:** Sneaky

### THE SHADOW FLEET

Ah yes, the oft-rumored, rarely encountered Shadow Fleet. It's got a couple hundred ships, makin' up a sort of mobile system circling Royal space (sector aspect: *Hidden among the Shadow Fleet*). The fleet's run by a goblin named Elizabeth Krigar, who realized that her people's long history of servitude left them trusted and omnipresent in the Hegemony. She spent her life building a network of informants throughout the sea, and set up the fleet to store all that info. Goblins work there as information brokers, code-breakers, spies, and such.

The fleet's hidden, it's mobile, and it's too valuable to attack. And for Krigar and the many goblins she employs, it's the only place in the sea they feel safe.





## Orcs

Big, green, betusked, and to most folks pretty scary-looking, orcs have a not-entirely unearned reputation for being violent, borderline feral raiders. It's a reputation that stems from prejudice, both against orcs and by orcs against everyone else. They were hit hard in the dying days of Homeworld, when physical might was less important than magical skill, and are still pulling themselves back from the edge of extinction.

**Names:** Orc names are like this: a parent's name, then a birth number, then a personal name, traditionally given when the child comes of age, like Marek's First Arthog, or Grun's Third Sharn. To better fit with Royal bureaucracy, orcs have taken family names, often as boasts, like Mightiest or Elfsbane, or with great reluctance, like Makeme or Nongiven.

**Favored Approach:** Quick

### THE KLEHNAKI

Thirty years back, an orc named Morag's Second Klehnak gathered together a huge portion of the orcs in the sea and riled them up to wage war on the Royals. She was an orc supremacist who thought she could take the Homeworld system in one strike. And, fact is, she nearly did—but she didn't, so now she's languishing in a Royal prison somewhere. But her followers, the ones who survived, they stuck together, and they have an orcs-only territory that even the Spellcasters' Union won't go near. Of course, without SCU magic to keep their ships fuelled, they have to get it from outside their sector. To that end, they're constantly sending out pirates and raiding parties to bring back functioning aethercraft and other magical goodies. Rumor is, they're waiting for Klehnak to escape and guide them for a second attack.



## Dwarves

These small but stout folk traditionally lived in bustling underground hives, believin' in nothing but the Stone Prophecies, which foretold their names, careers, and even spouses. Not many still believe in 'em, though, because they never predicted folks would leave Homeworld. Some dwarves still live underground, but not as many as in days past. One thing to know: beards are popular with many men, but they ain't nearly as ubiquitous as some seem to think.

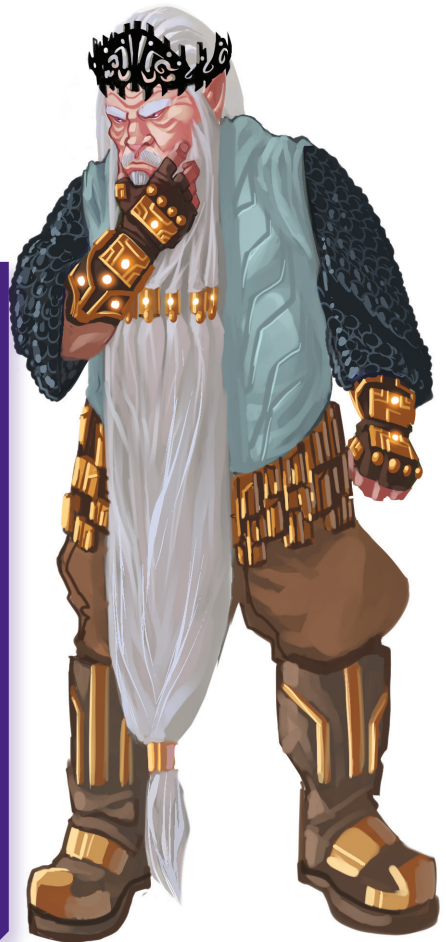
**Names:** Personal names are set by the dwarf's date of birth, and family names come from the family's prophesied role. Finally, each one's got a middle name that says where they were born: Stoneborn, Skyborn, or Aetherborn. They have names like Cal Stoneborn Forgefounder and Mett Aetherborn Arrowsmith.

**Favored Approach:** Careful

### THE STONE KING

Here's something the Royals don't talk about: Homeworld ain't really part of Royal space. Truly. Dead center of everything, but they don't claim it; they leave it for the magic-warped mutants on the surface and the Stone King and his followers below. King Albrecht Stoneborn is a genuine insane tyrant, convinced that the stones whisper to him and have told him to go to war with the aether sea. The dwarves on Homeworld are building an engine, one massive enough to propel the entire planet. Ships that move too close are attacked from the surface and stripped for parts after they crash. Hooded or blinded dwarves have been found out in the sea, sent past naval blockades on unspecified missions.

Folks are pretty sure the King's plan to build a planet-sized warship is impossible. But the man and his people are fervent.





## Elves

Elves evolved in Homeworld's forests and have developed a uniquely magical biology. It's pretty ingenious, actually: their gut uses transfiguration to extract nutrients from plants. They're known to be arrogant, and once believed that Homeworld itself was a sort of mother-goddess who blessed them with their natural aptitude for magic. Post-exodus, they're not so sure anymore.

**Names:** Many elves take pride in not sharing a name with any other elf, living or dead, so they craft elaborate names for their children through elaborate naming ceremonies. An elf name might be Silarrianatha or Zetherasias, for instance. Surnames are taken from old elven community names, such as Crescentmoon, from the City of Crescent Moons, or Silverleaf, from the Silver-Leaved Forest.

**Favored Approach:** Clever

### THE EXPLORATORY THEOLOGICAL COUNCILS

Imagine you believe your planet is a literal goddess. And then your planet withers and dies, and you leave it. Where does that leave you, exactly? To the elves in the Exploratory Theological Council, it leaves you traveling from planet to planet, scouring each one for traces of divinity, and leaving folks behind wherever you find some. Trouble is, like any elven organization, it's had a dozen schisms since its inception. One group of odd-but-polite elves who, by definition, are most interested in the areas where people aren't living? Not a problem. Let 'em poke around. Two groups like this and suddenly the streets are full of screaming proselytizers. And if you happen to live on a planet that seems "divine" for whatever reason, you're going to get swarmed with them.

## Trolls

Trolls are big. Trolls are slow. Trolls aren't stupid, even if they've got that reputation. They came from harsh mountain wilderness, and were taught not to speak until they had something intelligent and eloquent to say, so they got tagged as dumb brutes when they first encountered other folk. They never developed a written language, so when their bards who held their oral tradition were killed, enslaved, or driven out ages ago, much of the epic poetry that was trollish culture got lost.

**Names:** Most traditional troll names are forgotten, so trolls take names freely from other cultures. When taking surnames to fit in with Royal bureaucracy, trolls went simple: Moon, Rock, Desk, Sky, and such. Roughly a tenth of trolls have the family name Troll.

**Favored Approach:** Forceful

### TROLLISH LOREMASTERS

All across the sea there are trollish loremasters. These folks dedicate their lives to gathering together all the stories that have been lost. A fellow named Thurûn Troll is the closest they have to a leader, and he runs a little library on a planet not far from Homeworld.

There's maybe a hundred loremasters across the sea, moving from planet to planet, asking trolls to share any stories they can remember. After a year or so, they wend their ways back to Thurûn's library to have them added to the ever-incomplete saga of trollish history.



## MAGIC

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A thousand years ago, maybe, magic was the province of great mages; it was a mystical and highly valued skill that maybe one in a thousand could be said to have mastered—just like literacy. Things change. Modern magic is a bit more like cooking: there are great chefs who can do amazing things, but most folks can put together a sandwich when they need to.

There are two big categories of magic: **raw casting**—which most folks just call casting—and **prepared spells**. If raw casting were cookery, it would be the kind where you open the pantry door and find a sack of potatoes and a jar of capers and just figure something out with it. There's different schools of casting, but within each school it's flexible. If you know how to make a fireball, you can also light a cigar without lighting up the fellow holding it. You can also keep your coffee warm. Probably. That's the tradeoff, there: raw magic might not do just what you want.

The other option is preparing spells. It's like a recipe for magic: it tells you exactly what to say and how to move your hands, and it gets you an exact result. Tradeoff is, they're limited: if you know a spell that lets you, say, toss a fireball, you can't change it up on the fly. If you wanted to light a fire, you'd have no way other than standing ten feet back and chucking balls of flame at the woodpile. You can't fiddle with the recipe.

### Dabbling in Raw Magic

Most folks who know magic, they **dabble** in it. They ain't got a lot of actual training, they just picked up a little magic on the way. Maybe they got magic-users in the family, maybe they did some reading in their off hours. Maybe they just got a knack. Whatever the method, they know a bit about a school of magic.

If you want to dabble in raw magic, you just need to take one school of magic—Animation, Evocation, or Alteration—as a stunt. Don't even need an aspect to justify it; dabbling is common.

Each school of magic can do a bunch of things: Animation can bring stuff to a shambling parody of life; Evocation can yank elements out of their respective planes and into the real world; Alteration can tweak the operational rules of the universe and so on. Read up on 'em, starting on page 20, to get a better idea of what's in their wheelhouses.

There's a tradeoff for this broad base of knowledge, though. It's gonna take you a while to figure out how to do anything; you can only use magic to overcome an obstacle or create an advantage, and doing so takes ten to fifteen minutes of concentration. You're dredging up a lot of magical theory and half-remembered lessons, relying on guesswork and approximation, and you can't just do it at the drop of a hat.

## Focusing on Raw Magic

Now, there's those other folk who **focus** on raw magic. If you want to, you first need an aspect that represents your training, something like *Former SCU Member* or *Trained at the Academy on Risingstar*. If you've got one, you can take a focus from within a school of magic as a stunt. Each school has a handful of suggested focuses, but you're not beholden to that list. Players, work with the GM to create something new and different, so long as it makes sense in the school and is, above all, focused. If you want multiple focuses, you'll need a justifying aspect for each one.

Unlike dabblers, focused practitioners don't get a broad base: if you're focused on summoning fire, then you have little to no wiggle room for how it gets summoned. You could use it to light up a pipe or a house, but you couldn't summon ice no matter how you try. The good thing is you can move quickly. You're really familiar with your focus, so you can work it nearly instantly. In other words, you can use that sort of magic as an action, including in a conflict. You can even use magic to attack and defend in a conflict, assuming you can think up a way that fits in your focus.

You don't have to dabble in a school to focus in it; focusing in a school that you don't dabble in just means you are so caught up in your particular field that you can't expand beyond it.

## Using Raw Magic

Whether you're a dabbler or a focused practitioner, casting works about the same. You declare what you're trying to do, or what effect you're trying to make, and what approach you're going to use. For the most part, dabblers use Careful or Clever, while focused practitioners are more likely to use Forceful or Quick, but it depends on the cast.

Opposition to casting depends on many factors, but by and large it is a Fair (+2) challenge to perform an obvious application of magic that don't go outside your zone and targets a willing or inanimate target. 'course, you'll need to concentrate, too; anything distracting you much will also make the cast harder.

Ties, successes, and successes with style work the same as in the *Fate Core System*.

If you fail, you have a choice to make. You can take stress equal to the shifts needed to make the roll a tie. By pushing yourself, you take some magical backlash. Otherwise, you can create a **wild magic event**, where the cast is too weak to take hold, but the universe tries to reconcile it anyway, causing some unpredictable problems. In this case, the GM twists your cast and turns it back on you. If you were trying to light a fire, then you light the whole place on fire instead. If you were trying to summon a spirit, then you summon its bigger, angrier cousin. Trouble of that nature.

### MAGICAL COMBAT

Magic fighting magic can get pretty out of hand. The loser in a magical fight has gotta take enough stress to get to a tie, or they trigger a wild magic event that makes life more complicated for everyone. Clever folks learn to stay well away from magical duels.

## Preparing and Performing Spells

Spells aren't like raw magic. Raw magic involves risk; things might go awry. Spells don't: a spell works all the time, every time. You'll never roll dice when performing a spell, and you won't take stress. You say they happen and they happen. But also, you got no say in how the spell works; it'll always act the same way.

**If you want to make spells**, you're out of luck. The SCU has clamped down *hard* on unlicensed spellcrafting and enchantment. To be honest, it don't matter overmuch to the average denizen of the deep sea: making spells requires a magically inert environment and hours of work, and that's just to make single-use scrolls. Permanent spells take years of effort to create, and true enchantments—magic effects which can last indefinitely and not fade out in a few hours—take days just to perform. Who wants to go through all that trouble, right?

**If you want to perform spells**, or otherwise use effortless magic, that you can do. Performing a spell is an action that immediately generates the spell's effect. Spells used to attack or defend will specify the result they create; these attack actions are actively opposed by the target, while these defense actions replace any rolls you could have made.

Getting access to a one-and-done spell or wave-and-it-happens wand isn't too difficult; in a populated area you might have to overcome a Good (+3) obstacle to track down a dealer selling what you want at a price you can afford. The more esoteric the magic, though, the harder it's bound to be to find. Plus, this is all single-use stuff; read the spell or wave the wand, and it'll never work again.

### CANTRIPS

For the most part, the folks who might most want to make spells are dabblers in raw magic. However, the time it takes to cast somethin' raw tends to put a damper on how much fun they can have with it. Luckily, there are **cantrips**, partially completed spells which can be unleashed at a moment's notice. While using cantrips is technically a form of spellcraft, the SCU doesn't much care 'cause cantrips are inherently temporary and can't be shared.

PCs who want to make cantrips must take the Cantripping stunt.

**Cantripping:** You've made a habit of preparing useful cantrips. You can spend a fate point to perform a spell as an action, as if you were a focused practitioner. To take this stunt, you must dabble in at least one form of raw magic.

Permanent magic is another matter. Creating a spell that'll always work is so difficult that a single one can cost more than an entire aethercraft. That purchase will take a darn good reason.

If you want to have permanent forms of magic, first decide what spells or magical artifacts your character wants. Any effect that can be created, you can get. **Each piece of permanent magic costs 2 stunts and requires an aspect to justify how you acquired it.** It's expensive. It's expensive because it *works*.

There's an effectively infinite number of prepared magic stunts; spells are inflexible, so even minor variations—like the difference between throwing a lightning bolt at someone in your zone and throwing a lightning bolt at someone a zone away—are completely different spells, each requiring a justifying aspect and 2 stunt slots.

Outside of the SCU or Royal military installations, most prepared magic works at a limited capacity: the aspects they create don't get free invokes, and attack or defense spells generally create Good (+3) results. But players, remember you can be inventive. Talk with the GM about creating permanent magic; it's a conversation, like everythin' else. GMs, if you think an effect is too powerful, then just weaken it, increase its cost, or forbid it. If a player wants a minor effect, well then maybe it only costs one stunt after all, but it still requires a justifying aspect.

### Some Common Spells and Artifacts

**Trusty Old Wand of Fireball:** If you've gotta go on the offensive, might as well stick with a classic. Wave this wand to toss a ball of flame at a single target in your zone, dealing a Good (+3) attack.

**Assassin's Shroud:** Developed by the goblin assassins of the Shadow Fleet to help them hide in the shadows of brightly lit halls. Place the aspect *Shrouded in Darkness* on a single willing target within your zone.

**Liaretta's Ravening Horde:** A popular item on planets in the Annular Necrocracy. Animate a single, complete corpse within your zone as the aspect *Ravenous Zombie*. This doesn't let you give that zombie orders, so be careful.

**Gloddi's Basic Lifeboat:** Though illegal in Royal space, there's a heavy trade in this spell. Attach the aspect *Capable of Surviving Aether Travel* on a shuttle-sized vessel.

## Schools of Magic

### Evocation

If you're an evoker, you can tear open a hole in reality and yank out what's on the other side: the elemental planes. Fire, frost, shadow, and forces of that nature. This ain't a delicate process, and you don't actually control what you pull out. You can give it a sort of vector or hold it roughly in place, but this is magic best used for smashing things.

The obvious application of Evocation is knocking down walls with blasts of elemental force, especially for focused practitioners. With enough time, though, even dabblers can lay useful aspects on zones; you can drown folks in shadow, freeze them solid, or set up barriers of flame to keep them at bay.

Evocation attacks naturally hit one target in your zone or an adjacent zone. To target somethin' further away, increase the passive opposition by one for each additional zone. If you want to target everything in a zone, increase it by two. If you're attacking someone, they'll instead add those numbers to their active opposition.

#### Evocation Focuses

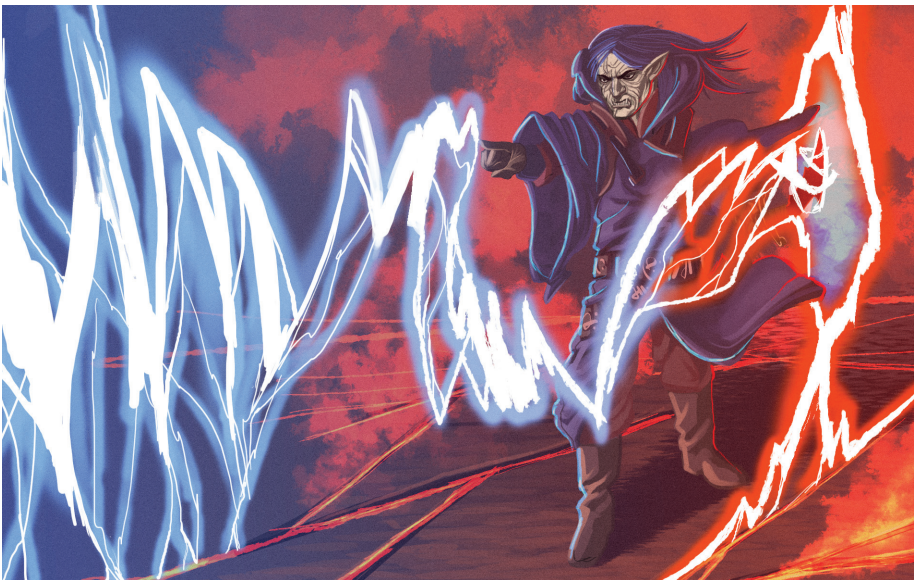
**Fire:** A classic, highly recommended. The number-one choice for focused practitioners across the sea.

**Lightning:** Less common, but no less destructive. Some SCU ships have engines that run off summoned lightning.

**Earth:** The least subtle aspect of an incredibly unsubtle art.

**Shadow:** A bit of a weird'un, without much in the way of offense but a fine choice for utility.

**Frost:** Lay down a floor of ice, or just freeze a friend.







## Alteration

Alteration makes something act like it's something else. It's like this: say you want to fly, but you can't. But you've got a bird that can fly. You can copy its ability to fly onto you, temporarily. If you're good, you can even copy the ability to fly from a lone feather, which still contains some of the, uh, essence of "able-to-fly" or whatever.

Whether you're a dabbler or a focused practitioner, you can only use Alteration to create an advantage: you put an aspect on something or someone, provided you can justify it. Like all aspects, this one is true for as long as it's attached to its target; to strain an example, if you've got the aspect *Able to Fly*, you've got all the narrative justification you need to hover around the room. That doesn't necessarily mean you can fly well, mind; that's still a matter of rolling your approaches and invoking your aspects.

Aspects created with Alteration last for about a half-hour, tops, before they fade away. In game terms, they last until the end of the scene.

### Alteration Focuses

**Shamanism:** Eagle's flight, bear strength, wolf claws; your bailiwick is animals and their attributes.

**Meta-Alteration:** A practice in high demand on small ships. This lets you create magical effects based on other, pre-existing magical effects, like turning a ship's artificial gravity into a sort of tractor spell, or copying a magic sword's *Always Strikes True* enchantment onto your own arrows.

**Illusionist:** Your wheelhouse is appearance alone. So, while you can't change how anything functions, you can drop aspects like *Looks Like a Wall* or *Looks Like an Orc*.

## Animation

Animation lets you make inanimate objects act like animate objects. It ain't so hard to imagine.

Animating an object is like creating an advantage, except the aspect you're creating is actually a creature, like a zombie or whatnot. Mechanically, it's even simpler than a mook: it's got a high concept of your choice, no approaches, no stress boxes, and one mild consequence slot.

Animations last for about a half an hour before the magic wears out, so until the end of a scene.

When you try to animate an object and succeed, give the animation one of the following properties. If you succeed with style, give it two.

- Keep the animation active for a full day.
- Give the animation a second aspect.
- Give the animation a second mild consequence slot.
- Give the animation 2 stress boxes.
- Give the animation an Average (+1) approach.
- Give the animation a **directive**.

A directive is a long-term order your animation will attempt to follow. Animations without a directive will stand around mindlessly unless you give them an order; animations with a directive will attempt to satisfy it.

Giving an order to an animation is an overcome action, but it's so easy that you'll only need to roll for it if someone's actively opposing you. It always counts as your action in conflicts, though. Animations always attempt to satisfy orders first, then directives. Once it's out of orders and directives, the animation will go back to standing around until it gets a new order or the spell ends.

The more active animations you have, the harder it becomes for you to make more: for each animation you have active, increase its passive opposition by 2.

### Animation Focuses

**Necromancy:** Turn dead bodies—whole, partial, or sewn together into something horrifying—into abominations and zombies and whatnot.

**Artificing:** Turn a person-shaped hunk of clay or other materials into an obedient golem.

**Guardian Crafting:** Create self-wielding weapons that float around you, or animate suits of armor, anything with a purely protective flair.

**Spirit Summoning:** Bring forth folk's ghosts by coalescing the energy left behind in places they died.

## THE SHIPS

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The earliest aether-capable ships were just that: old wooden ships, fitted with landing struts and aether screws and balloons to help them get airborne. Many an early colonist took to the stars in repurposed sailing vessels, and while there's a lot more kinds of ships these days, most you're likely to see are built off that old design.

### THE RISKS AND REWARDS OF RUNNING AN AETHERCRAFT

Do the players want to have an aethercraft of their own? We're assuming they do, but hey, not everyone wants to run a ship.

The PCs might be crew on a ship belonging to an NPC captain. They might be mercenaries or other folks who run with the highest bidder. They might even spend their time planetside, finding adventure without worrying about the sea around them. In any of these cases, y'all don't need to worry about building an aethership.

There are advantages to not having a ship: traveling through the aether can be dangerous, and if you have a ship you're suddenly obliged to keep it running. From a narrative standpoint, not having a ship means it's easy to keep the PCs confined to a sector or planet they might want to flee, turning "leaving the planet" into a bona fide quest. That's alright.

If you got a ship, though, you got the sea at your disposal. You can set your own course and make your own rules, and no amount of sailin' on someone else's craft will match that freedom.

### Building an Aethercraft

Your ship is a character in this story. It's just as much a part of the crew as you are, so you'll create it much the same as the PCs; the only difference being that you'll all work together to create the ship. Collaborate, and make an aethercraft everyone is happy with.

### High Concept

Figure out your ship's high concept not long after figuring out your own, before you start filling in all the little details about it. As with your own high concept, this is a quick summary of the most important details about the aethercraft: Is it a stolen Royal yacht? Or an armored dwarven trading vessel? Or a scratch-built fighter from an orcish sector?

Unlike your character, your ship does not get a trouble aspect. Let's be honest, if y'all are riding around in her, that ship has more than enough trouble already.

## Approaches

Aethercraft have the same approaches that folks do. What they do with those approaches might be a little different, though; ships can't exactly throw a Forceful punch, but they can Forcefully ram into someone. It's about the same thing.

The craft starts with two Average (+1) approaches, two Mediocre (+0), and two Poor (-1).

## Size

Folks are about the same size, but aethercraft sure ain't. There's a million different classes out there, but folks agree on the four main ones: **shuttles**, **working ships**, **major ships**, and **ultramassive craft**.

Shuttles are short-distance craft that hold less than five folks and rarely ever travel on their own.

Working ships account for nine out of ten craft you'll see out there. Small ones are the size of a house and keep a half-dozen folks in some comfort. Big ones can house fifty or sixty, but they usually have a much smaller crew with a lot of room for cargo.

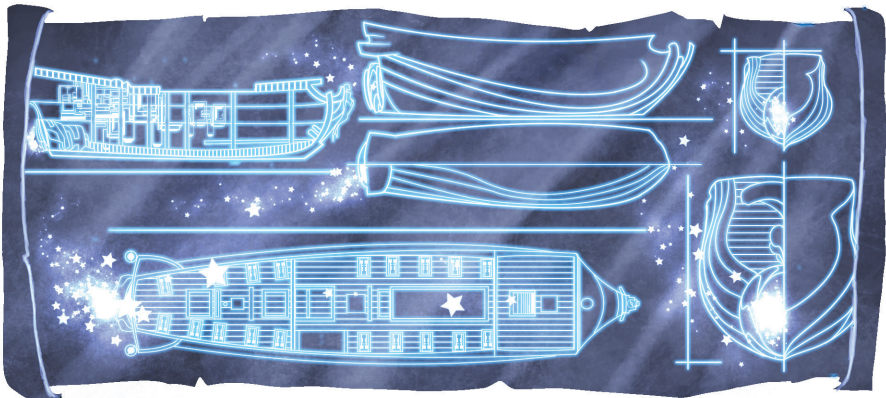
Major ships are usually military, with crews of a hundred or more. They out-size all but the largest planetside structures, and most need a dozen or more folks actively running 'em at any given moment.

Beyond that is the realm of the ultramassive, from luxury cruisers to battlestations. Coordinated fleets of smaller ships can be treated as a single ultramassive vessel.

The included adventure, **It's Only an Elven Moon**, assumes that you'll be entering the sea with a small working ship.

## Ship Aspects

When y'all were building your characters, there was an aspect called a ship aspect which you didn't make right away. Now that you have an idea of what your ship is like, make a ship aspect, which your character will share with your aethercraft. It's somethin' like *Faster Than You'd Expect* or *Gets Lost in a Crowd*. All in all, your ship will have ship aspects equalin' how many crewmembers it's got.



When someone spends a lot of time on a ship, they become part of it. It's not magic, exactly. Or, if it is magic, it's not the kind that the smart folks at the SCU can understand. It's just how things work in the sea: you meet a fellow who's bull-headed—he never gives up, even when he should—and most of the time the craft he calls his acts the same way. It'll keep puttering forward well after most other ships would've fallen apart.

Maybe it's just that folks are drawn to ships like themselves, but some folk swear it's the other way around. That tenacious fella's ship might be made of glass and eggshells, but when he started working it, it took on a part of him.

All this only happens when you make the ship your own. You can live on a ship, work on a ship, and be listed on the crew manifest, but if you don't /ove the ship, then it's not a part of you. No shame in that.

This is why a lot of the bigger ships out there, especially military ones, seem a little bit sterile. They might have a captain who loves 'em, maybe an engineer, maybe not even that. That's one place a smaller ship has an advantage: they got a personality.

## Components, Stunts, and Refresh

A basic, by-the-numbers aethercraft can't do much more than move through the aether and keep the folks inside alive. Every ship's got the following components:

- An aether screw and engine, used for basic propulsion in the aether sea.
- A control station, used to adjust the ship's course. Usually this is a helm which is mechanically or magically connected to the rudders on the aether screw.
- An enchantment sink, used to hold the magic that protects the ship from the aether and lets it move at meaningful speeds. The sink is usually a block of silver kept in the bottom of the ship, sometimes called a "bilge bar," but there's plenty of ways to keep a ship enchanted. Most of the time, any other magical equipment on the ship runs off the bilge bar as well.
- A mirror or crystal for communicating with other ships and stations.
- Life support, artificial gravity, and lights, for the comfort of the crew. Most often, these'll be air-cleaning ivy, enchantments worked into the carpeting, and sealed jars of elemental fire, respectively.

An aethercraft might have other things like kitchens and recreation areas, but in terms of equipment that's what you get. Each other component takes a stunt slot.

Aethercraft aren't so flexible as folks; a working ship starts with 1 free stunt and 1 refresh. If the crew agrees on it, they can spend 1 refresh from the ship to buy it a stunt; ships can go down to 0 refresh. Alternately, a crewmember can spend 1 refresh of their own to buy a stunt for their ship. The bigger a ship is, the more options it has. Shuttles get 1 refresh, but no free stunts. Major ships get 3 refresh. Ultramassive ships get 3 free stunts and 3 refresh.

Some of the most common components for a working aethership include:

- **Landing Struts:** Lets the ship take off and land on its own. Without struts, a ship that wants to land planetside must be brought in by a docking spell, which means someone on the planet knows it's landing.
- **Weapons Station:** The ship gets a station from which a crewman can use attack actions. Weapons stations can be anything from massive ballistae to some windows for an evoker to toss fireballs out of. Secondary or tertiary weapons stations are also quite popular.
- **Magical Warding:** The ship gets another mild consequence slot, which can be used to fend off magic attacks.
- **High-Efficiency Engines:** Add a box to the ship's resources stress track.

Ships can also take stunts to represent unique aspects of their construction. For instance, Armored Bow gives +2 when Forcefully ramming another ship, and Cloaking Enchantment gives +2 when Sneakily fleeing from combat.

### Name, Appearance, and Layout

Time to decide what your ship is called and what it looks like. There ain't much agreement about what to call ships in the sea; the Royal Navy tends toward expansive and abstract names like *Hope* or *Defiance*, Klehnaki raiders like threatening names like *The Bloodied Fist*, and plenty of mercenaries don't bother with names at all.

As far as appearance is concerned, you're not exactly constrained. While most aethercraft look like old ships with their sails chopped off, there are plenty other varieties: the Deeprunner's Mining Concern favors working asteroids with engines bolted to the back, and the SCU builds its stations by growing a massive, hollow tree to live in. Heck, there was some goblin a few years back who managed to get from this planet to the moon with nothing more than a rowboat and a lotta moxie.

Sketch out the innards of your craft, like sketching out the battlefield before trouble goes down. This ain't a perfect map, just somethin' rough to keep everyone's minds straight. A working ship has about 6 zones, split among rooms used for commanding the ship, the engineering area, a dining or rec space, living space—usually subdivided into even smaller quarters, not much more than beds with curtains, a hallway to get to all of those places, and plenty of room for storage. But that's just the general idea.

### Resources

A small working ship starts with a resources stress track with 3 boxes, but with the third box checked already. Shuttles generally don't have a resources stress track. Major ships have 4 boxes, and ultramassive vessels have 5.

Want to know more about Resources? Look at page 30.

## Operating Your Ship

Most of the time, your aethercraft will take you from point A to point B without a whole heck of a lot of trouble; after all, adventures tend to happen planetside. When there's no threat or no action, you can gloss over the things your ship does.

Sometimes, though, you're going to hit some Klehnaki raiders who want to scrap your vessel and, on the whole, don't really mind if you get scrapped as well. Sometimes you'll need to sneak by a Royal patrol craft. The kinds of things that require a finer touch.

### Stations

An aethercraft's got a bunch of **stations**, places where folks can control some part of the ship. They're just components that the crew can man. Stations come in all sorts of styles, from wheels that physically link up to the rudder, to boards etched with runes that the user presses to control the ship.

To start, ships have two stations: a control station, to change its heading and speed, and a communications station, to trade information with folks in nearby ships.

You can purchase extra stations as stunts, the most common being a weapon station. Each station lets the ship perform certain actions, as long as a crewmember is operating the station, meaning the operator is in the right zone of the ship and is free to act.

A PC operating a station can decide what that part of the ship does and which approach they use and the ship uses. The operator rolls four fate dice, adds their approach to the ship's approach, and resolves the action normally.

While piloting the ship is left to just the pilot, that doesn't mean everyone else can take things easy. When the ship's in trouble, the pilot's going to want someone in the engine room diverting power, and the gunner's going to want someone spotting targets from the port window. There are plenty of ways that crewmembers can create advantages for the other folks on the ship.

If you're a crewmember of a ship, you're vaguely familiar with all the stations; you can take any seat, even if it's not your forte. If you're trying to operate a ship you aren't a crewmember of—which don't necessarily mean you're stealing it, but sure carries the implication—then you'll likely need an aspect justifying your familiarity with the controls you want to use. If you don't have one, you'll need to overcome an obstacle to figure out how to work the unfamiliar layout; a mass-produced ship would be a Good (+3) obstacle, while an idiosyncratic homebrew aethercraft would be much harder to use.

## Ship Aspects and Fate Points

Ships have their own refresh and aspects, which can be compelled by the GM or invoked by the players. That means your aethercraft will have its own supply of fate points. They can be used to resist compels the GM throws at the ship, even if nobody is on the ship when it happens.

To invoke ship aspects, including any situation aspects the ship picks up, players can spend their own fate points or the ship's fate points. Aethercraft tend to be slow at getting fate points, so using your own might be wise. Holding onto a bit of the ship's stock might come in handy for punching a last-minute getaway or handling an unexpected boarding party.

Likewise, anyone operating a station on the ship can invoke or compel aspects—both their own and the ship's—using their fate points or the ship's supply.

## Ship-to-Ship Conflict

In conflicts, folks and aethercraft all act at the same time; for the most part, this means the crewmembers on the ships will be running around, creating advantages for the poor sap at the piloting controls to use to get out of trouble. When determining initiative, go through the motions for the crewmembers of the aethercraft in the conflict. Don't bother for the craft; they'll act when their crews make them.

Aethercraft move through zones just like folks do. When a battle breaks out, sketch out a quick map of the area, where the ships are, and where the crewmembers of each ship are—if you find such a thing necessary.

During a conflict, a character can spend an action to use a station, controlling some part of the ship. Each station can only be used once per exchange, but any number of stations can be used at once during an exchange; a craft bristling with weapons stations could attack a half-dozen times, while a ship with a secondary navigation station could move twice.

Ships not manned by PCs are constructed like NPCs, and you can create important ships using the same rules as those for the PCs' ship. You can also make ship mooks: ships with a couple of aspects, and couple things they are Skilled (+2) or Bad (-2) at, along with any essential components. Ship mooks don't have stress boxes, though, just a mild consequence slot most often.

Ultramassive ship
Major Ship
Working ship
Shuttle
Single person

### Size in Combat

The bigger a ship is, the more powerful it can be, and the harder it is to hurt. The scale ladder for ships is to the left.

When ships of different sizes face each other, the larger aethercraft gets +2 to attack and +2 to defend for each step higher on the ladder.





## Consequences

Unlike characters, ships don't use stress boxes to represent damage; they have resources stress, but that's something different (page 30).

Ships do have mild, moderate, and severe consequence slots, and the option to take extreme consequences. One thing with extreme consequences: they affect both a ship aspect and whoever shares that aspect. It might take some finagling to figure out how both parties get hit by that consequence.

The only way a ship can take an extreme consequence is if a crewmember agrees to take the hit; if nobody is willing, the aethercraft could be taken out.

Want to know more about extreme consequences? Look at *Fate Core System* on page 166.

Ships can't repair themselves; it costs money to get them into operational order again. See "*Repairs*" on page 30 for info on how to get your aethercraft into good shape again by spending your Resources.

## Advancement

Aethercraft hit milestones at the same time as characters. They also advance the same way, except that the players need to agree on what advancements the ship takes. Renaming ship aspects is a bit tricky: the crewmembers' ship aspects must be the same as the aethercraft's ship aspects, so both a player and the ship have to spend their milestone on renaming it.

## Changing Aethercraft

A crew can buy or steal a new aethercraft and abandon their old ship if they want. The crew will keep their ship aspects, but the new craft will not have them; it'll just have a high concept.

When the PCs hit a major milestone while operating this new ship, they'll become a part of it; in addition to all the other benefits, their ship will take on everybody's ship aspects without having to spend the milestone as it would normally.

## Surviving in the Sea

Keeping a ship operational is a huge and complex job, and getting from place to place is a logistical nightmare even for a dedicated captain who doesn't have to plan around where the Royal Navy patrols happen to be.

Don't worry, though, we'll run over the tough stuff.

### Resources

Aethercraft need a lot of raw materials to keep swimming. The bilge bar needs to get its enchantment topped up, the aether screw needs to be kept in coal or whatever it runs on, and the crew tends to be happier when there's enough food around. And that's not counting the hundreds of tiny repairs and tune-ups needed regularly to keep the thing from succumbing to the ravages of the aether.

In the name of keeping things simple, all of that gets collected into one thing: Resources, which is represented by a stress track that works a little different.

Resources works just like Wealth on page 69 of the *Fate System Toolkit*. If you can succeed at an action by throwing money at the problem, you can tick off a resources stress box or take an appropriate consequence to succeed.

Taking a job will get you whatever the local economy considers to be cash: gold crowns in Royal space, a half-dozen different currencies or barter scrip outside of it. This is expressed as a parcel of goods with a certain Resources value. Most often, an honest job that doesn't require you to leave a sector will get you a parcel of goods worth 1 Resources. Harder jobs, or those not quite on the up and up, can be worth a bit more.

When you get a parcel, you can use it to clear any resources stress boxes with a combined value of the parcel's value or less. For instance, you could clear the first and second stress boxes with a parcel of 3 Resources.

Money's got a way of disappearing, so you can't hold onto a parcel of Resources until you need it: use it when you get it, or not at all.

### Repairs

Resources are the only way you can fix up your ship. Removing a mild consequence costs 1 resources stress, as does knocking a moderate or severe consequence down a level. You'll have to explain how this works; erasing consequences caused by travel might be as simple as saying you squeeze a little more magic out of the engines, while fixing a hole in the hull might need to be something you just pay to get fixed.

Even if you have the resources to handle it, you can't reduce a moderate consequence to mild and then clear it immediately; it has to stick around for at least a scene before it can be fixed for good. Likewise for severe ones.

## Getting from Place to Place

The aether sea is big, but it's mostly empty. Stars and planets and whatnot bob around all over the place, but between them is nothing but aether.

The good thing about that is that navigation is easy. While you might want some fancy piloting when you're in a system or getting chased, most of the time you just gotta point yourself in the right direction and keep half an eye on the bow so you don't crash into a sun.

The bad thing is that moving through empty space burns up time and resources—a lot of it, at that.

Getting from place to place is simple: figure out how far you're going, and that'll tell you how much time and resources you'll need to spend. If you're moving from one point on a planet to another, or from a planet to its moon or another planet in the system, that's easy. It's about an hour, and doesn't use enough of your energy to be worth mentioning. Any further, just consult this list:

- Moving a short distance—from one planet to another in the same quadrant, for instance—takes a few days and 1 resources stress.
- Moving a moderate distance—like from one quadrant to another via a direct route, which generally means cutting through Royal space—takes a week and a bit and 2 resources stress.
- Moving a long distance—like from one quadrant to another by circumnavigating Royal space—takes at least three weeks and 3 resources stress.
- Moving a very long distance—like cutting from one end of the sea to the other—takes over a month and 4 resources stress.

## Where to?

A working ship needs a purpose, otherwise it's just wasting resources. The included adventure, **It's Only an Elven Moon**, will start the PCs off with a task; otherwise, the GM will need to craft a job for them.

A job has four parts: the contact, the cargo, the destination, and the complication.

- The **contact** is the person who wants stuff moved.
- The **cargo** is whatever the crew will be holding on to; it might be goods, information, or people. It might even be the contact.
- The **destination** is where the crew's got to go and who they've got to get the cargo to; the essential part of this is, of course, how far away it is.
- The **complication** is the reason dropping off the cargo won't be so easy—and usually something the crew isn't aware of. Maybe the cargo is illegal. Maybe the destination is on fire. Something to make the job interesting.

For some sample jobs, take a gander at page 44.

## IT'S ONLY AN ELVEN MOON

Folks call this area the red corridor, on account of the big red star hangin' about, which is just about the only thing of interest. It's between the Annular Necrocracy—the richest sector in the quadrant—and Finn's Prairie, a fertile farming planet and local hub for trading food. But both of those are days away, and the corridor itself is a dull stretch of unaffiliated Royal space, punctuated by a big red star and planets which, on all the Royal registers at least, are uninhabited. Even so, it's traveled well enough.

*Sector Aspect: A Long Ways from Anything Interesting*



### What Is the Crew Doing Here?

Nobody comes to the red corridor to sightsee. There's nothing to see. The PCs start this adventure on a job: they're to meet a waiting ship and deliver some cargo. Before this adventure starts, ask the players who they met and what they're loaded down with; as jumping-off points, they can consider any smuggling rings or criminal enterprises named or implied in their aspects.

The mission was supposed to be simple: find the ship, deliver the cargo, get paid, and move on. No names were given because none would be needed; the contact would be the only ship bothering to hang out in the red corridor.

## Getting Trapped in the Red Corridor

As the PCs approach the coordinates for the waiting ship, in the middle of nowhere, instead of finding a lone ship drifting near that big red star, they find a half-dozen ships of dwarven make, plenty of smaller vessels of various makes and models, a full SCU station in orbit around that sun, and—the *Royal Glory*.

### Royal Glory

**High Concept:** *Well-Used Royal Navy Warship*

**Size:** Major ship

**Skilled (+2) at:** Fighting

**Bad (-2) at:** Navigating close quarters

**Components:** Two weapons stations (cannons) and a grappling station (harpoon used to grab and tow ships and other objects).

A standard Amethyst-class ship of the Royal Navy, albeit one which has seen a few battles and slipshod repairs.

Almost as soon as they see the ship, it hails them. Its captain, Glada Aetherborn Shipwright, addresses them: “Attention, unauthorized vessel: by mandate of the Royal Hegemony, this sector is considered high-risk. We will have to escort you to a nearby station for processing.”

If the PCs play nice, Shipwright drops them off at the SCU station Gildedfrost. If they raise trouble, the *Glory* outclasses them by a wide margin and shouldn't have trouble taking them out. In that case, Shipwright tows them to the station anyway.

### GILDEFROST STATION

A massive oak tree, miles wide, whose branches and roots have been woven together into landing platforms, which are dotted with ships, mostly Royal Navy. The station is hollow, and the wood has been shaped to form hallways and thousands of irregularly shaped rooms.

Gildedfrost is huge and immobile enough that it's easier to treat as a planet, rather than even an ultramassive ship. It's got no weapons, but its sheer size means that attacking it would be fruitless.

Planetary Aspect: *A Bustling Artificial City*

When the PCs are brought in, their ship is set on a platform in the upper boughs of the tree, and they are ushered to processing. That might take place in a little cubicle or a holding cell, depending on how the PCs acted before, but either way it amounts to the same thing: they wait in a room for about an hour until a harried elf, a man named Ariallatta Glittering, arrives and asks the PCs: “What, exactly, did you think you had in your cargo hold, hmm?”

### Ariallatta Glittering, of the Department of Volatile Magic

**Folk:** Elf

**Aspects:** *“I know people who know people.”, Paperwork-fu*

**Skilled (+2) at:** Careful use of language

**Bad (-2) at:** Being in any way likeable

#### THE DEPARTMENT OF VOLATILE MAGIC

The Department of Volatile Magic (DVM) is a branch of the Royal Trade Commission (RTC), itself a subset of the Bureau of Goods and Services. The RTC is closely affiliated with—but not, its members are clear to point out, under the auspices of—the Spellcasters’ Union. The DVM isn’t even the department that deals with volatile magic; that would be the prestigious Magical Abuse Assessment Bureau, but the Bureau is only open to SCU-certified magic-users. The DVM basically just run the ship-scanners.

Glittering is a pinch-faced sourpuss in a cheap suit who works for a small department, has five bosses, and is eager to get noticed by anyone up the chain in any direction.

Glittering explains that he’s with the Department of Volatile Magic, and that the PCs were carrying a bomb hidden among their cargo: a fist-sized stone with an explosive enchantment worked deep into it, able to be triggered by an outside spell. Not the most deadly bomb in the sea, no—but volatile, unregistered, and brought into an area declared at high risk of instability. This offense carries a minimum sentence of five years in a penal colony.

But Glittering knows that someone in the sector was trying to get the bomb and that the PCs were just patsies. He offers the PCs a deal: they find out who was going to intercept the thing, meaning he’ll look good to his superiors, and he might just see that they don’t get officially cited.

Glittering can hold off a report for about two days before he needs to start crawling through bureaucratic channels. The PCs have that long to give him a name and enough evidence to suggest that the suspect arranged to have a bomb brought in.



In the meantime, the PCs are free to move about the sector. Don't worry about the bomb; it's been moved to the DVM's magic-dampening storage locker. But, Glittering is quick to point out, their ship's registry has been logged and their enchantment-signature recorded, so if they try to flee, the *Royal Glory* will find them.

## On the Trail

Once he makes the deal—and, if necessary, lets the PCs out of their cell—Glittering doesn't want to see them until they have a name. Otherwise it looks bad. If pressed, or if the PCs seem to be grasping for the next logical step, he'll point out that there's a bar on the station full of shady types, as good a place as any to poke about. Otherwise, they're on their own.

**Jack's Bar** is run by an aging troll—Jax Star—and one of the many civilian operations on the station. It's easy enough to find; the dining deck is the hub of station activity, after all. Jack's serves a number of small couriers like the PCs who have been temporarily delayed by station bureaucracy. There, Jax or anyone else can fill the PCs in on what's going on with the zone, which no one expected to be occupied.

## Political Instability

The problem is a little piece of nothing much that everybody wants a part of. The name in Royal ledgers is Unoccupied Planetoid G-13, but its occupants call it "the moon with the verdant eyes"—Verdanteye if they're in a rush. It seems a colony ship of elves touched down here, without informing the Hegemony, and have been habiforming it for the past few generations. Verdanteye is a sizable moon that circles a gas giant, and from the aether looks a bit like a big green eye: it's almost all bare white stone, save for a green circle where the elves have grown a forest.

Planetary Aspect: *Undergoing Long-Term Habiforming*

### Three big entities are eyeing the area:

**The Deeprunners Mining Concern:** An independent business that operates in Royal space, the Deeprunners are one of the biggest names in the sea for mining moons and asteroids. It's almost fully dwarf-run and the sea's largest employer of Stoneborn dwarves who fled Homeworld. There's gold in this here moon, and they've got a contract with the Hegemony to mine it out—they just didn't expect to find occupants there.

At Jack's, there'll be a table of sullen dwarves at all hours, sick of waiting for the okay to descend upon G-13.

**The Colonists:** A group of a hundred or so elves, whose ancestors stumbled across this rock a century back. Elves being a long-lived sort, some of those ancestors are still around, if a bit wizened. If you ask any one of those old folks why they settled on this moon, they'll answer the same thing: "The god who dwells within the planet called to us, and we answered." So, it's hard to argue with that. These are the sort of elves who really do believe in the sanctity of the planet, and even the ones who're not sure it's a literal god think it's a pretty special place. They don't even cut down trees if they can help it.

As a rule, Verdanteye folk don't drink, so you won't find them at Jack's, but there are a few on the station, including a peaceful protest group sitting silently in the center of the dining deck.

**The Royal Hegemony:** Officially, Gildedfrost Station and the *Royal Glory* are here to monitor the situation. Just to observe and keep the peace. But hey, habit-forming planets is a long and arduous process. Here's a livable planet in Royal space, so it seems a shame to let it be destroyed by the miners. Instead, the Hegemony can wait out the Deeprunners. If waiting to mine becomes unprofitable, they'll leave; if they attack a populated planet, they'll break their contract. Either way, the Deeprunners'll shove themselves out of the picture, and the Hegemony can evict the elves and move in a duke to get the planet in order.

If asked, Jax is more than happy to explain, at some length, why the station is out there.

### Jax Star, proprietor, Jack's Bar

**Folk:** Troll

**Aspect:** *A Consummate Barkeep*

**Skilled (+2) at:** Fixing drinks

**Bad (-2) at:** Moving quickly



## Getting Info from the Contact

The loudest voice at the bar at any hour is an orc named Grun's Third Arkus Darkblade. If the PCs ask around about who might be involved in the local arms trade, the orc's who'll get pointed out to them.

### Grun's Third Arkus Darkblade, member of the Royal Navy

**Folk:** Orc

**High Concept:** *"I'm the guy who can get it for you, whatever it is."*

**Trouble:** *Talks the Talk, but Panics in a Fight*

**Background:** *Spent Some Years Riding with the Klebnaki Pirates*

**Aspect:** *"I know who's corrupt and how much they want."*

**Aspect:** *Classical Theater Training*

Arkus is small for an orc, and he's got no tusks. They were snapped off in a ferocious brawl, he'll assure everyone—he actually fell out of his bunk and landed on his face. He's a low-level aetherman on the *Royal Glory*, always dressed in a poorly maintained uniform. Right now, he's out on leave and loving it.

**Where to find him:** At Jack's Bar, drinking or gambling. Eventually he'll stumble his way back to his ship, but not until Jax forces him out.

**What he knows:** He knows how to get anything of any legality, if you have the time and coin. Most pertinently, he knows who wanted the bomb delivered to Gildedfrost—he's the one who brokered that deal—although he doesn't know why. "Why" is not a question that concerns him.

He won't just give away that information, though, but he'll claim to feel right bad that the PCs got arrested for it. He don't feel that bad, though.

**How to find out:** Arkus will happily let the PCs purchase the information with something of value; he'll suggest that station manager Nosmo Mateji's logbook is a tempting target. If the PCs have another high-value target in mind, he'll readily accept.

Or they can just beat the information out of him. If the PCs threaten Arkus out of sight of a crowd, he'll fight briefly but panic before long. If the PCs can't get him alone, they'll have to contend with one or more **Royal Navy Aethermen** (page 38) as well.

However they work it, the PCs get the truth out of Arkus: one of the elf colonists, Lararion—she ordered the bomb.

The PCs might be tempted to take this info straight to Glittering, but he's not stupid: they'll need some proof. He appreciates that the nature-lovers on Verdanteye are less likely to have the appropriate paperwork, but what are you gonna do?

### Royal Navy Aetherman

**Folk:** Various species, usually orc, dwarf, or human

**Aspect:** *The Strong Arm of the Royal Navy*

**Skilled (+2) at:** Working together, brawling

**Bad (-2) at:** Self-directed activity

**Stress:**

### Tracking Down the Colonist

The elf protestors know Lararion: she's the chief habiforming engineer on the planet. They also know she was on the station a few days back, but she's gone back to the surface of the moon. The PCs will have to fly down there.



### Lararion of Verdanteye

**Folk:** Elf

**High Concept:** *Habiforming Engineer*

**Trouble:** *“Don’t want no trouble on my planet.”*

**Background:** *Born and Raised on a Developing World*

**Other Aspects:** *Passionate About Her Beliefs, Rich Elvish Traditions*

**Dabbles in:** Alteration

**Focuses on:** habiforming in Alteration

Lararion is in her sixties, which is late-middle age for an elf. She grew up on Verdanteye, and like the rest of her people she has no desire to leave. Like the other colonists, she wears simple clothes of natural fibers and is in incredible shape; Verdanteye is one of those colonies where folks still climb from the forest floor to their treetop homes multiple times a day.

**Tracking her down:** Getting to the planet is easy enough—maybe, see “*Other Troubles*” on page 43—but the PCs are strangers there, treated with suspicion. Some colonists have never seen a non-elf before. If any of the PCs are orcs, goblins, or trolls, they might well see younger elves fleeing in terror. The colony is small, and Lararion will be among those gathering when the PCs’ ship approaches the landing platform. She’s not dumb; she knows who they’re looking for.

Verdanteye colonists are proud folk; if the PCs are respectful, Lararion will make herself known. If the PCs try to intimidate her, Lararion will flee down and into the forest, forcing the PCs to engage in a contest to catch up to her.

If the PCs fail to catch Lararion, they’ll return to find their ship rooted down with magical vines. If they try to contact Lararion, she’ll only talk to them on her own terms.

**Her plan:** Arkus was to pull the bomb from the PCs’ cargo, then see that it made its way to the Deeprunner flagship. It wasn’t meant to kill anyone, just destroy their equipment and get them to move on.

She has no idea that the Hegemony plans to evict her the moment the Deeprunners leave. No idea.

**Securing a confession:** Here’s the deal. If that bomb gets onto the Deeprunner’s ship, Lararion will turn herself in. She’s got no interest in seeing mostly innocent people go to jail.

If she trusts the PCs, they can convince her that the Hegemony will just roll in and evict everyone anyway. She’ll want proof. The station manager’s logbook would do nicely, as it contains a record of all communication with the Department of Immigration and Colonization. If the PCs get the book to her, she’ll give herself up without any explosions—the planet’s a loss, anyway. But that’s only if she trusts the PCs; in other words, if the ship ain’t buried under a half-ton of enchanted greenery.

### Getting the Bomb Back

...so it turns out that the Department of Volatile Magic has evidence storage, but the department is so low down on the list of things folks care about, the storage ain’t even guarded. A map of the station will tell the PCs that they can access the evidence through Glittering’s office. Hardest part will be distracting the elf for ten solid minutes so they can pick the lock.

### Putting the Bomb on the Flagship

This will be considerably harder than getting the bomb. Captain Arrowsmith of the Deeprunners Mining Concern won’t just let the PCs onto her ship unless she trusts that they have her interests at heart, though she is perfectly content to communicate over a distance.

## Captain Aldis Stoneborn Arrowsmith, of the Deeprunners

**Folk:** Dwarf

**High Concept:** *“The best damn moon-miner in the whole damn fleet.”*

**Trouble:** *Always, Always Angry*

**Background:** *“I still remember fleeing Homeworld.”*

**Ship Aspect:** *When In Doubt, Smash It*

**Aspect:** *Faster Than You’d Think*

Aldis spent her first twenty years on Homeworld, under the Stone King, following prophecy. She won’t talk about why she left, not even to other exiles. Fact is, she was ordered to shoot down a ship that had drifted too close to the planet, and she did. Six died in the crash, and then she decided *never again*. Like many Homeworld dwarves, she’s especially short, with pale grey skin you only see among the Stoneborn.

## Deeprunner Flagship Mining Vessel #22

**High Concept:** *Impenetrable Fortress in the Sea*

**Ship Aspect:** *When In Doubt, Smash It*

**Size:** Working ship

**Components:** Landing struts and stone armor (all stress dealt to this ship is reduced by one).

Like many Deeprunner vessels, #22 is made out of hewn stone. It resembles a cross between a ship and an ancient castle. And like a castle, it’s meant to discourage attacks; the cargo bays might be full of gold or other precious minerals, after all, so appearing untouchable is advantageous.

**Getting into the Captain’s good graces and onto the ship:** Like any cadre of bored people at a bar, the miners at Jack’s will talk about their troubles if you buy them a drink. It seems Captain Arrowsmith is in a bad mood; Deeprunner Mining Vessel #325 got damaged in an altercation with a Klehnaki pirate and needs a critical engine part: a rune of stasis. To make matters worse, a half-dozen of Deeprunner dwarves got locked up in the Gildedfrost holding cells for public drunkenness. Embarrassing. If the PCs can track down a replacement rune—Arkus might know where to find one—or charm the station guards into releasing the miners, the mood on the flagship would certainly be improved.



And of course, there's the perennial problem of the colonists. Clever players might be able to convince the miners that they've got a plan to scoot the elves without earning the Hegemony's ire.

If the PCs can solve a problem to the satisfaction of the miners, they'll put in a good word with Arrowsmith, and the PCs will get a polite invitation to dine at the captain's table.

Or they can try to just force a dock with the flagship. That's quite a challenge, there. They'll need to get close to the flagship, keep the ship on the right heading, deceive the Gildedfrost representative who hails them to ask what they're doing, and so on.

**Dropping the bomb:** Inside, the ship is almost wholly cargo area, and the rest is filled with dozens of miners in close quarters. Sneaking around is difficult, but if the PCs get access to the cargo bay, currently full of boxes of mining equipment, there's plenty of room to run, hide, and cause trouble.

### Deeprunner Miner

**Folk:** Dwarf

**Aspects:** *Patient and Powerful, "I know my equipment."*

**Skilled (+2) at:** Mining, moving through the dark

**Bad (-2) at:** Moving quickly

**Stress:**

Otherwise, the PCs can just drop their little bomb anywhere out of sight. That's going to injure or kill some Deeprunners, though, which there will surely be repercussions for, but it will satisfy Lararion.

## Snatching the Station Manager's Logbook

Maybe the PCs are grabbing it for Arkus, or maybe for Lararion to convince her that her colony is doomed. Or maybe they got their own reasons. There's lots of reasons to want a logbook, and Nosmo Mateji is the goblin who has it.

### Nosmo Mateji, Gildedfrost Chief of Operations

**Folk:** Goblin

**Aspects:** *Detail-Oriented, "I've got a plan for this!"*

**Skilled (+2) at:** Fleeing from danger, knowing where he is

**Bad (-2) at:** Shows of bravery

**Stress:**

**Focuses on:** ice in Evocation

Nosmo is a born manager. He takes copious notes of just about everything, and he's never seen without his ledger. He's a member of the SCU, but his skill with magic is minimal. He earned his position from being just plain good at coordinating the dozens of departments who have a say in Gildedfrost's operation.

While Mateji spends much of his time in his office, he likes to wander from time to time through the open areas of the station, especially the dining deck. He's easy to follow, and his office is in a public area, near the offices of internal security, down toward the roots of the station. Breaking into his office means picking some locks and keeping witnesses at bay. Especially careful PCs will notice that the door has a ward on it, which will inform Mateji whenever the door opens.

Less observant PCs will see the goblin turn up while they're rooting through his desk.

Whatever happens, there's a logbook in his desk, complete with clear notes on how the Hegemony plans to take Verdanteye, and whatever other information Arkus might find interesting.

### Getting the Confession

If the PCs get Lararion to read the logbook, she'll ride with them to the station. If they tell her that the bomb's been planted, she'll set it off and then ride with them; the explosion will be immediately obvious if the Flagship is missing a bulkhead.

Either way, she'll let herself be led to Glittering's office to offer a full confession. In response, Glittering will tell the PCs that, in all the drama, he's completely forgotten their ship's registry number; they're free to take off.

## Other Troubles in the Red Corridor

If the players are starting off on a larger campaign, or if you're just interested in throwing them a few more problems, here's some more issues to consider:

**Klehnaki Pirates:** Like a pack of vultures, a group of Klehnaki pirate ships have descended around Verdanteye; ships taking off or landing will have to tread carefully. As it happens, though, the Aether Safety Council has put out a bounty on the pirate vessel, a handsome reward for anyone who can take it out. This is a good option for folks who are itching for an aether-battle.

### Klehnaki Vessels

**Aspect:** *Repurposed Junker*

**Size:** Working ship

**Skilled (+2) at:** Taking hits

**Bad (-2) at:** Anything delicate

**Components:** Weapons stations and a moderate consequence slot.

There's no one description of what a Klehnaki raider's ship looks like. There are dozens of styles, many stolen but most cobbled together from scrap. They all look like they're falling apart, and they're all armed.

**Necrocratic Citizens:** Gildedfrost Station was pulled from the Annular Necrocracy, a sector of space ruled by a cadre of immortal lich-kings. Theirs is a necromancy-focused economy and, honestly, it works really well... Unfortunately, the station's been out of place long enough that some of the undead in storage have managed to escape. This is a good option for folks eager to engage in personal combat against objectively evil creatures.

### Erratic Specter

**Aspects:** *Tortured Undead Soul, Chilling Visage*

**Skilled (+2) at:** Surprise attacks, facilitating long-distance communication

**Bad (-2) at:** Interacting with physical objects

**Stress:**

An undead soul intended to be used in a communications array in the Necrocracy.

## Where to Next?

There's a few folks in and around Gildedfrost who might have work for the PCs:

**Contact:** Grun's Third Arkus Darkblade

- **Cargo:** A box full of plants and other alchemical material grown down on Verdanteye.
- **Destination:** Julian's Bluff, a human world a moderate distance away. The customer is the Royal Alchemical Society.
- **Complication:** Julian's Bluff is currently in the midst of a civil war, and the Royal Alchemical Society is in the midst of a battlefield.

**Contact:** Countess Vanessa of House Makepeace, a Royal of low bearing.

- **Cargo:** Several bound specters, part of some necromantic communications equipment.
- **Destination:** The Annular Necrocracy, a short distance away, to be delivered directly to Lord Makepeace's estate.
- **Complication:** The binding on the specters is weak. They'll unbind and start haunting the ship in transit.

**Contact:** Jax Star

- **Cargo:** Himself, as a passenger.
- **Destination:** Thurûn's library, a moderate distance away. Jax has a story to share with the grand loremaster himself.
- **Complication:** Among the stories in Jax's head is something the Shadow Fleet wants kept quiet, and the crew finds themselves pursued by a goblin bounty hunter.