



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

QUICKSTART PRIMER





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IMAGINE BAKSHI'S CLASSIC ANIMATED FILM *WIZARDS* HAD A HEAD-ON COLLISION WITH DISNEY'S *TREASURE PLANET* AND THE RESULTING FIRE WAS PUT OUT WITH A WHOLE LOT OF STUDIO GHIBLI'S *CASTLE IN THE SKY*. THAT, IN AN ANIMATED MASH-UP, IS *UPWIND*.

THE BASICS

THE SETTING

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

THE CHARACTERS

Upwind campaigns feature the Knights of the Explorers' Guild — storied, skyfaring explorers, scholars, engineers, elementalists and soldiers who search the Twilight Frontier for lost Masters' caches. The player characters are Explorer Knights, individuals with exceptional skills and elemental powers. Duty-bound to the Guild, they lead missions across dangerous skies and expeditions into the uncharted Dark. Upwind has a strong maritime theme with Wind-powered skyships serving as the

backbones of trade and defense, while exploration, mystery, intrigue and war form the backdrop of the narrative. The Age of the Grand Amplifier is said to be drawing to a close, the Children of the Dark threaten from below, and the Kin misunderstand the truth about both.

THE MECHANICS

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

WHAT YOU NEED TO PLAY:

- + 3 to 6 enthusiastic friends, one of whom is willing to learn these rules and run the game.



- + A deck of standard playing cards for each of participants.
- + Printouts of the pregenerated characters, a different one for each player.
- + This document — particularly the adventure outline at the end — for the moderator's reference.
- + 2–4 hours to play.

THE Q SYSTEM

Upwind uses an original game system called Q. Like most game mechanics it provides a framework of objectivity and chance that helps guide and drive the game's story. Unlike most systems however, Q does not shape the story by resolving individual character actions one at a time — instead it drives the story by determining singular outcomes for entire encounters. Q resolves whole encounters through a sort of quantum mechanic, determining which of a pair of potential outcomes for a given situation will be used to continue the adventure narrative. These potential outcomes are determined by cooperative negotiation between the game moderator and the players and proposed as stakes for which the participants bid using hands of playing cards.

Example

The EGS Vigilant has been hit by cannon fire from a Child frigate and its induction hull has been badly damaged. The ship is losing altitude fast and is about to crash into a downwind highland. Rowan, a young Knight, grabs the helm and shouts through the speaking tube for the engineer to give him full power.

The moderator calls for a play and asks the player to suggest the stakes for which he would like to bid. The player says he wants Rowan to save the ship and crew and in doing so win the lasting admiration of his Liegemen and earn a new Blaze of Rank from his superiors. The moderator agrees to those stakes and says that should he lose, the ship will crash and a full third of the crewmen will die. He also says that his superiors will still award him the new Blaze for his heroic actions, but that Rowan will feel so guilty about the loss of life that he is unable to take any risks with his crew in the future.

DECKS AND HANDS

Unlike most RPGs which use dice as their randomizers, Q uses playing cards. Most games that use cards use them as a source of random numbers that are then played against opposed draws or target values. Q however, uses the value of the cards as a source of points that are spent in blind bids for the proposed outcomes.

Each participant needs her own full deck of standard playing cards. She must remove one joker and set it aside unused. She must then separate out the suit that represents her character's elemental Potential (see Characters), shuffle those cards and set them aside as her Potential deck. She then shuffles the other three suits — including the remaining joker — into a stack called the play deck. She should then draw 6 cards from the play deck to form her play hand and 4 cards from her Potential deck to form her Potential hand.

The game moderator must also prep his deck but does not separate

suits. He simply shuffles all his cards together and draws a play hand of 8 cards. Though the moderator has a slightly larger play hand note that the odds are ultimately still in the players' favor as they have 10 cards with their play and Potential hands combined, as well as access to teamwork cards (see Teamwork) from other characters. The moderator keeps one joker in his play deck if there are three or fewer players in the game and two jokers in his deck if there are 4 or more players.

Cards are spent from the participants hands into their respective discard piles. Play hand cards are replenished from play decks after every play. Potential hands replenish from Potential decks but at the rate of one card per bell of in game time - or a whole hand every clock. When a participant takes the last card from either his play or potential draw deck, the discard pile for that deck and whatever cards remain in



that hand are immediately combined, reshuffled and a new hand drawn.

As a general rule, players should not share the content of their decks with other players, and to maintain some of the tactical elements of the core mechanic they should also keep their cards secret from the moderator.

PREPPING DECKS

- ✦ Moderators play with a single deck containing all four suits.

- ✦ Moderators play with one joker in their decks if there are three or fewer players and they play with two jokers in their decks if their are four or more players.
- ✦ Players separate their Potential suits from the rest of their cards and play with two separate decks — their Play Decks, containing three suits, and their Potential Decks, containing the one suit assigned to their Potential attributes.
- ✦ Players keep one joker in their Play Decks and discard the second joker from play.

CHARACTERS

Characters have three sets of attributes — abilities, skills and Potential. For a new character, each set contains three descriptive elements, each of which is assigned a relative value. Abilities represent natural, innate character prowess and aptitudes. Skills represent areas of knowledge and physical proficiency in which the character has specific education, training and practice. Potential represents the variety of unique elemental magic wielded by the Kin and most powerfully by the Explorer Knights.

Unlike other games where all characters are defined by the same set of attributes, the attributes in Upwind are narrative and unique to each character. These descriptive attributes provide more specific information about who character are, and makes them more versatile and effective in play. Having a skill defined by just the word “Swordsman” makes it clear that a character can defend himself with a blade and is a good fighter. However, “Finest Swordsman in All the Guild” not only indicates great ability, but it also implies a level of fame and reputation that would allow the character to use the skill in non-combat encounters as well — in circumstances involving

intimidation, cooperation and persuasion or possibly even negotiation, diplomacy or seduction depending on the specific type of interaction.

Creative invention and interpretation of attributes is one of the most entertaining aspects of playing Upwind and part of the job of the players is to stretch their applicability as far as they can. Applying attributes in diverse, clever or even sneaky ways is an intentional part of the mechanics and is intended to promote gamesmanship in the interactions between the participants.

ATTRIBUTES AND SUITS

Each of a character’s attributes are associated with a specific suit of cards. Their Potential abilities will all share a single suit, based on their character’s elemental affinity — diamonds represent Ore, clubs represent Arc, hearts represent Rain and spades represent Wind.

Whenever a play is called, the participants negotiate the stakes and then make bids. The number of cards each of the participants has can bid in a play ranges from one to three, limited by the level (1, 2 or 3) of the character attribute he is using to resolve the encounter.



CALLING PLAYS

The core mechanic of the Q-System is the play. Plays are usually called by the game moderator, but players are encouraged to request plays too. Since plays are used to resolve whole encounters they are made less frequently than the die rolls of incremental game systems. Though plays can be made anytime, controlling the timing and set-up significantly enhances the drama of plays and the quality of the storytelling. Plays should usually only be called when the possible outcomes are significant, the results of success or failure could be dramatic, or would have meaningful impact on the story. A good rule of thumb is if the potential outcomes are interesting, dramatic or significant, a play is worthwhile.

SETTING UP A PLAY

Because the scope of a play is so broad, and because they resolve stakes in play, it's important to use them when they are dramatically appropriate for the narrative. Moderators should let the players roleplay part way through and encounter — an interaction with pirate captain, infiltration of an enemy stronghold or even a fight with a creature of the Dark and then ask for the play.

Moderators should refrain from asking players to use a specific attribute during the resolution of encounters — the equivalent of asking for a stealth roll, a bluff check or an attack test. Encounters should be presented in ways that the players can decide how they want their characters to handle them based on the cards in their hands and how well they can justify particular interpretations of the attributes they want to use.

Players must choose only one attribute with which to resolve an encounter. It does not have

to apply to all the elements of the situation or the proposed outcomes of the play, but it should fit in a meaningful way. Even when more than one attribute can be used in the given circumstances the mechanics only allow for one at a time so players should choose what fits best narratively or for which they have the best cards. The moderator has final determination about the suitability of any attribute for a given play.

BIDDING

Q's core mechanic is based on the moderator and players using hands of playing cards to make blind bids for proposed outcomes. Whenever a play is called, the participants negotiate the stakes and then make bids. The number of cards each of the participants can bid in a play ranges from one to three, limited by the level (1, 2 or 3) of the character attribute he is using to resolve the encounter.

Bid size can also be limited by the number of cards of a given suit that a player has available. Because each skill and attribute is assigned a specific suit, the cards used during the play must match the suit linked to the attribute being used. If the player does not have as many cards of a given suit as he does ranks in the linked attribute, he can only play as many cards as he has.

Example

Miram is trying to subdue a guard without alerting the rest of the enemy crew. She has "Like a Blade in the Dark" at 3 and it is linked to spades. Unfortunately, her play hand has only 2 spades — a 6 and a queen. Unless she can play a cache or convince the moderator how wisdom, compassion or nurturing reason could help her silence a guard so she can use a crowning card, her best score will be a 16 if she uses that attribute.



CHALLENGE LEVEL

The number of cards the game moderator bids is based on the difficulty level he assigns to the encounter — easy (1), medium (2), hard (3). As with player bids, all cards bid by the moderator in a given play must be of a single suit. This is an essential balancing mechanic that compliments the players' suit limits.

When making a bid, the participants consider the contents of their hands — looking at the values they have in each suit and how effective these will let them be in using specific character attributes. Once the participants have selected their cards they play them simultaneously, face up. The hand with the highest point total wins, determining which of the two proposed outcomes is incorporated into the story.

The point values of each number card equal the number on that card. Face cards — jacks, queens and kings — and aces all have values of 10 points in any play. These remain exceptionally powerful cards however, in that face cards and aces can be used to crown plays — see below. Jokers have no point value but automatically win plays in which they are bid.

Example

Domnall is trying to force open a locked hatch on a burning ship to free those trapped inside. He has the attribute “Strong as an Ox” at level 2 and it’s linked to diamonds. The player has the 4, 7 and 10 of diamonds in his play hand and the moderator states that the difficulty level is “easy” so he will only play one card.

Knowing the moderator can only play the one card the player knows he cannot be beaten unless the moderator includes a crowning or cache card or plays a joker. The player takes a chance that the moderator will not spend higher cards on this minor encounter and saves the 10, and his own cache cards, for later. He bids the 4 and the 7 for a total of 11.

The moderator’s highest single card is a jack, but since he cannot justify crowning the jack in this encounter he decides to save it for a subsequent play. Instead he plays an 8 of clubs and opts to use one of his plot cache cards which turns out to be a 2 for a total of 10. The player wins.

CROWNING

Face cards and aces are each worth 10 points when played in a bid. Additionally, they are uniquely powerful cards under the right circumstances and can be used to “crown” plays. When a face card or ace included in a play is used to crown that play, the crowning participant draws a single random card from his draw deck and adds its value to his bid. The randomly drawn “crowning” card is considered “suitless” and simply provides additional points for the bid.

Face cards may be used to crown plays only under card specific narrative circumstances as determined by the actions and intent of the characters.

- + Jacks may only be used to crown plays involving trickery, deception, subterfuge, thievery or similar underhanded and nefarious intentions.
- + Queens may only be used to crown plays involving wisdom, healing, charisma, compassion, love or similar wise or nurturing circumstances.

- + Kings may crown plays involving combat, strategy, leadership, diplomacy, nobility, negotiation, or similar contexts involving forceful authority.

Aces may be used to crown any play at any time for any reason — making them singularly powerful cards.

To qualify for crowning a face card must be of the suit linked to the attribute the character is using and bid as part of the original play. Cards added to a play from caches or for teamwork may not be crowned.

Plays may be crowned only once, regardless of how many applicable face cards may be part of the play. Players are encouraged to stretch the interpretation and applicability of crowning but the game moderator has final discretion over whether a potential crowning card applies to a given play.



JOKERS

Jokers are powerful cards in Q, representing consummate skill, ability or uniquely potent luck. When a joker is bid or played as a crowning or cache card whoever bid the card automatically wins the play, regardless of any other cards played. Jokers are considered “suitless” and may be played for any attribute, including Potential powers. Individual jokers “die” after use — the participant who played his joker must remove it from his deck for the remainder of the session.

If a joker is pulled to crown, serve as a cache card, or as a tie breaker during a play it has the same effect as if it were played in the original bid — that hand wins automatically, and then the joker dies.

After a joker is played as part of a bid, all participants in the game must immediately discard their current play hands, shuffle their play discards into their play decks and redraw. The intention of this rule is to provide players the occasional chance to flush bad hands and to provide suspenseful limits on hoarding good cards.

TIES

If a tie bid occurs during a play the participants must escalate the stakes by negotiating additional elements into the two potential outcomes. Then, after agreeing to the new stakes, each participant may add one additional card of the appropriate suit from her hand to her bid and the new high score wins. If only one of the participants can play a card from the appropriate suit she automatically wins the stakes. If none of the participants can play a card, they all draw random “suitless” cards from their play decks as if crowning, add them to their bids, and the highest score wins. If by chance there are subsequent ties then the process should be repeated, with the stakes rising further and additional tie breaking cards being added or drawn until a winner is determined.

Example

The player wants Lajos to successfully impersonate a Loftian noble and replace the real navigational chart with a counterfeit version, without the switch being discovered until the smugglers have delivered their cargo to the crew waiting to spring an ambush. The moderator says if the player loses the smugglers will see the subterfuge and disappear with the cargo.

The player and moderator make bids and tie at 22 points apiece. The player adds the capture of the smuggler chieftain to his stakes and the moderator adds that the smugglers will also take the Loftian noble's daughter hostage.

They each simultaneously add one additional card from their hands to their bids. The player added a 4 for a total of 26 and the moderator added a 9 for a total of 31. Not only do the Knights now have to find the smugglers all over again, they have to rescue the Loftian girl as well.

POTENTIAL PLAYS

The Potential deck represents the source of a character's elemental power and is restricted to the suit that symbolizes the single cardinal element with which the character has affinity.

Cards are spent from the Potential hand whenever a character uses magic. If a character uses Potential as part of the narrative — in a story circumstance that does not merit a play — the player must power that use by randomly discarding a single card from his Poten-

tial hand. Though playing such a card represents the successful use of Potential, the numerical value of the card determines the narrative potency and relative effectiveness of the character's magic. Using potential is difficult and even experienced users do not always have precise control over the level of power and ultimate effects of their magic.

When a player uses his Potential as part of a play, he must power the play exclusively with cards from his Potential deck. Playing a joker is the only exception to this rule (see Jokers).

TEAMWORK

If one or more characters can meaningfully combine their attributes in the resolution of an encounter they can choose to use teamwork — representing the practiced coordination of abilities, skills and Potential. When using teamwork one character must act as the primary and any helpers as secondaries, and all participants must justify to the satisfaction of the moderator how one of their characters' attributes are contributing to the collective effort. This kind of cooperation is second nature to Knights — how they have lived and trained for

most of their lives — and simply requires a little creative description to be successful.

Secondary, helping characters may each provide one card for a given play, but that card may only be a 2 or a 3, and of the suit assigned to the ability, skill or Potential each is using to help. The values of any cards played as teamwork are added to the total score for the primary player's bid, just like crowing or cache cards. Secondary helpers may not crown or contribute cache cards to teamwork plays.

RESHUFFLING

When a participant reaches the end of her lay or Potential deck, she must reshuffle and redraw the given hand. The reshuffle occurs when the last card

is drawn and any cards still in her hand are immediately shuffled into the discard deck and an entirely new hand is drawn.

DISCARDING AND REDRAWING

There are times during play when players must discard cards to reduce their hand size — most commonly to simulate wounds or when playing in a flashback scene when their characters were not as well-trained or powerful.

When players must discard one or more cards for injury they should randomly select the designated number of discards from their hands and place them in their respective discard piles. As

characters heal they should draw cards from their respective decks and add them to their hands.

When players enter a flashback they should randomly draw down cards from their hand to the specified limits and set them aside. When play returns to the present the players should return their original cards to their hands. Any cards used in plays during flashbacks are replaced normally from their respective draw decks.

CACHES

Caches — as in a stashed supply — are bonus cards that can be added to bids to increase the scores for given plays and are mechanically similar to crowning. Caches represent advantage, motivation, inspiration and knowledge provided by character experience, valuable equipment, special training, powerful allies or other unique narrative circumstances.

Cache cards must be committed to a given play before the bids are revealed. Only a single cache may be added to a given play, even if the

acting player has several caches that apply to the situation. Plays in which cache cards are used may also be crowned as normal, but cache cards themselves are never crowned.

Example

Every Explorer Knight has a 1 card Knight's cache for the achievement, pride and authority of being a Knight, and this cache can be used in any circumstance.

Evengi is at the helm during a Potential storm. He has the skill "Born to Fly" at 3 and the player has the 5, 9 and 10 of the ap-

appropriate suit in his hand. Desperate to see the ship and crew safely through the raging weather, Evengi puts everything he's got into the effort and the player puts everything into the play — including his Knight's cache. He draws the cache card from his play deck and gets a 7, bumping his play score from a 24 to a 31.

Cache cards can be used on any play, whether it be abilities, skills, or Potential. Regardless of the ability used, cache cards are always drawn from the play deck, never from the Potential deck. Like crowning cards, cache cards are considered “suitless” when used.

There are two general types of caches — innate and story. Innate caches are most often associated with special objects or powerful people. They are usually permanent and perpetually available to those using the given item or playing the specific character. Innate caches are replenished at the start of every session.

Story caches are temporary and are usually associated with unique circumstances, limited effects, or one-off events. They may be available to individuals or to a group of characters as a shared pool. When cards are used from a story cache, they do not refresh.

Every cache has a trigger — the circumstances around a play that allow a player to use a card from a given cache. Triggers are specific circumstances, activities or events that should be clearly defined by the moderator when a given cache is assigned to an object or awarded to a party.

Example

- + *Appropriate in-game use of the particular item such as a relic or experimental device with which the cache is associated.*
- + *Fighting a specific type of foe or individual — like pirates, sky dragons, Children of the Dark or a personal nemesis — to which the cache was assigned.*
- + *Direct actions taken in service to a specific person, group or cause for which the cache was originally granted.*

- + *Specific environmental conditions unique to the cache such as traveling in the Dark, being lost in the sky or avoiding hunting predators.*
- + *Actions taken in pursuit of a specified the goal, target or mission related to the cache.*

CHARACTER CACHES

Player characters start play with four innate caches — Knight's, lineage, culture and talent. These caches allow additional characterization and contribute to the prowess for which members of the Guild are famous.

KNIGHT'S CACHE

The unique power of the Knight's cache is that it does not require a specific triggering circumstance and so may be used in any play. If for any reason a Knight character is separated from his Knight's Blade, not only physically, but more importantly psychologically, he loses his Knight's cache and may not replenish it until his blade is recovered or replaced.

LINEAGE CACHE

This cache models a character's natural facility with specific types of Potential based on her lineage. This cache may only be used in plays using Potential attributes.

CULTURE CACHE

Culture caches are innate caches available to player characters of specific national backgrounds. The nature of and triggers for these caches differ based on the Kin's nation of origin.

TALENT CACHE

Every player can create a talent cache during character generation. These caches are intended to emphasize standout aspects of character backgrounds, personalities or specialties.



OPTIONAL CACHES

Moderators and players are encouraged to work together to create additional, optional caches as part of ongoing play as fits their stories, interests and play styles. The following examples describe most options:

EQUIPMENT CACHES

Equipment caches are innate caches assigned to equipment and are triggered when characters use those items in a play. Such caches are most commonly assigned to Relics or other similarly unique arcanoelectrical devices and so usually only available to characters who use these artifacts.

Example

Izak has a bundle of uniquely fine tools for use in delicate arcanoelectrical repairs. The tools give him a 1 card innate cache that can be used whenever the play involves fixing, modifying or building complex machines or devices.

NARRATIVE CACHES

Narrative caches are assigned by the moderator when events in the current adventure provide valuable advantage or information to the characters. Moderators can award narrative caches at any time, but they are typically built into the outcomes associated with plays — as part of the players' or moderator's stakes. Narrative caches are usually story style caches but could be innate under the right circumstances.

Example

The characters have been assigned a mission to deliver a diplomat to the mysterious and isolationist Cloud Principality and to provide whatever assistance she requires during her negotiations. In an effort to prepare for the trip Lujza spends time in the Scholar's Library reading up on Cloud. For her effort the moderator awards her a 1 card cache that her player can use when a future play involves an aspect of Cloud culture.

ASSIGNING CACHES

Innate caches should not exceed 3 cards, with 1 or 2 being the most common sizes. Story caches generally do not replenish so may be as large as 5 cards for exceptional circumstances or longer campaigns with 1 to 3 cards being most common.

Moderators should assign caches whenever doing so will enhance the narrative, but they should remember that every cache awarded will increase the chance players will win a given play. If the players get too many caches the story will lose its sense of challenge, so moderators should balance cache number and size against metagame values such as the number of players, the frequency of plays, how difficult they want the adventure to appear and how often they want the players to win.

Example

- ✦ *An experimental firearm undergoing field trials grants an inherent cache of 2 cards triggered when the weapon is used. The cache replenishes only when a bell is spent carefully dismantling, cleaning, reassembling and then calibrating the gun.*
- ✦ *A lucky charm handed down from a doting grandmother grants an inherent 1 card cache to any circumstance where absolute chance plays a role. The cache replenishes only when the character writes a letter home to his nana and then sleeps with the charm under his pillow.*
- ✦ *An old and dear instructor from their Academy days is murdered when a thief steals a rare book from his personal library. The party's collective anger grants them a shared, narrative cache of 4 cards that can be used in any way directly related to the pursuit of the criminal. The cache expires when the cards run out or when the murderer is brought to justice.*

MODERATOR CACHES

Like players, moderators have a selection of caches they can add to their plays. Unlike player caches, moderator caches are assigned to various aspects of game play and triggered not by specific circumstances but by the rules of good storytelling. This means that if the moderator believes the drama, tension or excitement should be higher during a play, or if by winning the stakes the story would go in a more interesting direction, he is encouraged to trigger the associated cache. Moderator caches replenish at the start of every game session.



SETTING CACHE

Setting caches allow the moderator to emphasize particular aspects of the unique setting of Upwind — the strange geography, natural hazards, inherent dangers and the abundant mysteries. Moderators usually play cards from setting caches whenever the nature of the environment itself is important to the play being made.

OPPOSITION CACHE

Opposition caches are assigned to the various opponents the characters encounter during play — pirates, creatures or Children of the Dark. These caches are usually tapped whenever the unique behavior, tactics or objectives of the opposition are central to the play.

PLOT CACHE

Plot caches are assigned to the narrative itself and are used when the moderator thinks added drama, excitement or challenge would make the story better. Like the player's Knight's cache, moderators can use Plot caches whenever they choose.

The size of each moderator's cache depends on the number of players in the given session.

1–3 players = 1 card per cache

4–6 players = 2 cards per cache

7+ players = 3 cards per cache

If asked, moderators must tell players how many cards remain in their caches, and like players, moderators may only use a single cache card in a given play.

CHALLENGE CACHE

The moderator may also assign caches that represent exceptionally difficult or demanding circumstances — particularly dangerous missions, exceptionally skilled or clever foes, unreliable ships, mutinous crews or pieces of worn out and malfunctioning equipment. The moderator must assign challenge caches specific triggers that define how and when the cache can be added to a relevant play.

Challenge caches are typically story caches that do not refresh, and are usually assigned as narrative elements or as part of the stakes for a play. Challenge cards represent a clear threat hanging over the player, and so can color the options and influence the actions of the players in interesting ways leading up to related plays.

WOUNDS AND INJURY

The rules for resolving dangerous encounters in which characters might be hurt — like sword fights, falling down stairs, animal attack or poisoned wine — are the same as for resolving any other kind of encounter in the Q system, with one exception. When players make plays for which there is a risk of character injury, part of the moderator's stakes should include a wound draw for that character.

Character wounds are simulated by reducing the size of the injured character's play hand by a number of cards equal to the number of wounds the character took. Smaller hands reduce character effectiveness, modeling the effects of injury — pain, shock, mental confusion and physical incapacitation. The size of the reduction depends on the severity of the wound.

There are three severities of wound draws and the level of injury to be included as part of a given play should be negoti-

ated by the participants and assigned as part of the stakes.

MINOR WOUND

When a minor wound is part of a winning outcome the player draws 1 card from his play deck, divides its numerical value by 3 and his character suffers that number of wounds. Such injuries usually result in scrapes, cuts, bruises and broken noses, fingers or ribs. They are typically the consequences of brawling, clumsy accidents or being thrown around the deck of a storm-tossed ship.

MAJOR WOUND

When winning stakes include a major wound, the player draws 1 card from his play deck, divides its numerical value by 2 and his character takes that number of wounds. These injuries result in deep cuts, punctures or gouges, con-



cussions, broken limbs or internal bleeding. They are usually the consequence of falls, animal attacks, shipwrecks and combat.

MORTAL WOUND

These are life threatening injuries where death is possible and lifelong physical consequences are likely. When a character takes a major wound, the player draws 1 card from his play deck and assigns the character that card's full numerical value in wounds. If the number is greater than six cards the character is killed outright.

The results of wound draws are "suitless" and always rounded down so the range of possible wound penalty cards is 0 to 3 cards for minor wounds, 1 to 5 for major wounds and 2 to 10 for mortal wounds. Remember that aces and face cards are each worth 10.

When assigned a wound draw the player taking the injury must randomly discard a number of cards from his play hand equal to the calculated value of that draw. The player must use the new, smaller hand size for all his plays until his character heals.

Example

Uryx is in a vicious sword fight with a band of Children of the Dark boarders who are assaulting his ship, and the player knows it could go badly when the moderator includes a major wound as part of the counter stakes. Uryx's player loses the bid and in addition the other stakes, his character must suffer a wound. The moderator draws a card and pulls a

9. Major wound card values are divided by 2 and rounded down, meaning that Uryx is badly hurt and the player must discard 4 cards from his play hand. Until Uryx heals, his player is restricted to a 2 card play hand.

If a player ever loses enough cards that his play hand effectively drops to zero, his character is rendered unconscious by his injuries. If his effective hand ever drops below zero his character is killed. The effects of wound draws are cumulative so that characters who are still suffering from previous injuries may die from even minor wounds. If other potentially lethal game or narrative effects cause a player to lose additional cards from his hand, the effects are the same as for injury. For example, if a mortally wounded character with only one card in the player's hand enters the Twilight Frontier without proper equipment, the harsh conditions would drop him to 0 cards and unconsciousness.

WOUNDS AND POTENTIAL HANDS

A player may never have more cards in his Potential hand than he has in his play hand as wounds reduce the ability of his character to control Potential. Accordingly, when a character is injured and loses 3 or more cards from his play hand, the player must discard from his Potential hand as well. As the character subsequently heals, the player may draw up his Potential hand as his play hand increases.

HEALING

Characters heal naturally at a rate of 1 card for every three clocks of in-game time. For every three clocks that pass, the player of an injured character can restore 1 card to his play hand up to the healthy maximum of 6 cards. If a character receives skilled medical care at the time of his injury, he may heal 1 card for every face card the healer is willing to discard from his play hand.

Face cards drawn to replenish those spent for healing may not be used for healing those same injuries. Thereafter, if he continues to receive medical care, the injured character heals at the rate of one card for every two clocks. No plays are required to gain this benefit from healing skills, but healing skill plays can be made for battlefield

first aid, conducting research or experiments, saving limbs, attaching arcanoelectrical prosthetics, attending to a birth, running a hospital or other such challenging, medical circumstances.

Magical healing requires the abilities of a character with some form of healing Rain Potential, and will immediately restore one play hand card for every Potential hand card spent to power the healer's magic. Magical healing may be used more than once on the same character for the same injuries.

Each card restored to a player's hand by healing — mundane or magical — relieves the character of the incapacitation effect associated with a single face card wound draw.



WEAVING OUTCOMES INTO NARRATIVES

Once the outcome of a play has been determined, the moderator — with the help of the players — must integrate the events of the winning stakes into the ongoing narrative. This is usually as simple as describing how the stakes play out, using as much detail and flair as fits a given gaming group's style of play. The intention is to tie the outcome seamlessly onto the thread of what has happened before while simultaneously setting up whatever might happen next — the next event, encounter, or character interaction. This description-focused resolution allows for fluid pacing and dynamic storytelling that is difficult to achieve with incremental game systems.





THE LIGHT AND THE DARK

The Light and the Dark are the borders of existence. The Light shines from above, a bright, sourceless glow that never fades. The Light fills the sky and is the destination towards which the Wind always flows. The Dark is the void below, a shadowed and dim realm up from which the wind forever blows.

The space between, the skies of Upwind, hold the highlands, the drifting debris of an ancient, broken world. These stony islands drift slowly across the sky, buoyed on the elemental power of the Wind, casting their vast shadows over the darkened realms below.

THE MASTERS OF THE WIND

“The Masters of the Wind” is an traditional title given to the lost culture from the remains of which Kin civilization and technology are derived. The Masters were great scientists and ingenious engineers. Myths claim

that they held dominion over all nature and that nothing was beyond their power. There are many tales about the Masters as there are mysteries, but there is no doubt that they had fantastic technologies.

THE DOWNFALL

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

were ended in apocalyptic disaster. This event is called the Great Catastrophe by some, The Cataclysm or The Wrath of the Wind by others, while some cultures refuse to name it at all out of old superstition. The Guild histories simply refer to it as the DownFall.

THE KIN

The Kin are the citizens of the Kingdoms in the Light. Though the isolating geography of their strange world has led to the development of many races and unique cultures, all Kin carry clear heritage from their original ancestral lineages. They are generally lean creatures, though those with Stone ances-

try can be truly massive. Their faces are open and protracted, with bright, narrow eyes, high cheeks, small noses and narrow jaws. Their ears are wide, pointed and alert and their hair is thick and heavy. Their arms and legs are long with strong, four-fingered hands and narrow feet bearing four, almost pre-



hensile toes. Skin, hair and eye color vary widely with the differences marking an individual's ancestry.

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

THE CHILDREN OF THE DARK

The Children are the denizens of the Dark and the long-standing enemies of the Kin. There is little evidence of them from the time of the Masters and so most historians believe that, like the Kin, they were born of the same catastrophe that destroyed the old world. The Kingdoms are rife with legends however, even though encounters with the Children have been rare since their sudden withdraw at the end of the Second Incursion. Frighteningly, skirmishes with the Child patrols have increased and Guild leadership is concerned that a Third Incursion may be imminent.

Little is known about the Children. They are Kin-like in form, but only the maddest scholars believe they bear any actual relationship to the Kin. Children are uniformly tall, pale and gaunt, with wide, dark eyes that are extremely sensitive to light. They are fast, agile creatures, with lean frames that belie their considerable strength, and their warriors are ferocious fighters. They typically wear heavy, fur-lined leathers reinforced with intricately worked armor plates and are armed with large swords, lethal powder guns and crude arcanoelectrical weapons.

POTENTIAL

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

Every Kin is empowered with Potential and the ability to bend it to their wills. The least child can direct dust motes, raindrops, and sparks to his whim. The average adult can ignite a twig, snuff a candle or fill a glass with a simple im-



pulse. Those with deep enough Potential can burn sails, launch boulders, and knit flesh and trained elementalists can tame storms, flood rivers, blast down buildings and command stone constructs through will alone.

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



THE KINGDOMS IN THE LIGHT

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

The Kingdoms are scattered among the highest of the highlands, where the Light shines the brightest and the taint of the Dark is weakest. Here crops grow best, the raids of the Children and the incursions by other beasts of the lower shadows are rare. Though many nations have established colonies in the lower islands and military outposts along the deeper Twilight Frontier, these are dangerous places where life is harsh and the Dark a constant threat.

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

VERDANT

Verdant is one of the largest of the Kingdoms in the Light and is governed by the constitutional monarchy of Her Righteous Majesty Elsa Elena Worthies and her Parliament of Lords. Other realms may lay claim to greater natural resources — metal ores, timber, undiscovered Masters' ruins — but Verdant unequivocally holds title to superior scholars and grander industry. The scholars, scientists and engineers of Verdant are the most skilled in the Realms and the best universities and the most innovative guilds have become a locus for bright and creative minds.

The result has been an inevitable migration of intellectuals from other nations to the institutions and factories of cities like Cleft, Rim and Highstone. This boon of intellectual and technical expertise allows Verdant to compete with rival traders, offering commodities every bit as valuable as copper ore, seasoned lumber, spices and textiles.

The Verdani are perhaps most accurately described as practical, adapting to cultural changes with ease. They are quick to take advantage of new circumstances, techniques and technologies and have turned this flexibility into a potent cultural asset. Verdani are also known

for their informality, independence and deep sense of loyalty to family, friends and crew — perhaps as a source of stability in an otherwise pliable social landscape. Though usually an advantage, their informality can be seen as disrespect for the traditions of others and can therefore sometimes be a source of conflict.

The Verdani are known to provide some of the best mechanics and arcanoelectricians in the Realms and they are particularly famous for their skilled skyship navigators and helmsmen. Many assume this is because Verdant is home to the Explorer's Academy and that the knowledge somehow just leaks into the surrounding countryside.

HIGHSTONE

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

ARCANOTECHNOLOGY

Technology in Upwind is a strange synthesis of lost science, baroque invention and raw elementalism. Engineers and technicians across the Kingdoms are creative designers and skillful builders, but despite their considerable abilities there are finite limits to what they can construct. To go beyond these limits, to build the devices and machines most critical to the lives of the Kin, they must incor-

porate arcanotechnology in their constructions — components salvaged from the ruins left behind by the Masters of the Wind. The inherent rarity of these items, such as circuit boxes and spark bottles, makes the Guild's expeditions into the Dark vital to the technological foundations of the Kingdoms in the Light. These dangerous salvage missions have become essential to the economies and infrastructure of Kin society.

ARC

Electrical Arc is a form of Potential magic, but it is also akin to the electrical energy by which arcanotechnology is powered. Arc is the lifeblood of the Kingdoms and is most commonly generated by large mills built out over the edges of the highlands where the mundane updrafts of the Wind continually turn their vanes. The mills generate power that is fed directly to the grids of local settlements where it is used to heat homes, provide light, drive trolleys, run factories, charge spark bottles and

power all manner of other smaller machines, devices and appliances.

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

TELLING TIME

In a world without day or night, where darkness comes randomly and there are no seasons, sun, moon or even stars, there is no natural way to mark the passage of time. This conundrum is a constant challenge for governments and industry throughout the Kingdoms in the Light. There have long been clockwork and arc powered chro-

nometers, but no practical way to synchronize them between cities, much less within a fleet or across a Kingdom. As a consequence, time differences between Kingdoms, or even towns within a single realm, are wild and arbitrary.

In the lands of Verdant, individual settlements typically utilize bell towers or Wind-powered horns to mark the passage of time, sounding



at points spaced evenly throughout a repeating schedule. They sound five times to signify the end of sleep, four times for the mid-work break,

three times for dinner, two times near bedtime and once well after most decent folk have long since gone to sleep.

THE TWILIGHT FRONTIER

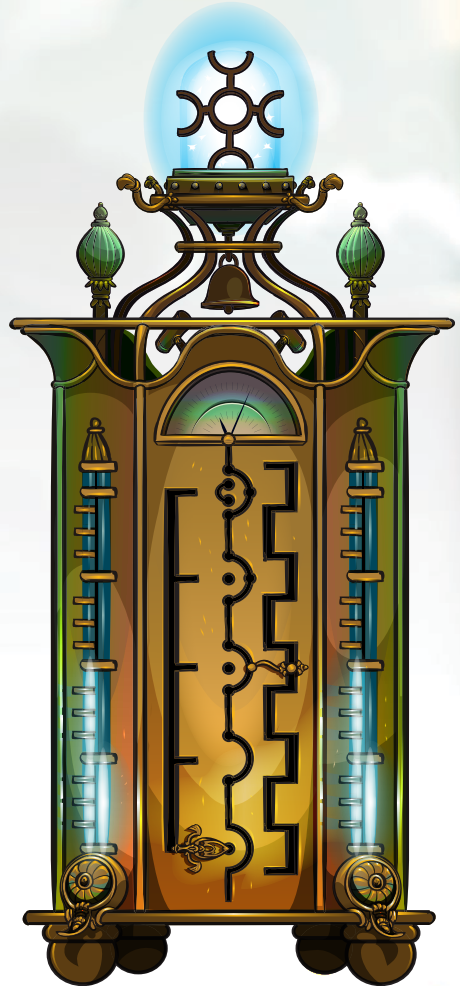
The Twilight Frontier is a dark and shadowed realm of mystery and danger — the frigid no-man's-land between the lowest Realms of the Kin and the deep territory of the Children of the Dark. It is here that the Knights search for the last remaining caches of Masters' technology. It is in these unexplored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

The shadows of the countless highlands drifting overhead coalesce into a constant, shifting gloom that veils the cold landscape. Figures in the bow of a frigate are only silhouettes as seen from the stern, lookouts strain to spy other vessels and highlands are often only darker patches against an already black sky. Lanterns and arc light help and are often strung about deck or camp. Though they allow a sailor to see what his hands are about, they attract predators and darken the world beyond the circle of light to inky blackness. As a result, many crews prefer to simply struggle with the dimness rather than allow threats to sneak up in the dark.

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

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

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



SKYSHIPS

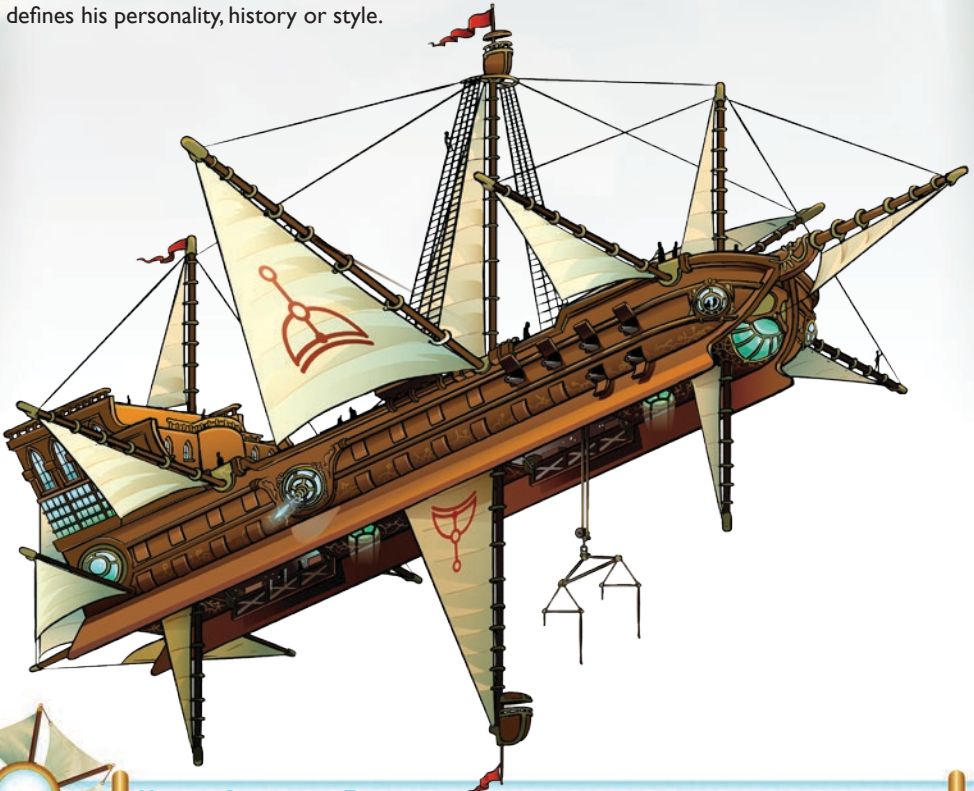
Skyships are beautiful, romantic, powerful symbols of Kin culture, exemplifying the sophistication of their own engineering as well as its synergy with the science of the Masters. These airborne sailing vessels allow the Kin to travel between the highlands and to delve into the Dark in search of treasure. There are countless designs, from skiffs, cutters and barges to galleys, frigates and great men of war, but they all share a common element in their construction — the induction hull.

Shipwrights integrate networks of filament arrays, acanoelectrical capacitors, and discharge collectors within the structure of skyship hulls. When interfaced with a circuit box the networks allows the hull to catch the arcane updrafts of the Wind, generating both elemental buoyancy and electrical arc. The buoyancy can be manipulated to raise and lower the hull, and the arc can be siphoned off to power ship systems and charge spark bottles wired into the onboard grid.

RELICS

Explorer Knight characters typically start play with all the basic equipment they need, including their Knights' blades. Every knight character also begins play with one unique item of equipment called a relic, intended to enhance his character concept, role and effectiveness within the party. Typically this device, tool, weapon, talisman, artifact or other piece of gear is an iconic object that provides a character with unique capabilities, and further defines his personality, history or style.

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



THE EXPLORER KNIGHTS

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

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

The Explorer Knights' Pledge

To honor the Guild

I so vow

To seek the Knowledge

I so vow

To defend the Kingdoms

I so vow

To defy the Dark

I so vow

EXPLORER KNIGHTS' HEADQUARTERS

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

BECOMING KNIGHTS

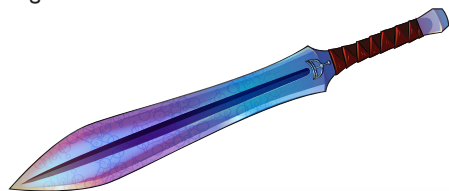
To become Novices, hopefuls must demonstrate unique levels of physical prowess and mental fortitude. More importantly, they must demonstrate exceptional ability to use Potential. They must show the telltale signs that Guild training will unleash the preternatural abilities that reside in all Kin, but the magnitude and mastery of which separates Explorer Knights from common folk. Selected as youths and trained at the Explorers' Academy, Knights undergo cycles of grueling academic, physical, martial and Potential training, becoming experts in their given fields, master elementalists and deadly soldiers.

Position in the Explorer Knight's Guild is denoted with Blazes of Rank and each blaze is earned by meeting specific goals, completing demanding missions, fighting successful actions and other conduct that upholds the Knight's Vow. Blazes can only be bestowed by Sky Captains, and on rare occasions the High Captain himself.

KNIGHTS' BLADES

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

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





A TALE IN WHICH THINGS ARE NOT WHAT THEY SEEM
AND WRONGS MAY JUST BE PROVEN RIGHT.

BACKGROUND AND ADVENTURE SUMMARY

Bait and Switch is a one-shot adventure to introduce your gaming group to the world, mechanics and themes of Upwind. Though not every situation can be accounted for, suggested plays and outcomes are included for each encounter to help you learn the art of negotiating stakes and run the adventure effectively.

In Bait and Switch, the player characters are Knights of the Guild's 5th Fleet, obligated by the Treaties of the Convocation to help police the skies of the failing nation of Vault. Recently, the region has come under siege by the pirate Dread Margit (pronounced Mar•geet) and her heavily armed frigate *Hawk*. The characters undertake a clever false flag mission posing as desperate merchants in an attempt to lure Margit out into the open and bring her to justice. Unfortunately, in the dangerous skies of Vault not everything is as it seems and the Knights may learn that wrongs can sometimes be right.

As it turns out, Margit is really just a charismatic book-keeper with excellent logistics skills. After several towns — including her own — along the Vaultish frontier were pillaged and burned by the mercenaries the Vaultish parliament calls its navy, Margit formed the survivors into a crew and fled to the skies. Her own pirating began as a necessity to provide food and supplies for her people. Very intentionally however, she has restricted her targets to the mercenary ships and fat merchantmen belonging to the even fatter members of the Vaultish government.

Pre-generated characters suitable for this adventure are available on the Upwind downloads page of the Biohazard Games website. Print them out, including some copies of their descriptions, and let your players choose who they would like to play.

www.BiohazardGames.us



INTRODUCTION

To set the stage at the start of the game either read the following aloud or print out copies and have your players take turns reading paragraphs aloud.

Under a False Flag

Vault is a small nation wedged between the Kingdom of Loft and the Fortress Dominion, and threatened from below by the upwind border of the Twilight Frontier. Its rulers are weak and the populace is desperate. The country's economy has all but collapsed, corruption is rampant and bandit gangs and local crime bosses have more influence over the people than the failing parliament. As a result Vault has become a haven for outlaws of all kinds, and some of the most notorious pirates in the Realms take refuge here when they need to go to ground.

Bound by the treaties of the Convocation, the Explorers' Guild is obliged to provide support, expertise and law enforcement at the request of the Vaultish government. Despite good faith effort and major expenditure of resources, the Guild has been mostly ineffectual as corruption and collusion undermine any progress it makes. Things have become so desperate that two squadrons from the Brotherhood's 5th Fleet have been permanently assigned to patrolling Vault.

You are members of the 5th Fleet's 4th squadron, known as Roland's Raiders, and though you are officers aboard the EGS Rival, you have recently been given special orders for detached service. You were instructed to make your way via supply ship to the

hive of scum and villainy known as Haven — the Vaultish capital. There you are to pose as merchants, take command of the freighter Majestic, hire a crew, secure a tempting cargo and make sure everyone knows where you are headed. All this to serve as the bait in your own trap — a trap you are to set for the notorious Dread Pirate Margit.

The Dread Pirate Margit has become the most feared bandit in the already dangerous and pirate-ridden skies of Vault. Brazenly attacking Vaultish shipping and navy vessels alike, she and her crew of cutthroats has been raiding with impunity along the Vaultish frontier and has reportedly taken a dozen vessels in the last round alone. Her ship appears out of nowhere, attacks without warning and vanishes again into the refuge of secrecy and fear she enforces among the people of the Vaultish frontier.

Your orders are to limp along, a fat and helpless duck, to lure out her crew of hungry hawks. Then, using guile, brute force or whatever other means present themselves, you are to capture her ship and crew and return her to Haven for a very public trial.

You were pleased to have been selected for this mission and were actually looking forward to the challenge, until you set eyes on the Majestic — which, it turns out, is anything but. Given its warped planks, tattered sails, dangling rigging and rusty hardware you are certain the only thing keeping this ship in the air is the fact that it's tied to the dock.

Well, at least things can't get any worse...

RUSE RUSE RUSE YOUR BOAT

As Knights, the characters' arrival would be readily obvious to anyone in Haven, and there is no doubt that word of their presence would get back to Margit quickly. As a result, they will need to maintain their cover as down-on-their-luck merchants and either conceal or stow their Knights' blades to keep their ruse from being discovered.

Take a moment to have the players describe how they've hidden their Knight's Blades. This should not be a play, but you may want to make notes as to how they've handled the

issue, as it may affect if and when any NPCs uncover the deception.

Remember, because the Knight's cache represents the awe, skill and confidence imparted by their status as Knights and the blades are their only badge of that office, the Knight's Cache is only available to the players when their blades are in their possession and close at hand.

The trade vessel Majestic is anything but — she lists badly to starboard, her sails are splotchy with sail mite infestation, the rigging is loose and tattered, the brightwork is tarnished or



missing and many of the deck planks themselves are warped, wormy or sprung.

To get the *Majestic* skyworthy again and underway, the characters need to accomplish three things. They need to make substantive repairs to the ship, hire a crew of able sailors to man her, and acquire a tempting cargo while making sure word “inadvertently” gets around about said cargo and where the *Majestic* is headed. Encourage the players to discuss their ideas and make a plan, and when they seem to have

agreed upon an approach call for plays to resolve each of these encounters.

Remember that the Q system plays fast, so be sure to allow for plenty of role playing in the lead up to, and resolution of, each play or you will find yourself quickly running out of adventure. Encourage the players to plan carefully and really engage them with your descriptions and NPCs. Haven is a desperate place where everyone has an angle and anyone can be dangerous under the wrong circumstances.

MAJESTIC MONTAGE

While the players will certainly come up with ideas for possible stakes for a ship repair montage, feel free to offer ideas to help them understand the mechanics and to lead them through this tutorial play. There are a couple of local chandleries and lumber yards, and negotiating with sly merchants claiming there is a parts shortage might be a good way to set up this encounter. Assume the characters have been issued enough money to cover only basic repairs.

The challenge level of the play should be based on what the players decide they want out of it. Use the following suggestions to guide setting the stakes. For each positive outcome the players want, consider raising the challenge level and be sure not to give them everything — make them pick and choose. Additionally, as they add positive stakes be sure to add additional counter-stakes.

Basic player’s stakes — 1 card challenge level:

- ✦ The *Majestic* is repaired and essentially skyworthy. She will not win any beauty contests and sails a bit like a brick but she will get the characters where they are going without falling out of the sky.

Raise the stakes and the challenge level:

- ✦ The *Majestic* is rigged for surprising speed. The players earn a one card story cache that may be used when extra speed is essential to the play.
- ✦ The *Majestic* is reinforced and armored, making her exceptionally durable. The players earn a one card story cache that may be used when extra defenses or resisting damage are essential to the play.

- ✦ The *Majestic* is left looking like a refugee from the scrapyards but is secretly sound and exceptionally maneuverable. The players earn a one card story cache that may be used when surprise or performance are essential to the play.
- ✦ The *Majestic* is fitted with some extra cannon in hidden gun ports making her secretly a more formidable opponent. The players can a one card story cache that may be used when in any plays involving ship to ship battles.

Basic moderator’s stakes:

- ✦ The majestic appears skyworthy and ready to sail, but at a dramatic moment of the moderator’s choosing, a major malfunction will occur complicating the action and imposing a one card challenge cache if the function of the ship is essential to any associated play.

Additional counter-stakes:

- ✦ Even cursory inspection of the ship tells any sailor that she is not what she seems and is in fact far more skyworthy than she appears.
- ✦ The repairs take six full clocks — twice as long as planned — and in that time word the Dread Pirate has struck again reaches Haven. This gives the moderator a one card challenge cache representing the stress of the delay and its impact on the confidence of the Knights.

Avoid stakes for either side that would preclude the players getting the *Majestic* underway as that would end the adventure. Instead, play around with complications, delays and roleplaying concerns.



CREW, SAILORS OR PIRATES... OH MY!



Haven was once a busy skyport town and there are plenty of down-on-their-luck sailors willing to sign on — even onto a vessel in as poor a shape as the *Majestic*. Haven is also...well...a haven for would-be pirates and mutiny is just a tool of the trade after all. So, it's less a question of can the Knights hire crew, but rather how trustworthy that crew will be.

The local sailors hall — a guild of sorts for skymen — is a good place to start looking for out-of-work crew. The dingy place is unwelcoming to foreigners and run by an officious, slow talking little kin with ink stains on his fingers and a big ledger tracking jobs, hires and dues. His name is Piotr.

Basic player's stakes — 2 card challenge level:

- + The Knights hire an able crew but they are rough, suspicious, slow to follow orders they do not like and there are certainly potential mutineers and actual pirates among them.

Raise the stakes and the challenge level:

- + The crew is exceptionally skilled and represents a one card story cache that can be used whenever the skill of the crew is part of the play.
- + The crew lacks any ne'er do wells at all and is instead made up of honest sailors who are just looking for work and to get out of Haven and back into the sky.

Basic moderator's stakes:

- + The characters hire a crew but there are shifty criminals among them who will definitely prove problematic at some point during the voyage.

Additional counter-stakes:

- + Much of the crew is made up of actual pirates and they will certainly mutiny during the voyage if the opportunity arises. In the meantime they will play the part of dutiful and hard-working sailors.
- + Members of the Dread Pirate's own crew are aboard the *Majestic* and they will conspire to aid in her eventual ambush of the ship, imposing a 2 card challenge cache on the Knights when that happens.

However hiring the crew turns out, the *Majestic* is a small vessel and requires 25 sailors to be worked efficiently, and the Knights should certainly feel outnumbered even without the threat of mutiny. Play up the salty and dangerous nature of the crew who, despite their intentions, are definitely not landlubbers. Use the following list of names to add verisimilitude to the nature of the crew: Aksel, Edva, Guilbrand, Igor, Igor, Igor, Igor (it's the most popular male name in Vault) Piotr, Vida, Aeltha, Young Thom, Old Thom and Dead Thom.

BAITING THE TRAP

A tempting target requires a valuable cargo. There are several options available to the players when they go looking. Various merchants and cargo brokers are looking for freighters to haul their wares, but each of the cargos carries different risk. If the players take the time to research her past attacks they learn that Dread Margit has a history of taking ships that carry exceptionally fungible cargos or, more often, vessels carrying practical goods like foodstuffs, tools and medical supplies.

Assume the Guild has provided the Knights-come-merchants with enough funds to contract for and insure a modest cargo. If they decide to purchase a cargo outright, they will have no money left for anything but the most basic ship repairs.

Possible cargoes:

- + Arc Powder — Dangerous, unstable, and in high demand across the Realms. Carrying this cargo will turn the *Majestic* into a veritable bomb waiting for an errant cannon shot or bolt of Arc to blow the vessel to flinders. Understandably, few crews like to haul Arc powder which makes it an easy and profitable cargo to find.
- + Vaultish Wine — The only luxury export from the failing nation, Vaultish Wine is in high demand in other countries because of its exceptional qualities and that fact that the current difficulties has made it increasingly scarce. It also appears to be popular with Dread Margit and her crew, as the last four freighters carrying it were attacked. In truth, Margit and crew are taking the wine because they can readily sell it on the blackmarket and because it most directly impacts the Vaultish

parliament as its members own most of the nation's vineyards.

Unfortunately, this means that most sellers are unwilling to ship it without selling it directly to the freighter captains as proof against loss. Because of this extra expense, the knights can only afford half a hold's worth, and leaving the ship half-empty is sure to raise suspicion among the crew.

- + Salvage — The Twilight Frontier has no shortage of mysterious and potentially exploitable ruins. Salvage fuels the economy of the Kingdoms in the Light, and while an exceptional find can mean a fortune, most salvage is bulk cargo intended for marginal uses. It is easy enough to haul such reclamation, but unless the players do something to sweeten their pot, there's a chance the Dread Magrit may go after a more tempting target.
- + Nothing — Daring players may decide to simply focus on spreading rumors of a valuable haul and opt to carry no cargo at all. While this is certainly a clever and inexpensive option, the locals will likely take notice that nothing has been loaded aboard the *Majestic*. If the players decide to take this tack, successfully baiting their trap should become a 3 card challenge. If the players think to load crates and barrels full of junk this could be reduced to a 2 card play.

Play up the officiousness and sly business acumen of any cargo brokers the characters approach. Remember these are skilled traders and the Knights are not, so there should be a sense among the players of being out of their depth. Charming words, schmoozing, academic rhetoric or even intimidation might help the

Knights navigate the bargaining process. If the players seem into dealing, go ahead and make a play around the nature, quality, expense and value of the cargo as one of the outcomes could be they actually make a profit — should the cargo survive — at the end of the voyage.

Once they have acquired a cargo, have the players describe how they go about spreading the word of their cargo. Let them organically describe their process, until it reaches a point where a play can be called. This should be a two card challenge (unless the players are hauling nothing at all) with at least one of the stakes being that word gets back to Dread Margit and inspires her predatory nature.

Basic player's stakes — 2 card challenge level:

- + Gossip spreads the word and the local underground is aware of the *Majestic's* cargo and course. She will be attacked by pirates before leaving Vaultish skies.

Raise the stakes and the challenge level:

- + The Dread Pirate is aware of the cargo and will overconfidently send one ship from her small fleet to take the flying junk-pile that is the *Majestic*.
- + One of Margit's crew is hired aboard the *Majestic* and the Knight's learn who the imposter is without letting on that they know. They can

later question this crewmate and potentially earn a story cache to use in their tactics against the Dread Pirate.

- + Margit is convinced the *Majestic* is carrying an exceptionally valuable cargo and will lead the attack herself. Because of their ruse, the players will have a 1 card cache they can use against her during that attack.
- + Should they survive their mission and get their cargo to a viable market, they characters will actually make a tidy profit.

Basic moderator's stakes:

- + Margit learns of the *Majestic's* valuable cargo and will ambush the Knights, taking them completely by surprise. This is represented by a 1 card challenge cache that the moderator can be used during the attack.

Additional counter-stakes:

- + Margit discovers through her spies that the unsuspecting merchants of the *Majestic* are agents of the Valutish government.
- + One of the Dread Pirate's agents catches a glimpse of one of the Knight's blade and realizes the merchants are Explorer Knights. Margit realizes she is now being hunted by more capable foes and plans accordingly. The moderator has a 2 card challenge cache to use in any plays between the Margit's forces and the Knights.

FORESHADOWING

While the characters undertake these various tasks, the moderator should contrive to insert a seemingly unrelated moment where the characters encounter members of Vault's mercenary navy who are bragging about "doing what the Knights won't," and "breaking up a pirate encampment" or even "putting those bandit towns to the

torch and taking back their plunder." Perhaps they are sitting around the docks while their ship is resupplied or are drinking in a skyfront tavern. They are clearly hard-worn and professional soldiers and the encounter should leave the Knight's feeling a little embarrassed and anxious to stop the pirates.

ENDLESS SKIES

The next several encounters are optional and deciding which ones to include should depend on how long you would like to play and the enthusiasm and interests of your players. They can occur in any order while

the Knights are in transit towards their anticipated confrontation with Dread Margit and her pirates. In each case, as preludes to the encounters, read the indicated text to the players.



ARE YOU MY MOMMY?

As your ship breaks through a wall of dense cloud into a startlingly blue sky a deep groan — more a vibration really — echoes through the cool air and into your bones. Behind you a small hemoth — perhaps just a calf — breaks from the same cloud bank and glides inexorably towards the Majestic. It seems curious more than anything, groaning out long rumbling calls and chasing your ship as if playing a child's game as well as trying to get your ship to join it in play.

Unfortunately, even a hemoth calf is more than half the length of the Majestic. As it bumps against the hull and rubs its back along the vessel's keel, one of the yaw masts snaps, leaving the broken rigging flapping in the Majestic's wake.

Well, this could become a problem...

A single calf has become separated from a small herd of hemoths and appears to have imprinted on the Majestic as either a surrogate parent or just a playmate. Cavorting and playing with the ship it is unaware of the destructiveness of its actions. Encourage the players to develop solutions to the situation — determining the best course of action to both protect their ship and drive off the unwanted attention.

Not that the herd is nearby and that any calls of alarm or pain from the calf will bring an angry

mother to its defense — plunging out of the clouds and diving to attack the ship. If the players dither in driving off the calf, have it do more damage and describe the whole herd as it breaks through the nearby clouds, dwarfing the Majestic.

Basic player's stakes — I card challenge level:

- ✦ The characters drive off the calf but take a I card challenge cache to ship performance due to the inadvertent damage it has caused.

Raise the stakes and the challenge level:

- ✦ Drive off the calf with no damage to the ship.
- ✦ Duck into the nearby clouds before being spied by the herd and gain a I card story cache for evasive ship maneuvers.
- ✦ One of the Knights uses Potential to befriend the herd which will subsequently show up at a dramatic moment in the future narrative to wreak havoc with any foe. This



could be worth a cache card at the moderator's discretion.

Basic moderator's stakes:

- + The mother attacks the ship to save her calf, crippling the vessel and forcing it to land on a nearby skyland to facilitate repairs.

Additional counter-stakes:

- + The moderator gains a 1 card challenge cache to the skyworthiness of the *Majestic* until it can be repaired at a proper shipwright's.

- + The attack is so brutal that a number of crewmen are killed or knocked overboard equal to the numerical value of a random card draw.
- + The damage is so extensive that the *Majestic* is shipwrecked on the highland and is a sitting duck when the *Dread Pirate* attacks sometime in the next few clocks. The tactical disadvantage grants the pirates a 2 card cache for any plays made as part of the attack.

PAST GLORIES

As you pass the bottle of surprisingly good Vaultish wine around the ward room table you fall to retelling of past Guild adventures, lowering your voices so that the crew does not overhear. Talk turns to how you each earned your most recent Blaze of Rank and inevitably the tales are told again — certainly not for the first or for the last time.

Some of you may be called upon to spin a yarn about the circumstances out of which you earned your most recent Blaze of Rank — tales inspired by the single name or phrase listed on your character sheets. Take a moment, then each of you make a luck draw.

Blazes of rank are earned for significant accomplishments during the career of an Explorer Knight — major acts of heroism self-sacrifice and bravery — the first of which is always granted upon graduation from the Explorer Knights Academy. Each of the pregenerated characters has at least two listed on their sheets. Ask the players to create a story in which they were a hero and through which they earned their most recent blaze. Have them all make random pulls from their play decks and in descending order tell their tales to the group. Make sure they know that if they are not embellishing and exaggerating the facts they are doing it wrong!

WHAT'S THIS RUMOR ABOUT SHARES?

Over the past couple clocks the crew has seemed to work with extra vigor and the lookouts appear more intent on their duties. Wide grins and happy nods greet you as you walk the deck during your watches, and snatches of whispered conversation reach your ears. They carry words like “each man a share,” “showin’ em what’s for,” “surprise surprise” and “privateer.” As a result, it soon becomes clear that something has convinced the *Majestic's* crew that you are yourselves looking to turn pirate and lure in an unwary prize. Maybe even play a little turnabout on some sky bandits themselves?

The crew may be mangy, desperate and murderous, but they are not stupid. Some of them have likely noticed the odd “refinements” the Knights might have made to the derelict-looking *Majestic*. Others have noticed that the ship is

light on cargo or that the crates in the hold are full of junk. Others have certainly eavesdropped on the Knights' conversations or seen them use uncommonly potent Potential. Regardless, already a suspicious lot, the crew has realized the characters are not merchants but likely pirates themselves with knowledge of a big score and a clever plan to take it — and they want in.

Eventually a spokesperson for the crew will offer a vague overture, implying that for fair shares the crew is ready to do its part. How the Knights react and this plays out should depend on role playing but could include a play as well. This is a great opportunity for the Knights to ply their leadership or deception attributes as they can come clean and deputize the crew or lead it on into a piratical frenzy.

Basic player's stakes —

I card challenge level:

- + The crew mostly believes what the Knights choose to tell it and continue working with more or less enthusiasm depending on possibilities for financial gain.

Raise the stakes

and the challenge level:

- + The new circumstances make the crew steadfastly loyal, either out of fear of the Knights or the promise of a massive score.
- + The crew is willing to follow any order — even a dangerous one — without question.

Basic moderator's stakes:

- + The crew believes the Knights are lying to it but plays along in hopes of turning the situation to its advantage.

Additional counter-stakes:

- + The crew feels betrayed and mutinies at its first opportunity.
- + The crew somehow discovers that the characters are in fact Explorer Knights and plays along out of fear of the lawmen. If the crew consists of mostly honest sailors they will demand to be let off at the nearest port. If they are piratical, they will wait until Margit attacks and then try to win membership in her crew by turning on the Knights.

PLAN? THERE AIN'T NO PLAN

The ship and crew settle into the routine of watch to watch sailing and you begin to make your final preparations, laying the trap for the Dread Pirate. It is clear that Margit is a cunning adversary and that if your attempt in Haven to lure her into pursuit was successful then even now she might be hunting you. You know she is dangerous, the old *Majestic* is certain to be outgunned, and you absolutely expect your small crew to be outnumbered. So, exactly what sort of clever trap do you intend to set?

Ask the players to articulate their plan and how, if appropriate, they are going to inform and involve the crew. Where exactly are they going? How are they going to present or sail the ship. What specific preparations are they going to make to prepare the ship for an attack, create their own ambush and plan a boarding action of Margit's ship? How are they going to deal with the clock-to-clock tension of waiting for something to happen?

Leave the plan up to the players and encourage them to be creative and be sure to roleplay through some of their planning and interactions with the crew. In the end it is likely that the players will settle on some version of the following options. If not, improvise as needed to get them into the penultimate confrontation with the Dread Pirate as described below.

PLAYING DEAD

Following this plan the knights are slowly sailing a reputedly dangerous course

in hopes that their efforts to spread the word about their cargo worked. After several clocks they encounter a derelict ship. The sails are tattered and the vessel lists to one side, barely kept in the sky by its failing induction hull. Cannon damage scars the hull and it appears as though it's either abandoned or the crew is dead.

The crew, eager for salvage if criminals or to help if honest sailors, has already prepared to bring the *Majestic* onto an approach course for the derelict and are awaiting the formal order. If the order does not come they will be quick to remind the players that the laws of the sky require they lend assistance as needed. If abandoned, they continue, then the cargo is theirs by right of salvage. Depending on the disposition of the crew and the outcome of previous plays this might be a perfect time to stage any pending mutiny, or at least a play using leadership, charm or oration attributes. Convincing the crew to leave the ship and sail on is a 3 card challenge and will carry whatever consequences result from the stakes.

The derelict is, of course, a trap. As the players toss grapnels, pull alongside or board using the launch, pirates pour out of the hold, attack and attempt to take the *Majestic*. Additionally, the Hawk and her two escorts drop out of the overcast sky and ready broadsides. A towering woman — one of the largest kin any of the crew has ever seen — leans over the rail of her ship and shouts at the *Majestic* with a voice like a cannon shot and an accent like a... Vaultish pi-

rate. “Surrender your vessel, and if you are very polite I may not murder you!”

In the moment following her odd words the Knights have two options — fight or surrender. Ask the players which they choose to do and then ask for a play. Suggestions for stakes are offered below.

WOUNDED BIRD

If the players have chosen to try their own derelict deception, it’s easy to make the *Majestic* look unskyworthy and vulnerable as she is half-way there already. Drifting along through the tradeways with broken spars and ruined rigging the crew can signal “distress” to any passing ship, hoping to lure in the hunting pirates.

Fortunately — or unfortunately — their plan works too well and a trio of Margit’s vessels close and attack with broadsides, musket fire and ready boarding parties. Ask the players how they want to handle the attack. If they armed the *Majestic* they can try going toe-to-toe relying more on their own Potential than their crew for fire support. They can board the enemy vessels and beat the individual crews into submission or they can sail some clever maneuvers in a protracted air battle and fight each ship independently. The tactics are ultimately up to the players and suggestions for stakes are offered below.

LOUD AND LOOSE

In this scenario the players sail a meandering course stopping in every port town and facilitating the spread of more rumors about their cargo. As they head towards the dubious port of Tempest, a lookout will spot a distant vessel that more or less follows at a fixed distance for several bells.

If the Knights order the crew to turn and pursue, the ship runs leading them into an ambush with two other ships as in *Wounded Bird* above. If the Knights ignore it, once in port a horde

of sailors — pirates actually — from two other ships and from the Margit-sympathetic town itself, swarm the docks and attempt to take the *Majestic*. Any crew who went into the town before the attack are likely to be taken prisoner by townspeople loyal to Margit.

In all three versions of the confrontation, there is likely to be fighting and this should be resolved with a play or two. Negotiate whatever you and your players wish, but the author suggests you try to set up the outcomes so that Margit escapes, the players have some prisoners and, best of all, at least one of the Knights is taken prisoner as well.

Basic player’s stakes — 2 card challenge level:

- + The Knights fend off the pirates who retreat. They lose one random card pull/2 crewmembers to the fighting and each Knight takes a minor wound. They also capture a few pirate crew.

Raise the stakes and the challenge level:

- + The Knights capture the huge woman — the one they believe is Margit — and disable all but one of her ships.
- + The Knights capture the *Hawk* herself and in the flagship have a much better armed and formidable vessel.

Basic moderator’s stakes:

- + The Knights win the battle but barely, each taking minor wounds. The pirates realize they are fighting Knights in disguise and dive downwind in an attempt to escape and disappear into the grey clouds below.

Additional counter-stakes:

- + Half the party takes major wounds.
- + A third of the party — determined by drawing random cards from their play decks — are subdued and taken prisoner by Margit’s crew.

INTO TO THE FRONTIER

Assuming Margit and at least some of her crew get away they will head straight for their secret harbor just over the border into the Twilight Frontier and it is a sure bet that the players will follow in fast pursuit.

There are several likely means by which the Knights can track the fleeing pirates. It is possible that the battle is a rout and that the outcomes allow the *Majestic* to keep the bandits in sight by chasing in their wake. There is a chance



that the characters successfully interrogate a prisoner, recover a logbook or find a chart that leads them to Margit's hideout. It is even more likely that one of the players comes up with a clever way to use one of her character's Potential attributes to supernaturally determine the location of the hideout. Such options are limited only by the player's imagination and your discretion. However they want to make it happen, you should call for a play to resolve the chase.

Basic player's stakes — 2 card challenge level:

- ✦ The crew of the *Majestic* is able to follow or otherwise track the pirates into the Twilight Frontier, but the pirates are aware they are being chased and will be ready for an attack.

Raise the stakes and the challenge level:

- ✦ The crew tracks the pirates without revealing their presence and earns a 1 card cache for use in any play where tactical advantage would be a benefit.

Basic moderator's stakes:

- ✦ The crew of the *Majestic* loses sight of the pirates and has trouble reacquiring their wake. They have to resort to Potential powers to track them down and do not reach them before they have retreated into the safety of their hideout.

Additional counter-stakes:

- ✦ The *Majestic* and crew are unprepared for their surprise foray into the Frontier and everyone takes a 1 card hand penalty and the boat earns a 1 card challenge for the cold, dank conditions and lack of adequate lighting.
- ✦ The crew is also frightened by the common tales of doom and death that await those foolish enough to risk the Frontier. They become uncooperative and grant the moderator a 1 card challenge cache when their abilities and dependability are at play.

As described in the full core book text, when characters enter the Twilight Frontier their Potential hand increases to 5 cards as they are significantly closer to the source of the Wind and Potential power than when in the Kingdoms in the Light.

THE ENEMY OF MY ENEMY

If the Knights catch up to the pirates before they reach their hideout, however they come upon them they will be surprised to find the bandits engaged in a running ship battle with a large Child of the Dark dreadnaught. The Children are obviously trying to capture the fleeting pirates as they could easily just blow them out the sky with their superior firepower. They are showing uncharacteristic restraint as they race through the dank, dark, grey haze of squall clouds.

Whether they have the tactical advantage or the pirates — and the Children — know they are there, the Knights have a choice. They can watch the pirates be taken or perhaps destroyed, or they can come to their aid. As the players make this choice it is important to emphasize a couple of things to those unfamiliar with the Upwind setting. First, the Children of the Dark are the Guild's greatest and most dangerous enemy. Second, there is no way that the Knights — even allying with the pirates — are going to be able to take on the massive warship. Their only chance is as sur-

prise attack that distracts the Children just long enough to allow a fast escape into the surrounding clouds.

The best tactic is for the Knights to drop all pretense of being merchants and barrage the Child ship with all the Potential they can bring to bear. Options could include de-masting the Child warship with rending Wind, stunning her crew with a blast of Arc, pounding the deck with torrential Rain or using Ore to deform the vessel's metal fittings — all effectively preventing the enemy crew from maneuvering the dreadnaught.

Basic player's stakes — 1 card challenge level:

- ✦ The Child crew is distracted, occupied or otherwise stunned long enough for the pirate ships to escape.

Raise the stakes and the challenge level:

- ✦ The Knights are also able to slip away and disappear into the surrounding stormclouds.



- ✦ The Child vessel is so badly damaged that the crew of the *Majestic* gets a 1 card cache they can use in any subsequent encounters with the enemy ship.
- ✦ The Knights are able to take a Child officer prisoner during the crazy exchange of Potential powers. The intelligence they might be able to force from him could prove useful.

Basic moderator's stakes:

- ✦ The *Majestic* and surviving pirate ships are all able to get away, but the Child vessel has their measure and one of their officers has a Potential power of her own by which she can effectively track the fleeing vessels. The Chil-

dren of the Dark are coming and somehow the characters can sense this.

Additional counter-stakes:

- ✦ All the Knights take minor wounds in their skirmish with the Children as wild Potential backlash wracks their bodies.
- ✦ One of the Knights takes a major wound and for his next three plays involving Children the player must randomly discard one of his play hand cards before making the play to represent his abject fear of them.
- ✦ The *Majestic* is so badly damaged the Knights and their crew must abandon the ship and join the pirates aboard one of their vessels.

THE DREAD PIRATE'S LAIR

Some time ago Margit and her people discovered a secret refuge inside a frost-covered highland just over the Vaultish border into the Twilight Frontier, and this dangerous location is likely the reason the navy has been unable to find her hideout. The entrance is extremely defensible, hidden behind a frozen icefall and passing along a narrow cleft of a tunnel. The winding passage — navigable by skyships but only at slipping speeds and with retracted masts — leads into a vast underground harbor. The place was obviously once some kind of Master's instillation, but one that was stripped of anything valuable ages ago by unknown scavengers. Between the tight maneuvering and several cannon emplacements bristling along the cliff walls it is obvious that a frontal assault would be suicide.

However the characters enter the hideout, as prisoners, buy infiltration or some combination of the two, they will quickly learn that things are not as they seemed. They will realize the secret refuge is literally a refuge. While there are several captured ships, there are far more kin here than are needed to crew them and most of these are certainly not pirates — elderly peasants, young children, pregnant women and many sick and injured. By the light of the few Arc lamps that dimly illuminate the cavernous interior it is clear that the place is less a pirate hideout and more a marginal refugee camp barely getting by on the precious supplies Margit and her crews are able to capture and share with the displaced kin.

As the players make this realization and you describe the place, pluck at their heartstrings and play up the pathos of the situation. Adult refugees looking at them with suspicion or fear. Grubby, bright-eyed children looking at them with expectation and hope. People are hungry, cold and frightened for their lives and it quickly becomes obvious that they own those lives to, and therefore love, the Dread Pirate Margit.

If the Knights have arrived as victors or infiltrators and therefore have the upper hand, Margit will ask to parley and ultimately surrender herself in exchange for protection for what she refers to as her people. If they arrive as prisoners, it is likely from their use of Potential and the presence of their blades that Margit will know they are actually Explorer Knights. In this case she will not so much negotiate as tell the characters that they will be given a ship and supplies and set free if on their honor as Knights they take the refugees' story to the Guild and bring back help.

Margit's tale is one of loss, sacrifice, nobility and a whole lot of luck. She was once just a bookkeeper who happened to be particularly good at logistics. When her town was raided by the mercenaries the Vaultish parliament laughingly calls its navy she fled with as many survivors as she could muster in an old transport, much akin to the *Majestic*. In desperation they turned to thieving and scored big — mostly by luck — when they raided a commercial warehouse and stole a fast freighter in the process.

With the help of a few retired sailors, she turned the new ship and her refugees into a real crew and began gathering more disenfranchised Vaultish. She harassed shipping and harried the navy — leading them on wild chases to nowhere. She brought food and medicine to plundered villages and gave aid where she could. Her crew, her fleet and her legend grew, and before long

she was the Dread Pirate and was a folk hero all along the Vaultish frontier. She did not hide from the authorities in the haze of fear she instilled in the region, but instead sheltered under the loyalty she has engendered in the common people. Margit has become the only shield between them and the plundering mercenaries.

DREAD PIRATE WHO?

An added layer to this unlikely deception is ultimately the truth about the Dread Pirate Margit's identity itself. When the characters finally meet her, she is an exceptionally large, heavy and heavily muscled woman with crazy flame-red hair and an enormous sword she calls "Finesse." She is one of the biggest kin any of the Knights have ever seen (and that includes Domnell or Bree if anyone is playing either of those pregens) and is a rather ridiculous caricature of a pirate queen.

She is garishly dressed and her face is covered in thick white makeup with orange circles defining her cheeks — all meticulously applied. She is loud, crude, easily distracted and preternaturally jolly — none of which diminish her lethality should the players choose to engage her. Conversing with her however, quickly reveals that she is not particularly clever, leading the Knights to realize there is no way she is the brilliant strategist and tactician that has been plaguing the Vaultish navy and providing for the refugees for almost a full cycle.

Never far from the apparent Dread Pirate's side is a tiny, simply dressed, intense young woman with round spectacles and ink stains on her face and hands. This is the actual Margit and it turns out that she is brilliant. Quiet but keenly observant, she is always thinking. She says little but when she does speak it is always with considerable gravitas. The clever bookkeeper cares deeply for the kin under her care and is constantly plotting the missions and logistics that keeps the camp and crew safe, fed and supplied.

How this revelation plays out depends on the characters. If they try to arrest the false Margit — her real name is Cymbeline — she will continue to play the part, but Margit will eventually be emotionally unable to continue the ruse and give herself up. If the characters decide to help the refugees, the pirate women will continue the ruse in case it proves to their advantage later. The moderator should drop hints as she sees fit or as the roleplaying interactions allow, as the moment the players realize just what's going both in the hideout and with the two Margits is worth the build up.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Maybe Margit is interrogating the characters in a brig surrounded by armed guards. Maybe she is leading them on a tour of the camp as she checks on their charges — the people treating her like a savior. Maybe they are in the makeshift infirmary where she begs one of the characters to use some healing Potential, or maybe they are sitting around a plank and crate table eating a meager meal of porridge, hardtack and the last bottle of the Knights' Vaultish wine. Give the players some time to sort out what they think about the true situation and decide what they are going to do. Roleplay through these inter-

actions. The real Margit will engage the players with strategic, logistical or moral questions while Cymbeline will talk about fighting, how much she loves Margit and perhaps make advances on Domnell or Bree if either is being played — she is a creature of impulse and urges and has never met anyone as large as herself before.

However you stage it, pile Margit's good deeds on top of more good deeds and even the most heartless players should be desperate to help her when the conversations are over. The characters are noble Knights after all, so it shouldn't be that hard to convince them of their duty.

Ultimately, a final decision will be forcibly delayed as in the midst of these deliberations the

Child warship finally catches up with the pirates and begins its assault.

GTFO

However the party and pirates evaded the Children of the Dark dreadnaught, the Children have since made repairs, used their potential to find the hideout, or have simply been taking their time planning the assault. Now however, they have chosen — with a little help from you — the most dramatic moment to attack the pirate refuge. Any pirate sentries might provide a moment's warning but it is the rolling cannon fire from the entrance to the flight tunnel that gets everyone's attention.

The Children are blasting away the ice sheets hiding the harbor entrance and though their ship is too large to enter they are readying launches and deploying troops to the highland. As soon as the ice is cleared they can bring their massive firepower to bear and clog the tunnel with the wreckage of first pirate ship that tries to escape. Though Margit's core crew of pirate-refugees respond quickly by manning the docked vessels and cannon emplacements, it is obvious as the rest of the survivors begin to panic that if the Knights intervene it will be a slaughter if the Children enter the cavern.

Tell the players that Margit looks at them with beseeching eyes, then runs off without a word to help her people. Give them a few short moments to come up with a plan, but do not let them dither. Keep the tension high by describing the attack and the failing defenses — cannon smoke billowing into the cavern, screaming people running, ships pulling away from docks and colliding in their haste, skippers screaming orders no one can hear and of course that one lost child standing alone crying as people run past, too intent or frightened to stop and help. Don't give the party too much time to think and press the players for their reactions.

As the ice falls finally crashes away exposing the gaping entrance and the Children pour from their vessel and flood up the tunnel, call for a play. This final climactic encounter can be resolved as one play or as a series of two or three successive plays, with each set of stakes based on the narrative outcome of the previous play. Encourage your players to make this decision. If they choose a single play, it

needs to be a 3 card challenge level and you should use a cache and some big cards if you have them. If they opt to break the scene down into a series of plays, husband your resources and play whatever cards make each bid most dramatic.

Basic player's stakes — 3 card challenge level:

- + Enough of the refugees manage to get away that the pirates — and the Knights — have to count it as a win.

Raise the stakes and the challenge level:

- + The Child dreadnaught is disabled by the Knights' skilled application of Potential and is forced to retreat. It's officers report to their superiors about the potent abilities of a young band of Explorer Knights and a fearful reputation is born among the enemy.
- + Margit and her crew are so thankful and exhausted, they surrender without resistance to arrest and the brig.
- + The Child dreadnaught is destroyed in an anticlimactic explosion of Potential and the Knights become famous within the Guild for the battle that becomes known as "The Clash of Pirate Rock." They are debriefed by the Order's finest tacticians and their insights become a new chapter in the Academy's *Manual of Skyship Stratagems and Gambits*.

Basic moderator's stakes:

- + The pirates are all but wiped out and most of the refugees are killed or captured and carried off into the Dark by the Children. The Knights survive and escape, but are in no condition to mount a rescue or pursuit. They must therefore live with this tragic failure for the rest of their lives.

Additional counter-stakes:

- + The Knights each take a minor wound.
- + The players all draw a random card from their play decks and the lowest card loses. That player's character takes a mortal wound.



+ One or two characters are chosen at random by similar card draws and are also subdued and taken prisoner. Their fates are ultimately left to the possibility of a sequel to this adventure.

The Q system intentionally allows moderators to push the odds up or down — tweak or fudge — the score they bid against the players. This is a feature of the system and should be exploited to benefit the storytelling. If you want

the players to save the day, bid lower cards, don't play a crowning card and don't use a cache. If you judge that a failure in this instant would allow for a more satisfying session because your players love heartbreaking drama, hit them with your best cards, play and cache whatever you've got and crown away. Let your storytelling instincts and the nature of the players help you make this choice.

AFTERMATH

Roleplay through the aftermath with your group. If they survive and save the refugees what do they report to their superiors? If they choose to do so, how do they protect Dread Margit? What do they report or perhaps even do regarding the Vaultish navy?

Perhaps this adventure could be the introduction to a longer campaign where characters help the 5th fleet pacify the criminal elements of Vault take down the corrupt parliament. Maybe their Guild superiors tell them the Treaties of

the Convocation do not allow them to work against a member nation's government and this becomes a painful and heartbreaking lesson in the corruption of power or the redemption of doing great wrong for a greater good. These characters and their Upwind world are now yours — play on, explore and be heroes.

What to play more Upwind? Character creation, the complete ruleset and a deep, evocative setting await in the full core book — available soon from Biohazard Games and Nocturnal Media.



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This is the quickstart primer for the Upwind rpg from Biohazard Games and Nocturnal Media and is brought to you as a community-building stretch goal by the awesome backers of the original Kickstarter campaign. This document introduces you to the setting and mechanics and offers a ready-to-play adventure. Note that this is a radically simplified version of the Upwind game. The full text of the core book provides numerous rules enhancements, explanations and examples and the setting is a vast and evocative realization of a strange and fantastical world.

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