

# SAILS FULL OF STARS



DON BISDORF

A WORLD OF  
ADVENTURE FOR

**FATE**  
CORE SYSTEM

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Sails Full of Stars

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This is a game where people make up stories about wonderful, terrible,  
impossible, glorious things. All the characters and events portrayed in this  
work are fictional. Any resemblance to real people, sailors, spacefaring  
technology made out of silk and moon rocks, alchemists, Martians, or  
steampunk sailing spaceships is purely coincidental, but kinda hilarious.



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## PROLOGUE

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It's June 15, 1850. You're on Mars. And you're late.

Your rheoship's hold is full of asteroidal ore, precious raw materials that the alchemists and metallurgists of Earth will pay dearly for. Your creditors in Saint Petersburg expect this shipment in fifteen days, and will cancel your debt if you deliver on time. But if you are as much as a day late, they will declare you to be in default, which could result in the seizure of your ship and a long stay in debtor's prison.

You would be on your way to Earth now if your ship's atmosphere refresher hadn't started to fail, forcing you to stop at a Martian port for maintenance. Your crew had nearly completed the repair when the colonial governor announced that the sky harbor was closed, forbidding any ships from landing or departing.

The governor's soldiers claim to be searching for a fugitive, but you've heard crew members of other ships speculate that the governor is simply inventing a pretext to seize cargo and demand bribes. It seems certain that, soon, some impatient captain will defy the soldiers and anti-air guns by making a run for freedom—and as your deadline draws nearer, you wonder if that fleeing ship will be yours.

When a shadow rises into the sky over the port city, you look up to see that someone else has chosen to be the first to test the port's defenses and the governor's wrath. You watch as the rheoship floats free of the sky harbor, its phlogiston-powered propellers humming, as it tries to gain as much altitude as possible before the crews of the anti-air guns receive their orders to fire. But it seems as if those orders will never come, as the rheoship ascends, and the guns remain silent...

Then, a flash—a bright green ray cuts across the sky. Where is it coming from? It looks as if something in the nearby Martian ruins is projecting it—has an eons-old machine of the long-dead Martians reawakened?

The crew of the fleeing rheoship has only a few seconds to ponder the mystery. The green beam slides across the horizon until it strikes the ship, and you hear a whine, almost a scream. The ship's wooden hull turns gray, then black—and then the entire vessel collapses into a cloud of fine dust, dispersing in the thin Martian air.

The killing ray disappears and the port is silent, with only a fading smudge in the sky as evidence that a hundred sailors were just erased from the universe.

You suspect that you are not going to meet your deadline.



## A SEA OF STARS

*Sails Full of Stars* takes place in the middle of a nineteenth century that never happened. It's a world where merchant and military vessels unfurl their sails in the vacuum of space. Engineers construct fantastic machines, and alchemists push the boundaries of chemistry and mortality. Colonists of asteroid belts watch nervously for pirate raiders. And if you're sailing out beyond the orbit of Jupiter, you might catch a glimpse of a dragon swimming through the starry void.

This world can be described as steampunk, where the capabilities of science are much different than in our own world. These leaps of technology have changed the course of history, dividing dominance of the solar system among three Great Powers: the French Empire, the Ottoman Empire, and the Chinese Empire. Each strives to tip the balance of power by establishing extraterrestrial colonies, by investing in technological breakthroughs, and by employing the traditional tools of diplomacy and espionage.

In *Sails Full of Stars*, your characters are traders, naval officers, privateers, pirates, and anyone else seeking adventure throughout the solar system. They might be loyal to one of the Great Powers, or they might be working purely in their own interests. They might be charismatic ship captains, gifted navigators, keen-eyed gunners, or brilliant alchemists.

You'll find rules here for creating a character, with all the skills and stunts you'll need for a game of *Sails Full of Stars*, as well as rules for conducting ship-to-ship battles and boarding actions. You'll also find a sample scenario to get your characters started on their travels through the solar system.



## A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE SOLAR SYSTEM

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1074 – According to Chinese legends, in this year a dragon gives the secret of rheosilk to the scholar-official Shen Kuo. Combining this with his earlier discovery of a lunite deposit near the capital city, Shen Kuo constructs the first rheoship.

1234 – The Mongol invasion forces the Jin dynasty to abandon support of its extraterrestrial colonies. The lunar colonists are able to return to Earth on their own, but the Venusian colonists have no ships capable of a return flight. When China returns to Venus two centuries later, they can find no trace of their lost colony.

1424 – Admiral Zheng He returns from the first successful expedition to harvest gases from Jupiter.

1577 – Taqi ad-Din Muhammad ibn Ma'ruf ash-Shami al-Asadi uses one of the Ottoman Empire's earliest rheoships to observe the passage of the Great Comet of 1577.

1639 – Martine Bertereau and her husband discover a large lunite deposit in France. The French government moves swiftly to exploit this priceless resource, but offers Bertereau no reward. When she demands compensation, the government imprisons both her and her husband, charging them with the crime of witchcraft. Both die in prison.

1665 – The French Extra-Terrestrial Company deposits twenty settlers on Venus, establishing France's first off-planet colony.

1812 – Napoleon's conquests east of Europe come to an end when the engines of his airships falter in the cold of a Russian winter.

1846 – Johann Gottfried Galle leads a French expedition to locate and explore the planet of Neptune, whose existence had previously only been deduced by mathematical prediction.

## THE GREAT POWERS

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### France

France's recent political and scientific revolutions have dramatically improved its fortunes. Napoleon's genius put the resources of Europe under French control, and France's alchemical advancements have extended the range of French ships and the power of French guns. France is therefore enjoying the fruits of a new colonial age, realizing rapid gains in wealth and extraterrestrial territory.

The French government has dismantled the structures of nobility throughout Europe in the name of social equality. In many cases, the government has seized the ancestral lands of these former earls and barons, redistributing the property according to "the needs of the state." This has provoked deep resentment among the ex-nobility, especially as their lands have been given to favored government officials.

France's holdings include all of Europe, from the United Kingdom in the west to Poland in the east. France also controls some territory in North Africa, including Algeria and Morocco.

### The Ottoman Empire

The Ottoman Empire's position as the Earth's greatest political power was dealt a severe blow by Napoleon, and this defeat seems to signal the beginning of the empire's decline. Still, the Empire holds more territory on Earth than either of its rivals, and with its vast resources it is quickly repairing its deficiencies. Though Ottoman ships are not as well designed as Chinese ships, and Ottoman alchemy is not as puissant as French science, Ottoman navigational tools, charts, and techniques are unsurpassed.

Ottoman territory extends from Romania and Egypt in the west to the Punjab in the east.

### China

China was the first nation on Earth to achieve flight beyond Earth's atmosphere. Its extraterrestrial colonies are the oldest and most prosperous, and its rheo-ship crews benefit from centuries-old wisdom and traditions. Unfortunately, China's initial dominance of the heavens led to arrogance, and then to stagnation. They have ignored the progress of the other Earthly powers, and they have neglected their own scientific efforts, allowing the Ottomans and the French to close the technological and colonial gap. China still considers the realms beyond Earth as their sovereign territories, and they regard extraterrestrial expansion by other nations with a mixture of disgust, anger, and horror.

China has directed its energies toward colonizing other planets, not toward conquering its Earthly neighbors. Its borders match those of our own 19th-century China.



# DON'T KNOW WHO TO SERVE?



## SERVE 'EM **ALL!**

**THE GREAT POWERS TRADING POST WANTS YOU**

### The Unconquered

The Age of Princes in Ethiopia is coming to an end as Kassa Hailu restores monarchical control over the divided regions of the country. He will soon find himself in conflict with those who prey on Africa to feed the slave trade.

Having lost its European neighbors to Napoleon's conquests, Russia maintains a wary peace treaty with France.

The United States has remained in the wings of the global stage for now. Though it has the wealth and scientific know-how to become a major player, its internal divisions—possibly encouraged by outside influence—will soon threaten its stability.

Brazil's strong atmospheric navy keeps the fleets of other nations at a safe distance, and their respect for democracy and civil liberties has earned the respect of Europeans and Americans alike.

The French conquest of Britain allowed India to regain its independence. To safeguard its sovereignty, the South Asian power is now trying to develop its own lighter-than-air fleet as quickly as possible.

## BEYOND EARTH

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After centuries of exploration, it's certain that no planet in the solar system is better suited to human life than Earth. Comfortable gravity, breathable air, tolerable temperatures—why would anyone ever leave?

...For wealth, of course. For the lunite deposits of Earth's moon, or the precious gases of Saturn, or the rare ores of Io. For the exotic vegetation of Venus, from which Earth derives miracle cures and fashionable perfumes. For the ruined cities of Mars, which colonists excavate for materials Earth cannot manufacture, and for mysteries that scientists one day hope to solve.

The Great Powers have established colonies throughout the solar system so they can harvest these commodities. Rheoships bring supplies to the inhabitants of these hostile worlds, and return with holds full of riches for their parent empires.

These transport vessels are tempting targets for pirates, who sell captured goods, ships, and even prisoners in accommodating ports on Earth and elsewhere. The Great Powers send out naval patrols to protect friendly vessels, and contract privateers to hunt for unprotected ships belonging to their rivals.

### The Rheus

The rheus is an invisible force that permeates all space. Most matter is unaffected by the rheus, but rheoresistant materials react as if the rheus were a moving fluid. Picture a piece of driftwood dropped into a fast-moving river. The river will sweep the driftwood along in the direction of its current. When the river empties into a lake, the current slows, and the driftwood slows as well. The rheus acts in the same fashion as the river, accelerating or decelerating the rheoresistant object until it is moving at a given speed and direction, depending on the local rheus characteristics.

Note, though, that the rheus does not provide buoyancy or lift; instead, rheoships use a counter-gravitational material known as lunite to achieve flight. Once a ship is free of the bonds of gravity, it can harness rheus forces with its rheosilk sails to carry the craft where it needs to go.

The rheus has different layers, referred to as “pitches.” The rheus at one pitch might seek to move objects northward quickly, whereas the rheus at another pitch might move objects eastward slowly. These forces vary from location to location, and they change over time. Through extensive measurement and calculation, space travelers have learned to chart and forecast patterns of rheus forces across the solar system.

A ship's mainsails are tuned to a pitch known to produce high velocities, while the keelsails are tuned to a pitch that produces low velocities. The mainsails generate acceleration; the keelsails generate drag. Changing the orientation of these sails allows the ship to change directions and to tack, much as an ocean-going vessel does.

## Venus

Beneath its oppressive clouds, Venus is hot and humid, uninhabitable by humans near the equator, but endurable at other latitudes. Most of the planet's land masses are covered with thick jungles, whose canopies can reach thousands of feet above ground. These upper canopies are knit so tightly that colonists have not bothered to explore underneath, instead choosing to build their homes and storehouses on platforms constructed across sturdy branches.

The indigenous organisms of Venus are not friendly to humans. Most plants are poisonous, most animals are venomous, and the jungles generate an array of deadly, contagious illnesses. Venusian residents and visitors rely on alchemical treatments to keep them well, but Venus seems to devise new ailments as fast as doctors can devise cures.

## Mars

Ancient ruins scattered across the barren surface of Mars are evidence of a great civilization that rose and fell eons before human eyes first saw the light of the Red Planet. The Great Powers establish colonies near these ruins so their colonists can harvest exotic materials from the deserted cities, while state-sponsored scientists study the mysteries of the lost Martians.

## Jupiter

The gaseous depths of Jupiter are rich in the raw materials needed to produce valuable alchemical products. To harvest these materials, specially designed “gas drinker” ships dive into Jupiter's clouds, scoop and filter the polychromatic gases there, and climb back up to safety. Gas refineries in orbit wait to receive and process these gases, then render out the precious elements to supply Earth's alchemists. Working on a gas drinker is risky, but the profits can be substantial.

## Europa

Jupiter's icy moon is the home of the Winter Palace, home away from home for France's government officials. For two months out of the year, the important elements of the French government relocate here, ostensibly to be closer to France's critical gas refineries. More likely is that Europa is far less crowded and far less accessible than Paris, which allows visiting officials to pursue their recreations with more privacy than on Earth.

## Io

Currently, France has exclusive control over Io and her rich mineral deposits. The moon's atmosphere is violent and unbreathable, and most French mines here are crewed by prison laborers who live in underground shelters.

## Fortuna

This hollowed-out asteroid is a port unclaimed by any government. It provides supplies, repair facilities, and various forms of entertainment to pirates, privateers, and private merchants. Fortuna's governor is a man commonly called "the Pasha," though he also uses the name Mahmud. Through diplomacy and deals, he has kept Fortuna neutral and relatively safe. His four wives provide the financial savvy to keep Fortuna profitable, living in luxurious seclusion with their arithmetic mills and the Pasha's ledgers.

## Dragons

Vast space-going creatures, dragons are encountered only rarely by travelers from Earth. Their wings are rheoresistant, providing them propulsion in space. They are telepathic and possess knowledge far beyond human understanding. The reaction an Earth vessel might receive upon being discovered by a dragon is unpredictable. Some dragons might ignore it, some might pause for conversation, and some might destroy it with only the merest effort. The Chinese regard dragons with reverence; the Ottomans believe that dragons are a menace to be exterminated; the French regard dragons as a marvelous scientific curiosity.

The truth—unknown to any human being—is that dragons have inhabited our solar system for millions of years. An individual dragon might live as long as a hundred centuries. They have no gender; instead, they reproduce asexually by laying eggs on suitable planets. A dragon might lay a single egg during the course of its life, two if it is particularly prolific. These eggs, which resemble purplish-pink iridescent stones three feet in diameter, gestate for centuries before hatching. The young dragon will immediately seek the freedom of the vacuum, where it will grow by feeding off the subtle energies of the cosmos.

There are close to thirty dragons in our solar system currently, and though they remain physically separated, they can communicate telepathically from opposite sides of the system. They spend their long lives observing the universe, giving them scientific knowledge far beyond the dreams of humanity. Their attitude toward humans varies from amusement and curiosity to annoyance and hostility. Most avoid humans when possible—there are more significant topics to hold their attention—but a few have decided to play a game amongst themselves by interfering with human culture. The gift of rheosilk to humanity was but an early move in this game, which may take a millennium or more to play out.

## SCIENCE

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### Lunite (Moonstone)

The anti-gravitational properties of lunite have been known to humanity since before written history. The substance acquired the name “moonstone” because of the mistaken belief that the moon must have been made entirely of the material; after all, what else could possibly keep the moon from falling to Earth? This misconception persists today among the undereducated, reinforced by the discovery of rich lunite deposits on the moon, though they make up an insignificant fraction of the moon’s total mass.

### Phlogiston

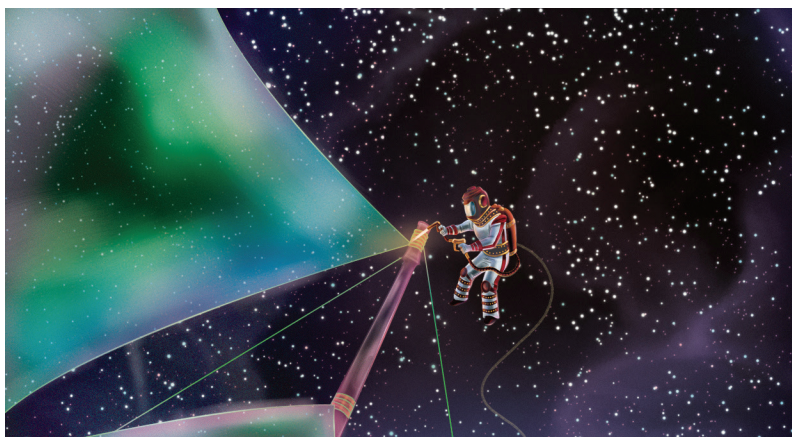
The process for producing phlogiston gas was one of alchemy’s earliest triumphs. Highly compressible and flammable, phlogiston can be used as a compact and energetic fuel for combustion engines. The gas is pale green and, when ignited, produces a green fire.

### Prometheum (Black Fire, Gun Oil)

Prometheum is an ore that is scarce on Earth but more abundant on other extraterrestrial bodies. It combusts in powder form, and when alchemically refined into an oil, it is a potent explosive. Modern artillery and personal firearms use oil of prometheum as propellant.

### Rheosilk

The Chinese were the first to learn the process for manufacturing rheosilk. Chinese legend states that the formula was given to an early aerial explorer by a benevolent dragon. Within Earth’s atmosphere, air resistance is sufficient to cancel the influence of the rheus upon rheosilk; in the vacuum, though, rheosilk sails can propel spacegoing vessels at prodigious speed.





## NEW SKILLS AND STUNTS

Use the skill list from *Fate Core* for *Sails Full of Stars*, but remove the Drive skill and add two new skills: Alchemy and Sail.

### Alchemy

Alchemy is the science of combining materials and chemicals in order to produce other materials and chemicals with new properties. Alchemists can produce poisonous gases, potent acids, healing elixirs, luminescent fluids, and other useful mixtures. They cannot achieve true transmutation, such as transforming lead into gold, though many frauds are willing to sell fictional techniques for accomplishing this.

Alchemy is also the study of biological processes, including health, illness, aging, and recovery. All modern medical treatment requires the practice of alchemy. Even the preparation of folk remedies and botanical cures is a basic form of alchemy. Competent diagnosis and treatment of ailments requires specialized study, so characters must have the Doctor stunt (page 13) if they wish to help others recover from physical consequences.

#### ALCHEMY IN PRACTICE

To create an alchemical mixture, an alchemist needs access to three things:

- Tools: flasks, burners, pipes, and retorts.
- Materials: liquids, powders, metals, and crystals.
- Time: Anywhere from a few minutes (to produce a simple acid) to several years (to produce a breakthrough in alchemical science). Typically, an alchemist can produce a simple alchemical mixture—such as a one-use gas bomb or a vial of antivenom—in less than an hour.

To set the difficulty of an Alchemy roll, consider not only the magnitude of the task to be accomplished, but also the tools, materials, and time available. When a character must work with a limited set of tools, or with poor quality materials, or in a rush, increase the difficulty.



**Overcome:** You can use Alchemy to overcome a variety of obstacles where alchemical knowledge would be useful. For instance, you could mix an acid to dissolve a sturdy lock, or you could determine the components of an unknown alchemical mixture. Alchemy is useful for overcoming medical obstacles as well, and it can be used to remove aspects of a medical nature.



**Create an Advantage:** When you have alchemical supplies and tools on hand, you can create advantages. For instance, you could mix a gas and release it into a guardhouse, leaving the soldiers inside *Quite Sleepy*. Or you could distill an elixir which gives an ally *Liquid Courage*.

In addition, you can provide your allies with mixtures, which they can later use to create advantages on their own. When your ally uses the mixture, you roll Alchemy to create the desired aspect. Your ally might need to roll to deliver the mixture, such as Shoot to throw a flask or Stealth to pour a vial into someone's drink.

If you wish to create alchemical weapons, such as acids or explosives, you can do so by creating an advantage. You or your allies could then use the free invokes granted by the advantage you created to improve their attacks.



**Attack:** You cannot use Alchemy to attack directly. If you wish to apply your alchemical knowledge and supplies to damage a specific obstacle—for instance, trying to dissolve a sealed metal box—that is better represented as an overcome action.



**Defend:** You cannot normally use Alchemy to defend.

## Alchemy Stunts

**I've Drunk Worse:** You've grown accustomed to toxic fumes and chemical burns. You can use Alchemy to defend against attacks and aspects involving poisons, toxins, and other chemicals.

**Doctor:** Your alchemical studies include treating the ailments of the human body. You can roll Alchemy to allow another character to begin recovering physical consequences. Characters who have Alchemy at Average (+1) or higher can provide you with teamwork bonuses on recovery rolls, even if they don't have the Doctor stunt.



## Sail

The practice of sailing a rheoship requires competence in reading navigational charts, using instruments to determine one's position in the solar system, measuring the local rheus currents, and setting the sails to produce the desired course and speed.



**Overcome:** While you are navigating a rheoship, the GM may ask you to roll an overcome action to determine how quickly the vessel arrives at its destination. This roll can be modified by stunts belonging to the navigator and by the ship itself.

If you fail an overcome roll with Sail and want to succeed at a cost, you can choose to damage the ship as your cost. In this case you're pushing the ship past its limits, causing its structure or mechanisms to suffer. By default, a minor cost produces a situation aspect, such as *Engine Stalled Out*, and a major cost produces a consequence, such as *Torn Mainsails*.



**Create an Advantage:** A ship's navigator can roll Sail to put the vessel in an advantageous position relative to an enemy vessel. The enemy's navigator actively opposes this roll by using Sail. See *Rheoship Combat* on page 28 for more information on this.



**Attack:** You can use Sail to try to ram an enemy vessel, as described in *Rheoship Combat*.



**Defend:** A ship's navigator can defend with Sail against Shoot or Sail attacks made by enemy vessels, or against enemy Sail rolls used to create an advantage.

## Sail Stunts

**Superior Tactics:** When it comes to naval battles, you've seen every trick in the book. +2 when actively opposing Sail rolls to create positional aspects.

**Second Star to the Right:** Charts and arithmetic mills will never replace the instincts of a good navigator. +2 to Sail overcome rolls to improve the speed of a journey.

## Other Skills and Stunts

Several *Fate Core* skills have additional uses in *Sails Full of Stars*, as listed below. We also give a few sample stunts.

### Athletics

Characters with higher Athletics will have an easier time getting around in zero-gravity environments.

**No Gravity? No Problem:** While in zero gravity, you receive +2 to any roll to move between zones or to move extra zones in a single action.

**Freefall Wrestling:** While in zero gravity, you can use Athletics instead of Fight to make unarmed, hand-to-hand attacks against an opponent.

### Crafts

Ship crews use Crafts to maintain and repair their vessels.

**A Finely Tuned Machine:** When you stack an advantage by invoking one of your engineering-related aspects, and give it to an ally using your ship's equipment to perform an action, you grant that ally a +3 bonus instead of the usual +2.

**Miracle Worker:** Once per session, after you succeed on a Crafts roll to begin recovering a ship's consequence when outside combat, you can spend a fate point to immediately remove the consequence.

### Deceive

The art of deception can be a useful—if not necessarily honorable—talent for a ship's captain.

**Subtle Signaling:** By understanding the relationship between lantern signals and the hexagrams of the I Ching, you can construct signals that carry hidden significance. To understand the hidden message, an observer must have the Subtle Signaling stunt or must successfully overcome with Lore, opposed by your Deceive.

**The Finest Snake Oil:** You've learned enough scientific jargon to convince people that the flasks of colored vinegar you're selling are elixirs of youth or miracle cure-alls. +2 to Deceive while trying to convince someone that you've produced a remarkable feat of alchemy.

## Lore

Though modern weapons have transformed the face of warfare, the insights of past battlefield masters such as Sun Tzu and Carl von Clausewitz are critical for the education of any commander.

**Eightfold Formation:** From your study of battle formations, you know how to arrange your troops for any situation. During crew combat, you can use Lore instead of Will to benefit units under your command. See the *Fate System Toolkit* (page 167) for a list of these benefits.

**Empty Fort Strategy:** Your knowledge of armies and warfare allows you to construct a convincing illusion on the battlefield. You can use Lore instead of Deceive to create a plausible but untrue situation aspect on a zone. Creating this aspect requires enough time before the enemy arrives to arrange the scene appropriately—creating false tracks, propping up rifles in windows, and so forth.

For instance, you might place *Well Garrisoned* on an empty building, or *Bristling with Traps* on an otherwise ordinary road. Enemies who see your illusion attempt to overcome using Notice, with a difficulty equal to the shifts of your Lore roll used to create the illusion. Any enemies who fail this action will believe the aspect is true, and will act accordingly.

## Notice

An experienced commander looking down on a battlefield will see more than blood and chaos. A true strategist will see opportunities, weaknesses, and—above all—the guiding hand of the opposing general.

**We Have Already Won:** Before a physical conflict begins, if you have advance knowledge of the area in which the battle will take place, and you have the opportunity to discuss tactics with allies, you can use Notice to create an aspect on a single zone without actually being there. This aspect represents the benefits of planning and scouting, such as *Coordinated Ambush* or *We'll Hold Them At This Pass*. You can use this stunt for crew battles and for conflicts between individual characters.

**It's A Trap!:** +2 to Notice to detect hidden aspects, such as *Concealed Trenches* or *Snipers Watching*, on any zone you can see.

## Provoke

Fear and anger can be effective tools for driving a crew to perform extraordinary feats.

**Have At Them, You Dogs!:** You keep your troops motivated in combat by bellowing a constant stream of colorful, inventive, and multi-lingual insults. You can use Provoke instead of Will to benefit units under your command during crew combat. See the *Fate System Toolkit* (page 167) for a list of these benefits.



**Iron Grip:** Your crew is too afraid of you to keep any secrets from you. You can use Provoke instead of Empathy to detect changes in the crew's mood or to discover any secrets or plots the crew is hiding from you.

## Rapport

A charismatic leader can remove a crew's fear, doubts, and fatigue with a few well-chosen words.

**Follow Me To Glory!:** You are an inspiring presence on the battlefield. You can use Rapport instead of Will to benefit units under your command during crew combat. See the *Fate System Toolkit* (page 167) for a list of these benefits.

**Good Show!:** When you show approval of a job well done, you encourage your allies to achieve greater success. Once per scene, if an ally successfully creates an advantage, you can grant another free invoke on the same aspect if you are close enough to issue encouragement or congratulations. This does not require an action.

## Shoot

Napoleon himself started as an artillery officer, and used the firepower of his cannons to devastate his enemies.

**Hit Them Where It Hurts:** When you successfully attack a rheship, you choose—rather than the defender—whether the ship must absorb the attack with ship consequences or crew conditions. The target chooses which specific consequences or conditions to use.

**Warning Shots:** a well-timed volley of cannon fire can discourage enemy ships. Once per exchange, you can use Shoot to oppose an enemy ship's attempt to create a position aspect against any ship.

## Will

A ship's captain must be decisive and determined, or else risk losing the faith of the crew.

**Master and Commander:** Once per scene, when your crew or battle unit performs a single action under your command, you can substitute your Will for any skill the crew or unit would have used. This Will roll cannot be improved with teamwork bonuses.

**One With the Ship:** Your sweat and blood keeps the ship going in the worst circumstances. When the ship would take a consequence, your character can instead choose to take an equivalent consequence.

## RHEOSHIPS

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In atmosphere, the rheosails do not propel the ship. Air turbulence would damage the sails, and rheus forces are weak compared to planetary gravity. Instead, phlogiston-powered propellers provide the necessary thrust to maneuver the vessel while in atmosphere. When the propellers are in use, the sail masts and spars fold back along the ship's hull, collapsing the rheosails to keep them safe.

Since rheus forces alone cannot free a rheoship from a planet's gravity, a ship always carries enough lunite in ballast chests to cancel the ship's weight, plus additional lunite to compensate for cargo. Ideally, this leaves a ship with negative weight. The contents of these ballast chests are frequently more valuable than any other commodities the ship might carry, not only because lunite is rare and expensive, but also because entering any significant gravity well without lunite ballast would end in a fatal crash.

In order to land, a rheoship uses its propellers to maneuver close to the ground, where it releases mooring lines. Harbor crew then secure these lines to mooring posts or any available stable point. Once the ship is fixed, the ship's crew deploys the landing struts, then retracts the mooring lines, lowering the ship until it is held down firmly atop its landing struts.

Neither the sails nor the propellers are appropriate for making small adjustments in position, as might be necessary to bring two vessels close together without colliding. For these precise movements, rheoships use small jets of ignited phlogiston. These produce only small amounts of thrust, so they are useless for interplanetary travel.

A ship's navigation equipment includes an arithmetic mill attached to an armillary sphere, used to calculate the positions of planets and moons and to work out orbits and trajectories. Navigators also use glass spheres containing rheoresistant chemicals for sounding, the process of measuring rheus forces at various pitches to find favorable currents and to forecast rheostorms.

Large rheoships may carry cutters, which are small pressurized craft propelled by phlogiston jets. Sailors use cutters to carry passengers and environment-sensitive cargo. A single pilot is sufficient to operate a cutter, and the craft can transport up to ten passengers in comfort or twenty passengers shoulder-to-shoulder. Smaller vessels do not carry cutters, so their sailors must use pressure suits whenever leaving their vessel or transferring cargo in vacuum.

Rheoships only experience gravity while they are within a planet's gravity well. When in orbit or drifting, they are in freefall. Rheus currents provide acceleration, which tends to push crew and cargo toward the stern of the vessel. To deal with these inconsistent forces, sailors install ropes and handholds throughout the vessel, which let them to get from place to place regardless of which direction is "down."



The gun decks are double-hulled. Prometheus-powered cannons protrude from the inner hull, with any gaps between the barrel and hull sealed with flexible rubber. Nearby each cannon is a reinforced glass aiming port. Shutters in the outer hull conceal the cannon barrels and the aiming ports, presenting a peaceful appearance when the ship is not in combat.

Ships communicate with each other and with harbor facilities by using chemical lanterns, which produce flashes of light bright enough to be seen in daylight. These lanterns were first used by Chinese sailors, who devised the signaling language that sailors of all nations have now used for centuries. This language is best suited for communicating ship-related concepts, such as navigation instructions, requests for assistance, or the status of ship's equipment, but in experienced hands it can also express a wide array of subtler concepts.

## A SAILOR'S LIFE

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### Common Equipment

A pressure suit is the most important piece of equipment a crewman owns. Pressure suits are made of alchemically treated leather, with rubber joints and metal seals. Helmets are large, rectangular metal cages set with reinforced glass viewports. Built-in cylinders of air refreshment chemicals maintain the oxygen concentration and temperature. Small chemical bubbles built into the helmet visually indicate the air quality and pressure outside the suit. When in vacuum, speaking to a comrade is only possible by touching helmets together so that the metal and glass conducts the vibration of your speech. Since radio technology is unknown, crewmen must use hand signals to communicate at a distance.

In places where the atmosphere is merely thin—such as on the deserts of Mars—a crewman can leave the pressure suit behind and instead use a breathing mask. A tube runs from the mask to a cylinder of air refreshment chemicals, usually worn on a belt. These chemicals are effervescent and produce a faint but continuous bubbling sound when working correctly. For this reason, crewmen refer to air refreshment cylinders as “bubblers” or “soda bottles.”

For personal defense, the most common sidearm is a repeating pistol, a semi-automatic weapon with a magazine of shells mounted in front of the trigger. Simply opening a hole in an enemy's pressure suit will be either fatal or likely to consume the attention of the suit's occupant, though, so many crewmen also like to carry piercing or cutting weapons such as knives, light swords, or axes.

### Extraterrestrial Environments

The conditions on the planets and moons beyond Earth, and in the measureless void of space, are inconvenient to humans—that is, when they are not downright hostile. Most often, treat these hazards as situation aspects, such as *Hard Vacuum* or *Poisonous Mists*. You can compel these aspects to create complications at dramatically appropriate moments, such as: “Because you are lost in the *Plague-Filled Jungles of Venus*, it makes sense that you would develop a *Mysterious Dizziness*. You're going to want to get to an alchemist as soon as possible.”

You can also use the local environment as inspiration when choosing consequences, as in: “She shot me for a 3-shift hit, so I'll take *Slow Leak in My Pressure Suit* as a moderate consequence.”

## Sky Harbors

A sky harbor is a flat, clear area of land with marked squares—known as “slips”—where rheoships can land and moor. When approaching a sky harbor, a rheoship uses its signal lanterns to request landing permission from the harbormaster’s tower. The tower will respond by directing the ship to an empty slip. At small harbors, this is a straightforward operation. At larger harbors, with dozens of ships approaching or departing at any given time, careful coordination between pilots and the harbormaster is necessary to avoid disaster. Difficult conditions such as fog or storms can make safe landing impossible; in these cases, harbormasters typically put a halt to all traffic unless an emergency arises.

## Asteroids

Though navigators have recorded the orbits of hundreds of asteroids, millions more do not appear on any charts. When a ship travels to the asteroid mining colonies, the vigilance of its lookouts is as important as the sure hand of its navigator. A mile-wide rock appearing suddenly from the darkness can put a quick end to a simple ore-hauling voyage.

Even with all this danger—or perhaps because of it—an uncharted asteroid is a perfect place to hide something. Pirates use asteroids for hideouts and treasure caches, and the Great Powers use them for secret lookout stations and supply posts.

## Rheostorms

A rheostorm is a violent disturbance of the rheus, usually lasting anywhere from an hour to a day, though some rare storms have raged for a full week. Appearing as complex ripples of purple light, rheostorms are harmless to most physical objects, but interact violently with rheoresistant materials such as a ship’s rheosails. When a rheostorm approaches, ships typically retract their sails and coast along on momentum until the storm passes. If a ship’s sails are up when a storm hits, the force of the storm can throw the ship off course, bend the masts, or shred the sails. A skilled crew can attempt to ride out the storm with their sails up, but the risk is rarely worthwhile.

Rheostorms are large enough to engulf planets, though only ships in orbit would be endangered. Strong gravitational forces cancel the effects of a rheostorm, protecting ships closer to the planet’s surface. Well-equipped sky harbors use their own sounding equipment to watch for coming rheostorms and will issue warnings when appropriate.



## RHEOSHIPS AS CHARACTERS

Rheoships have aspects, skills, and stunts, just like regular characters. If the players start the game in command of—or serving aboard—their own ship, take some time to discuss the ship's origins and history so you can decide what statistics to assign it.

Rheoships come in three sizes: small, medium, and large. A ship with no stunts is considered small, which means that it carries 20 guns and 100 crew, and up to 300 tons of cargo. To increase a ship's size, take the Medium Ship and Large Ship stunts (page 23). For every step in size difference between two ships, the larger ship receives +1 to attack and defend against the smaller ship in combat.

### Rheoship Aspects

Every rheoship has a **high concept** and a **crew aspect**. The high concept is a brief description of the ship as a whole, such as *Poorly Repaired Merchantman* or *Intimidating French Warship*. The crew aspect describes the makeup and personality of the crew, such as *Merciless Pirate Scum* or *Patriotic but Inexperienced*.

A vessel controlled by the players starts with 3 additional aspects, for a total of 5. Important NPC vessels may also have additional aspects in proportion to the significance of the vessel to the story.

### Rheoship Skills

Skills associated with a rheoship represent the proficiencies of its crew. Choose these skills *only* from the following list:

<b>Athletics</b>	<b>Notice</b>	<b>Shoot</b>
<b>Craft</b>	<b>Provoke</b>	<b>Stealth</b>
<b>Fight</b>	<b>Sail</b>	<b>Will</b>

For an NPC vessel, use the guidelines in *Fate Core* (page 214) for giving skills to nameless NPCs. Don't use the guidelines for supporting and main NPCs; only use those guidelines when making important non-ship NPCs.

For the starting PC ship, give it the skill levels for an Average, Fair, or Good nameless NPC, depending on what makes sense for your story.

When the ship's crew performs a task, use the crew's skill rank. However, if a character takes direct command of the crew while they're performing the task, use the character's skill rank instead. In this case, the character must participate in the task alongside the crew, and the character cannot contribute to any other tasks simultaneously. Only one character can take command of a given task at once, and other characters cannot provide teamwork bonuses.

## Rheoship Stunts

Stunts represent special equipment aboard ship or innate features of the ship itself. A ship controlled by the players gets 1 free stunt. Rheoships do not have fate points or refresh.

**Medium Ship:** This is a frigate-sized ship, carrying 40 guns, with a capacity of 250 crew members and 750 tons of cargo.

**Large Ship:** This is a ship of the line, carrying 80 guns, with a capacity of 600 crew members and 1800 tons of cargo. This ship is also large enough to carry two phlogiston-jet cutter boats. To purchase this stunt, the ship must already have the Medium Ship stunt.

**Fine Sails:** High-quality rheosilk provides better resistance to the rheus, which produces higher maximum speed. The ship's navigator gains +2 to Sail when determining travel times or racing other vessels.

**Maneuverable:** The mechanisms operating the ship's sails have been improved. The crew gains +2 to Sail rolls to gain or remove positional aspects during combat.

**Long Guns:** Lengthened barrels and expanded prometheum chambers extend the range of the ship's guns. As long as the ship can maintain an *At Long Range* aspect between itself and its opponent, it gains an ongoing +2 to defend against attacks from that opponent. The *At Long Range* aspect can still be invoked as normal.

**Chain Shot:** Firing lengths of chain from the ship's guns gives a better chance of inflicting serious damage to enemy sails. The ship gains +2 to Shoot when attempting to create a negative aspect on a target representing damaged sails.

**False Hull:** Cleverly built into the ship's structure, this hidden space can store a small amount of cargo, less than 5% of the ship's total cargo tonnage. Add +2 to the opposition to any attempts to find the hidden cargo.

**Ramming Prow:** A reinforced, sharply pointed prow allows the ship to deliver a ramming attack while minimizing harm to itself. When delivering a ramming attack, the ship receives +2 to defend itself against the damage from this attack. See *Rheoship Combat* (page 28) for more information on this.

## Rheoship Milestones

If your characters own or serve aboard a ship, the ship gets a milestone when the characters do. The rheoship milestone is like a character milestone, with two exceptions:

First, rheoships do not have refresh. At any major milestone, one player may spend a point of refresh to buy a single stunt for the ship.

Second, the skill cap for the ship's crew is always one rank below the skill cap for the characters.

## PLANETARY TRAVEL

To determine the travel time between two points in the solar system, use the following chart:

	Mercury	Venus	Earth	Mars	Asteroid Belt	Jupiter	Saturn	Uranus	Neptune	Same Orbit
Mercury	-	6/1	10/1	13/1	16/1	20/1	25/1	27/1	30/1	6/1
Venus	6/1	-	10/2	13/2	16/2	20/2	25/2	27/2	30/2	12/1
Earth	10/1	10/2	-	13/2	16/2	20/2	25/2	27/2	30/2	10/1
Mars	13/1	13/2	13/2	-	16/3	20/3	25/3	27/3	30/3	26/1
Asteroid Belt	16/1	16/2	16/2	16/3	-	20/4	25/4	27/4	30/4	1-32/1
Jupiter	20/1	20/2	20/2	20/3	20/4	-	25/5	27/5	30/5	40/1
Saturn	25/1	25/2	25/2	25/3	25/4	25/5	-	27/6	30/6	50/1
Uranus	27/1	27/2	27/2	27/3	27/4	27/5	27/6	-	30/7	54/1
Neptune	30/1	30/2	30/2	30/3	30/4	30/5	30/6	30/7	-	60/1

Cross-reference the two planets you're traveling between. If your origin or destination is not listed, use the planet or orbit closest to it. The number before the slash is the base travel time in days, and the number after the slash is the variance. This variance represents ever-changing influences such as orbital positions and rheus forces.

Roll four Fate dice, multiply the die roll by the variance number, and add the result to the base time to get the expected travel time.

After resupplying in Peking, you've received orders to guard Chinese gas-drinker vessels around Jupiter. Consulting the chart, you see that the base travel time from Earth to Jupiter is 20 days, with a variance of 2 days. You pick up the dice and roll -2. Multiplying this by the variance of 2 days gives -4 days, and subtracting 4 days from the base travel time gives an expected travel time of 16 days. You'll be staring into the great red eye of Jupiter in about two and a half weeks.

Moving between a planet and its moon, or between moons belonging to the same planet, has a base time of 24 hours with a variance of 1 hour.

When moving between two distant points in the same orbit, such as two different asteroids in the asteroid belt, use the last column of the chart. To represent the distance between the two points, choose a base travel time between 1 day and 32 days, the listed base travel time, then roll against a variance of 1 day to represent shifting rheus forces. The minimum travel time after adjusting for variance is 1 day. A travel time of 32 days means that the two points are on opposite sides of the solar system.

A little math will show that these times aren't proportional to the actual distances between the planets. The chart isn't meant to represent real-world distances; it's meant to produce travel times consistent with the fiction and flavor of the setting. You can blame any apparent discrepancy on the peculiarities of rheus forces.

The ship's navigator can accept the ship's travel time as is, or can attempt to hasten the ship's arrival by charting a new course, rolling Sail against a Mediocre (+0) difficulty. Failure indicates that the new course was poorly planned, and increases the travel time by one-third. On a tie, the travel time increases by one-fifth. For a success, use the same travel time, and on a success with style, decrease the travel time by one-third. The modified travel time is final and will only change due to circumstances outside the players' control, such as a rheostorm or a pirate ambush.





## CREW

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### Crew Actions

The ship's crew includes general hands as well as officers who fill any roles the PCs haven't. The crew can perform any ship duty on their own, including navigating and plotting courses, operating the sails and guns, repairing damage, keeping lookout, operating signal lanterns, transferring cargo, and so forth. When the crew performs a task on their own, they roll actions using their own skill rank.

If a PC takes direct command of the crew to perform a specific task, roll using the PC's skill rank. In these cases, the PC must be actively involved in the task alongside the crew. The crew can perform any reasonable number of tasks at the same time, with or without PC leadership, but any one PC may only take command of one task at a time.

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Bailey orders the ship's guns to fire. He decides to lead the gun crew, so he uses his own Shoot rank instead of the crew's Shoot rank. Shortly after, the ship is damaged by return fire, and Bailey wants to lead the repair effort. To do this, he gives up command of the gun crew. When the guns are fired again, the crew operates the guns, using their own Shoot rank.

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You may wish to invent names and backgrounds for some NPC crew members, but you don't need to choose skills for these characters—they have the skills and skill ranks as the rest of the crew.

### Crew Combat

When running battles with large portions of the crew, such as ship-to-ship boarding actions, use the mass combat rules from the *Fate System Toolkit* (page 163) with the modifications in this section.

At the start of the battle, divide friendly and enemy forces into units of equal size, such as five or ten combatants per unit. Create enough units so that each player can command at least one unit, but without creating too many units to track easily. If the units have fewer than five combatants each, run the battle as a normal conflict, not a mass combat, and group nameless NPCs together using the mob rules from *Fate Core* (page 216).

Next, determine the statistics for each unit. Units composed of ship's crew will have the skills and the crew aspect associated with their ship. For non-crew units, just assign skills as appropriate using the templates for nameless NPC's. Units have no stress boxes and 1 mild consequence. If you're using maps or other props, use a two-sided counter to represent each unit. When a unit takes a mild consequence, flip the counter over. When it is taken out, remove the counter from the battlefield.



During the battle, you can combine units into groups. A group of units acts as a single unit, combining their skills using the teamwork rules from *Fate Core* (page 174). The entire group can benefit from having a leader as if it were a single unit. However, if you roll Will to remove a consequence from your troops, remove a consequence from one unit in your group, not from all the units in your group.

Multiple characters can attach themselves to a unit group, but only one attached character can serve as the group's leader. Attached characters who are not leaders can invoke their aspects on behalf of their unit, and can engage enemy leaders in single combat, but they cannot perform any of the other functions of a leader.

Units use Fight to attack enemies in the same zone, and use Shoot to attack enemies in distant zones. Attacked units defend against Fight with Fight or Athletics, and defend against Shoot with Athletics. When a group takes shifts from a successful attack, the player controlling the group chooses how to assign those shifts among the comprising units and attached characters.

A unit cannot prevent another unit from entering its zone. However, a unit entering a zone with an enemy unit cannot leave that zone until the next exchange. Also, whenever a zone contains opposing units, any of those units can overcome using Fight to move an enemy unit into an adjacent zone. The target can oppose this action with Fight or Athletics.

At the end of the combat, take note of which units are uninjured, injured, and taken out. After combat, injured units immediately recover and become available for duty. If any crew members are taken out, each character with the Doctor stunt can roll Alchemy once against a Mediocre (+0) difficulty to attempt to prevent the crew members from dying. Characters with Alchemy at Average (+1) or higher can provide teamwork bonuses to these rolls, even without the Doctor stunt. Each shift preserves the life of ten crew members. Any crew members who were taken out and not healed with Alchemy will perish.

## RHEOSHIP COMBAT

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### Running the Conflict

Before combat begins, each ship's navigator must roll Sail to create an aspect indicating its position relative to the other vessels. For example:

- *The Asteroid Is Between Us*
- *We Have the Weather Gage*
- *Closing to Gun Range*

The navigator may be any PC or NPC crew member who is on or near the bridge of the ship at the beginning of the conflict. To determine the order that the ships create their aspects, compare the Notice ranks of the navigators, just as you would to determine turn order during a normal exchange. When declaring each aspect, state which ships it affects. Each of these ships can actively oppose this attempt by rolling Sail.

You may wish to use index cards to represent individual ships and positional aspects. For a positional aspect between two ships—such as *In the Pirate's Blind Spot*—place a card between them, drawing arrows as desired to show motion or targeting. For one that affects multiple opponents—such as *We're Leaving Them Far Behind*—place the card near the ship creating the aspect and note on the card which ships it affects.

Certain activities can only occur once per ship in each exchange: **maneuvers**, **repairs**, **gunnery**, and **signaling**. All four of these activities can occur simultaneously. The PCs can directly command any of these activities, one activity per PC, or the crew can execute any number of these activities on their own, as described in the “Crew Actions” section. When the crew performs an activity on their own, use their own Notice to determine their place in the turn order; when a PC takes command of an activity, use that PC's Notice instead.

**Maneuvers:** To alter a position aspect, the ship's navigator rolls overcome using Sail. Any ships affected by the altered aspect can actively oppose with Sail. Successfully changing the position aspect removes the prior aspect and grants one or two free invocations or a boost on the new aspect, as per the usual rules for creating an advantage.

You can attempt to create a position aspect between your ship and several other ships at once. In this case, each of those ships actively and independently opposes you. Assign the new aspect to each ship that fails to oppose your action.

Ramming a ship requires two exchanges. On the first exchange, your ship's navigator rolls Sail to create a ***Bearing Down On the Enemy*** position aspect targeting an enemy ship, which can actively oppose with Sail. While this aspect exists, your ship's navigator can attack with Sail to ram the targeted ship, which defends with Sail. If the attack is successful, determine damage as usual, and then roll Sail again to defend *your own ship* against your own ram attack. If you do not successfully defend, damage your own ship as normal. If your defense ties your attack, the resulting boost goes to the enemy ship you rammed; if you took out the ship you rammed, the boost goes to an enemy of the GM's choice.

**Repairs:** The ship's crew can roll Craft to attempt to remove damage-related aspects from the ship. During a conflict, the crew cannot attempt to recover damage-related consequences, but they can create aspects to represent temporary repairs, such as ***Held Together with Twine and Hope*** or ***We Didn't Need That Gear Anyway***. Any character on the ship can invoke a temporary repair aspect in response to an opponent invoking a consequence on the ship.

**Gunnery:** A ship can fire its guns at a single target per exchange. This can be represented as an attack action or create an advantage action, attempting to create an aspect on an enemy ship, such as ***Shredded Sails***. The targeted vessel can defend or actively oppose, as appropriate, using Sail.

**Signaling:** Once per exchange, a ship can transmit a single message using its signaling lanterns. To judge whether a message can be sent during a single exchange, assume that signaling speed is roughly similar to that of Morse code—about forty words per minute. Normally, signaling does not require a roll, but it does use the signaling character's action for the exchange.

## Other Actions During Ship Combat

Characters who are not taking command of the four main ship activities listed in the prior section may take other actions during the conflict as desired and necessary. For instance, while a ship-to-ship battle is raging, the PCs might also need to defend themselves against a swarm of Uranian ice spiders loose on the ship, or they might need to negotiate with a saboteur who has barricaded herself in the ship's magazine with a box of matches and the vessel's store of prometheum.

You can divide up ship decks and compartments into zones to resolve conflicts occurring inside a ship, such as a mutiny or a boarding action. Zones within a ship have no bearing on ship-to-ship conflict, including taking command of the crew.

## Rheoship Consequences and Conditions

When a ship takes shifts of damage, the defender may absorb them using ship consequences, crew conditions, or both.

Consequences represent battle damage, mechanical failures, and other persistent problems with the ship. Rheoships can take the usual three consequences—mild, moderate, and severe.

Conditions represent crew casualties or missing crew members. The *Fate System Toolkit* explains how to use conditions on page 18. The following conditions are available for a ship's crew:

- **Bruised:** 1 point
- **Battered:** 1 point
- **Light Losses:** 2 points
- **Light Losses:** 2 points
- **Heavy Losses:** 4 points
- **Heavy Losses:** 4 points

The Bruised and Battered conditions are fleeting: remove them as soon as the crew has time to rest and dress their wounds. The Light Losses and Heavy Losses conditions are sticky: you can only remove them after you replace the lost crew members. Each Light Losses condition represents a loss of one-tenth the ship's maximum crew, while each Heavy Losses condition represents a loss of one-quarter the maximum crew.

If you are deliberately sailing with less than a ship's maximum crew—because you've sent some of the crew off on a raiding mission, for instance, or because you've captured a merchant ship and only sent a few crew members to sail it—you must take a combination of Light Losses and Heavy Losses conditions to cover the missing crew. If you can't take enough conditions to cover the shortfall—that is, if you have less than three-tenths the ship's full crew—you cannot mount a competent defense in battle. If you enter a combat situation, your ship is immediately taken out.

To begin recovering a consequence that represents damage to the ship, you must roll Repair against the consequence in question, as normal. This task requires several hours of in-game time, and must occur while the ship is not involved in combat.

On a successful Repair roll, rename the consequence to reflect the ongoing repairs. For example, *Gaping Hole in the Hull* might become *Hastily Patched-Over Breach*. After the appropriate amount of game time passes, remove the consequence.

GMs, you may wish to limit the number of consequences and conditions that an unimportant NPC ship can take, just as you would for a nameless or supporting NPC.



## SECRETS OF THE RED PLANET

In this adventure, the player characters are officers and crew aboard the *Half Moon*, an independent trading vessel. The crew of the *Half Moon* are mostly Arabic, though the PCs can be any nationality they wish. They are docked at the sky harbor of Jiujiang, a Chinese colony on Mars.

The PCs must return to Earth in fifteen days in order to pay off a loan from the Bank of St. Petersburg. The ship's hold is full of asteroidal ore, which should be sufficient to cover the debt, but bank officers are not patient people. If the PCs cannot return to Earth before the deadline expires, the bank will declare the loan to be in default. Since the bank has an excellent business relationship with each of the Great Powers, the PCs might find themselves under arrest the moment they land in any legitimate port after the deadline is up. The PCs would then be sent to debtor's prison, their ship and cargo confiscated to cover the bank's losses.

The *Half Moon* stopped at Jiujiang, rather than continuing on to Earth, because the ship's atmosphere refresher chemicals started to spoil unexpectedly. The crew landed on Mars so that they could flush out, clean, and refill the refresher tanks. Now that the system is clean, it's safe for the *Half Moon* to depart, but the governor has declared the harbor closed.

Tell the players that their charts indicate a thirteen-day flight from Mars to Earth, based on current orbital positions. This means they have two days to get off Mars in order to reach Earth on time. With a good Sail roll, they might be able to trim some time off of this, but that's a gamble.

Also tell the players that the aspect *The Debt Is Due* affects the entire adventure, and that you can compel this aspect to drive the players to take risks and make haste in order to return to Earth on time.

### Half Moon

#### High Concept:

*Patched-Up Trading Sloop*

#### Crew Aspect:

*Experienced Sea Hands*

#### Other Aspect:

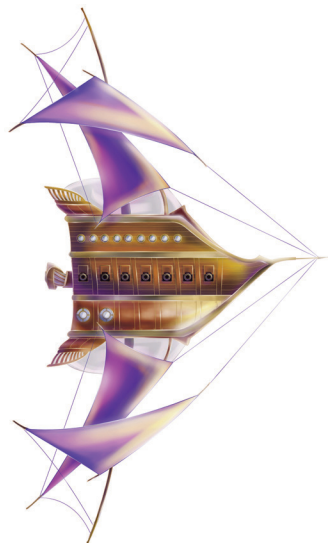
*The Debt Is Due*

#### SKILLS

**Good (+3):** Sail

**Fair (+2):** Fight

**Average (+1):** Shoot, Athletics



## Jiujiang

**Aspects:** *Dust and Poverty, What Is the Governor Up To?*

Jiujiang is a Chinese settlement, located two miles away from the ruins of a large Martian city. The population, roughly a thousand colonists, consists mostly of laborers and their families. Workers employed by the governor dig through the ruins twelve hours a day, harvesting materials and curiosities that might be valuable. The shops that sell supplies to the laborers are also controlled by the governor, ensuring that he eventually gets back the meager wages he pays his laborers.

Gravity on Mars is light, and the air is thin. Visitors unaccustomed to the atmosphere will need to carry soda bottles (see “*Common Equipment*”) and wear breathing masks when outdoors. Shops and government buildings are kept pressurized, but the houses of common citizens are not. The governor issues breathing equipment to all laborers, but overcharges them for air refresher chemicals, so citizens learn to do without.

Although the laborers live in *Dust and Poverty*, the governor, Fu An, lives comfortably. He gives his laborers less supplies and lower wages than he reports to China, keeping the difference for himself to fund a side business in commodity trading. He is happy to trade with well-behaved pirates and smugglers, providing a safe port of call for vessels that might be shot out of the sky elsewhere. He defends himself against unruly guests and unhappy laborers with a force of 200 soldiers and six ground-to-air guns, issued to him by China for the purpose of maintaining control over the nearby ruins.

### Jiujiang Soldier

**High Concept:**

*Because the Governor Ordered It*

**SKILLS**

**Average (+1):** Fight, Shoot

**STRESS**

None

## The Martian Ruins

**Aspects:** *Colossal and Collapsed, Buried Secrets*

The ruins are a mile-wide sprawl of shattered, weather-worn buildings constructed of thick, semi-transparent crystal. A few tall towers remain intact, but most of the structures are damaged and filled with wind-blown Martian sand. The ruins are located at the intersection of seven dry Martian canals, which suggests that this was once a hub of Martian commerce.



## Fu An, Governor of Jiujiang

### High Concept:

*Self-Serving Colonial Official*

### Trouble:

*Obsessed With Martian Secrets*

### SKILLS

**Superb (+5):** Rapport

**Great (+4):** Resources

**Good (+3):** Deceive

**Fair (+2):** Empathy

**Average (+1):** Will

### STUNTS

**I Own This City:** Use Resources in place of Contacts when dealing with inhabitants of Jiujiang.

### STRESS

**Physical** ☐☐

**Mental** ☐☐☐

## Death Ray!

### Fate of the *Dolorosa*

Begin the first scene by explaining the *Half Moon*'s situation and predicament. The harbormaster will have explained to the captains of all ships in port that the governor has closed the harbor while his soldiers search the settlement for an escaped fugitive, an elderly European woman named Sophia Reinking. The soldiers know that she is short, with gray hair, and has a glass left eye.

The PCs might ask additional questions. Hand out the following information to the PCs who have the most appropriate skills and aspects:

- The Reinking family has a long lineage of accomplished alchemists, since the Middle Ages. The family has been dying off, and Sophia is the last of them. She was active in the alchemical community fifty years ago, but no one knows what became of her.
- Some of the governor's soldiers have heard a rumor that Sophia cheated the governor in some way, but they know none of the details.
- There are five other ships in the harbor, two European and three Chinese, all privately owned. Captain Charlotte Lafarge of the *Saint Lazare* has been suggesting that all the ships might join forces, disable the ground defense guns, and leave. The other four captains, although unhappy about being grounded, are not yet willing to defy the governor.

Ask the players how they might be spending their time while trapped in port. It's okay if they immediately start hatching plans to escape. Don't let them waste too much time scheming, though. The object is to give them a chance to become familiar with the situation before continuing the story.

When the PCs are ready to take action, a Chinese woman will approach them quietly. She is about thirty and dressed in dusty laborer's clothes. She will identify herself as Duan Tianlin, and will ask the PCs whether they can give her passage off Mars.

Before she can explain further, the crew of the *Dolorosa*, a small trading vessel, will choose that moment to try to flee the port. The ground-to-air gun crews watch the *Dolorosa* ascend, but they have received orders not to fire. The governor has told the ranking officers that he will demonstrate a secret weapon should any vessel attempt to leave.

When the *Dolorosa* is several hundred feet in the air, the inhabitants of Jiujiang will witness the event described in the prologue: a green ray, projected from a tower in the Martian ruins, turns the *Dolorosa* into ash. No one in Jiujiang has seen anything like this before, and no one will be able to explain it. Shortly after this, a harbor official will deliver an announcement from the governor, declaring that any other ships that attempt to leave will meet the same fate.

## Tianlin's Story

After this startling event, Tianlin will tell the PCs that she is a scientist, part of a team the governor had put together to study the machinery in the Martian ruins. For years, the governor has wanted to reactivate some of the ancient devices, but he had no success until he hired a Prussian alchemist named Sophia Reinking.

After over a year of work, Sophia made some progress toward restoring an enormous device housed in one of the intact Martian towers. She concluded that the machine was intended to project a beam of incredible destructive power. Fu An was elated. He saw that, if he could offer the secret of the Martian ray to his government, he could earn the wealth and glory he had always hoped for.

A few days ago, just before the scientific team could test the weapon, Sophia vanished without explanation. Fu An was convinced that the alchemist had fled to sell the secret of the device to a foreign government, so he ordered the harbor closed. He also ordered the scientific team to prepare the weapon to fire on any ship that left the harbor. Tianlin knew that Sophia had repaired the weapon to operational status, but not enough for it to be safe. She and the other remaining scientists protested, but Fu An threatened to kill them if they did not obey his orders.

Tianlin was able to escape the ruins before the governor garrisoned his troops around the Martian tower. She wants to leave Mars, but she knows that no ship can leave the harbor while the Martian ray is standing guard. She offers to show the PCs a secret tunnel into the ruins, which lead to the base of the ray tower. Once there, she can damage the weapon so that it will no longer fire.

If any of the PCs are suspicious of Tianlin, and they successfully overcome using Empathy against Tianlin's Deceive, they'll sense that she's holding something back. If pressed, Tianlin will admit that she stole some gemstones from the ruins, and was hoping to sell them when she returned to Earth. She's not carrying them with her—they're hidden elsewhere in the colony—but she will offer half of them to the PCs in return for passage.

## The Truth

It's true that Tianlin has a small bag of Martian gemstones, worth 5000 francs on Earth. But the gems aren't the only secret Tianlin is holding back—she is actually Sophia Reinking.

Sophia is a brilliant alchemist, but she has never been satisfied with her achievements. She used her skills to extend her own life as far as she could, but she reached the point where her death was certainly less than a decade away. She couldn't accept this idea, though—she had so much work left to do.





## Sophia Reinking (Tianlin)

**High Concept:** *Alchemical Genius*

**Trouble:** *I Must Know Everything!*

**Other Aspects:**

*I'm Not Who I Appear to Be •*

*I Planned For This •*

*A Long Memory*

### SKILLS

**Fantastic (+6):** Alchemy, Lore

**Superb (+5):** Investigate, Crafts

**Great (+4):** Deceive, Will

**Good (+3):** Notice, Fight

**Fair (+2):** Physique, Athletics

**Average (+1):** Shoot, Burglary

### STUNTS

**I've Read About That!:** Spend a fate point to use Lore in place of any other skill for one roll.

**Developed Immunity:** +2 when using Physique or Will to defend against an opponent using Alchemy to create an advantage.

**Art of Improvisation:** Ignore any increase in difficulty to an Alchemy roll caused by not having the correct materials or equipment.

### STRESS

**Physical** ☐☐☐

**Mental** ☐☐☐☐

As a last gamble, she entered the employment of Fu An, hoping to find inspiration in the Martian ruins. She kept the governor satisfied with trinkets and vague promises, until she eventually found the treasure she had hoped for: a pictographic tablet that, when she deciphered it, detailed a set of alchemical techniques far in advance of human science.

She packed her belongings and tried to leave the governor's mansion, intending to leave Mars entirely, but the governor had lost patience with her. He demanded that she provide instructions for manufacturing a copy of the Martian disintegration ray. Sophia did not fully understand the ray's construction, but she asked for time, and worked around the clock on a desperate gambit.

She used the secrets of the Martian tablet to transform her own appearance. She restored youth to her body, tinted her skin and hair, and molded the flesh of her face like clay. The procedure was painful and carried the risk of unknown side effects, but when she was done she appeared to be a much younger Chinese woman. Since she has a deep knowledge of Chinese customs and etiquette, and can speak several Chinese dialects without an accent, she can carry this disguise flawlessly. She slipped out of the governor's mansion and set about finding a ship willing to take her off Mars.

Unfortunately, she was more successful at repairing the disintegration ray than she'd intended, as she discovered when the ray burned the *Dolorosa* out of the sky.

## The Governor

For fifteen years, Fu An has been profiting from his position and his distance from any other Chinese authority. His attempts to reactivate Martian machinery had, at first, been little more than a hobby that his more lucrative enterprises allowed him to sustain. The arrival of Sophia Reinking changed all of that. Where his previous experts had provided disappointment, Sophia delivered results. Nothing earth-shaking—a few simple Martian toys and tools—but more than anyone else had been able to accomplish, and with the promise of greater things to come.

When she explained the potential of the Martian ray tower, he was dubious at first, but he began to consider what he could do with that kind of power. He told himself that the weapon was so immensely valuable that China would forgive him any offense. He would become a true king of Mars, awesome and invincible.

Sophia's escape has driven Fu An mad with wrath. He is convinced that she intends to sell the design of the Martian ray to another empire, or even directly to the Chinese government, cutting him out of the deal. He would rather see her dead than allow her to sell what he regards as his property. He has ordered his soldiers and engineers to fire the ray at any fleeing ship, both to make sure that Sophia does not escape alive, and to demonstrate his newfound power to the universe.



### The Saint Lazare

Before the *Dolorosa* was destroyed, there were six ships in the sky harbor at Jiujiang, including the *Half Moon*. Now there are five, and the largest is the *Saint Lazare*, a French merchantman with a crew of 250.

The crew of the *Saint Lazare* has no patience for legitimate business. They have earned their living through smuggling and piracy, with occasional diversions into kidnapping and extortion. They are friendly enough in most circumstances, but they are well practiced at betrayal and violence.

Fu An had sold them a shipment of silk, conveniently neglecting to charge the usual Chinese tariff. The crew's plan was to sell the silk on Europa, bypassing the tariffs in that port as well, but the closed harbor is an obstacle between the *Saint Lazare* and the deep purses of the European dressmakers.

Whereas the captains of the other ships at Jiujiang had been willing to wait for the governor to open the harbor, Charlotte Lafarge was not. She told the other captains that the governor had no right to interfere with the course of honest commerce—or any other kind of commerce—and furthermore that the governor was likely using the fugitive story as an excuse to demand bribes for safe departure. She suggested that the governor's soldiers are inexperienced, and that their gun crews are useless, and that the ships trapped at Jiujiang might easily escape if they worked together.

This spirit of cooperation was self-serving. She intended to place the other ships and crews in the most dangerous positions during their mass escape, shielding herself and her crew from harm.

Lafarge presented such a convincing picture of the weakness in Jiujiang's defenses that the crew of the *Dolorosa* attempted an escape on their own. Their failure has left Lafarge without a plan. She is still willing to participate in a joint attack on the ground defense guns, but the guns are no longer the main obstacle. As soon as any ship lifts from the harbor high enough to clear the surrounding rooftops of the settlement, the ray tower will disintegrate it.

Lafarge will refuse to lead her crew into the Martian ruins, as she is certain they would meet the same fate as the crew of the *Dolorosa*. The other captains will share the same reluctance.

## Charlotte Lafarge

**High Concept:** *Ruthless Rheoship Captain*

**Trouble:** *So Long As I Get Paid*

**Other Aspects:** *Only Dogs and Fools Are Loyal*

### SKILLS

**Superb (+5):** Provoke

**Great (+4):** Deceive

**Good (+3):** Fight

**Fair (+2):** Shoot

**Average (+1):** Will

### STUNTS

**Have At Them, You Dogs!:** Use Provoke instead of Will to benefit units under your command during crew combat.

### STRESS

**Physical** ☐☐

**Mental** ☐☐☐

## Saint Lazare

**High Concept:**

*Deceptively Ordinary-Looking Merchantman*

**Crew:** *Honorless Opportunists*

### SKILLS

**Good (+3):** Shoot

**Fair (+2):** Sail

**Average (+1):** Fight, Provoke

### STUNTS

**Medium Ship:** 40 guns, 250 crew members.

**Fine Sails:** +2 when using Sail to determine travel times or race other vessels.

### NOTES

The *Saint Lazare* is one size class larger than the *Half Moon*, so it gains +1 to attack and defend against the *Half Moon* in ship-to-ship combat.

## Leaving Jiujiang

Jiujiang is situated on the east bank of an old Martian canal, which runs northwest to southeast. Following the canal northwest for two miles leads to the Martian ruins. There is a wide and well-beaten path through the Martian sands between Jiujiang and the ruins, traveled by laborers and patrolled by soldiers. This route would be more convenient for the scavenger trade if the settlement were closer to the ruins, but given that the ruins are an enormous pile of unsolved mysteries, no one wants to risk living any closer to them.

Tianlin will recommend that the PCs bring lanterns and climbing equipment. She expects that the tower will be guarded, though she doesn't know by how many soldiers. If the PCs ask the right people in town, they might find witnesses who saw fifty soldiers march into the ruins when the governor first declared the harbor closed.

The PCs might want to bring some of the *Half Moon's* crew to the tower to assist in the assault. The *Half Moon* has 100 crew members, but bringing them all along would leave the ship unguarded—unwise, with a hold full of valuable ore. In addition, the city soldiers would be suspicious of a large crowd of sailors marching out of the settlement. The PCs might want to find a way to be less obvious, such as breaking up their force into smaller teams. When resolving the departure from the settlement, let the players' tactics determine what rolls to make, and use the statistics of the Jiujiang soldiers as a guide for opposition.

## The Tunnels

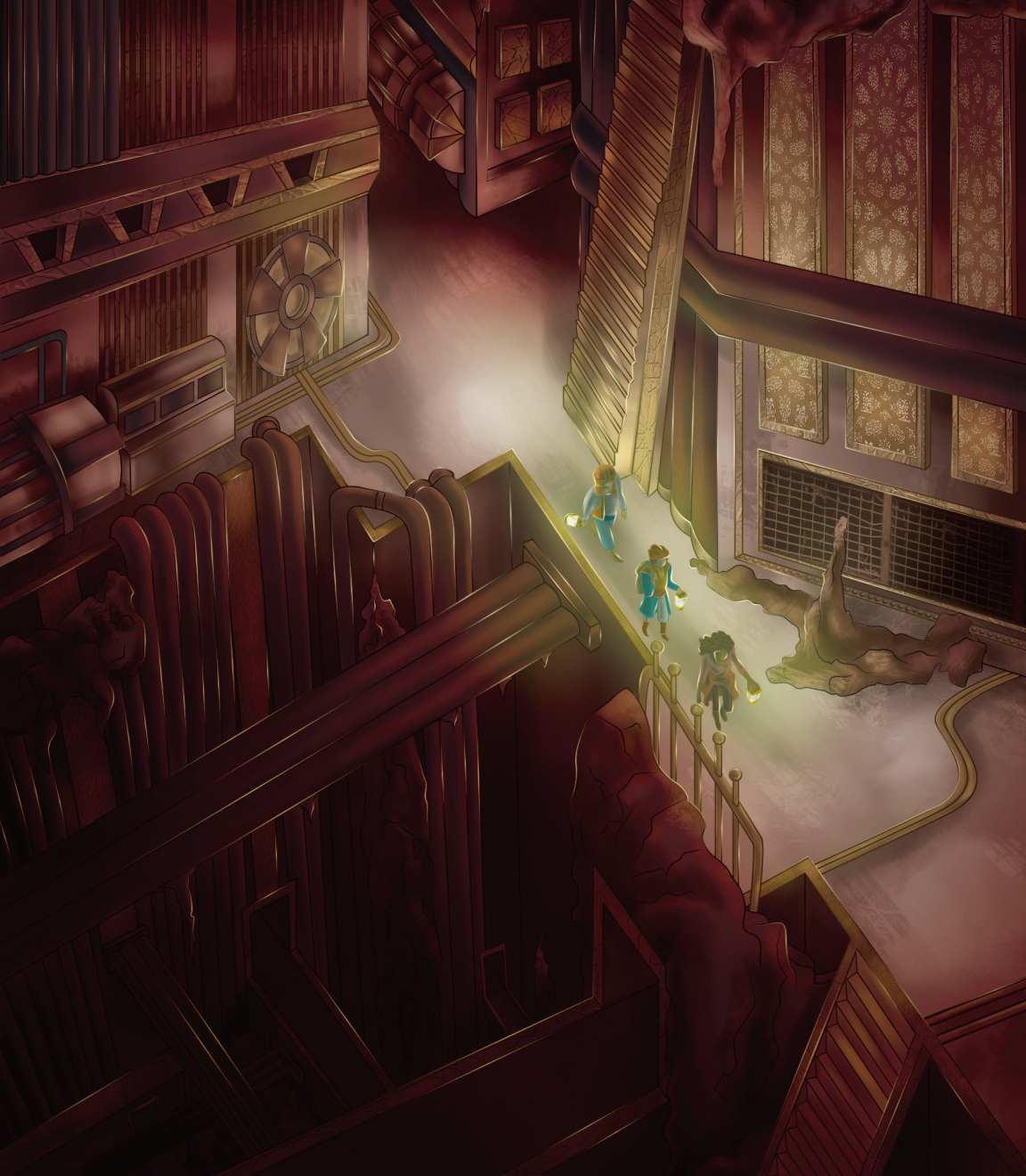
### **Aspects:** *Not Built for Humans, Unsettling Alien Atmosphere*

To get to the tunnel, Tianlin must take the PCs across the canal and due west into the empty sands. Once they are a mile south of the ruins, she will ask the group to look around for a stone building. All the PCs can roll Notice or Investigate to spot the building, which is nearly the same color as the sand it is partially buried under.

The building is a cube, twenty feet on each side, with a circular door covering most of the south face. The lowermost five feet of the door is buried in sand. Just above the buried lower edge, Tianlin will find a slot that accepts an item she is carrying, a three-inch-wide purple metallic plate. When she inserts and removes the plate, the door will descend into the ground.

The interior of the building is vacant, and instead of a floor there is a smooth stone ramp, descending northward. Tianlin will explain that she has reached this point before, but from the inside. At the bottom of the ramp, there is a tunnel that leads to a network of underground passages beneath the ruins. She believes most of the tunnels existed to service the city's infrastructure, but she wonders if this particular tunnel might have been an escape route if the city was under siege. After all, the Martians must have constructed the disintegration ray to protect the city from *something*.





For most of the approach to the city, the tunnel is fifty feet wide, thirty feet high, and straight as a ruler. There are no interior lights, which is why Tianlin recommended lanterns. The walls, floor, and ceiling are smooth stone, with no features other than a few squarish Martian sigils carved into the walls every few hundred feet. The tunnel will continue this way for three-quarters of a mile until it reaches the city tunnel network.

From the moment the characters reach the first intersection, it will be clear that the tunnel network is vast and complex. Cross-tunnels lead to other cross-tunnels, and to steep ramps leading up and down to different tunnels. Wide doorways will open to chambers filled with gigantic, dust-caked machines. Narrow walkways will cross seemingly bottomless chasms whose walls are lined with tarnished, house-sized canisters. The sigils inscribed on the walls will become encyclopedic, as towering paragraphs accompanied by incomprehensible diagrams surround the characters at every turn.

The first, obvious obstacle the characters will encounter are the ramps, which are ***Not Built for Humans***. They are too steep and smooth to allow easy passage on foot, even with the low gravity. If the PCs ask Tianlin how she got past them, she will say “Carefully.” To represent the danger of tumbling down the stone slopes, the ramps will make a Great (+4) physical attack against the group.

- The PCs can defend using Athletics. They can combine their defense to get a teamwork bonus, but if this fails, each character in the team receives the full shift value of the attack. For example, if the attack exceeded the team’s defense by two shifts, each PC in the team would suffer a two-shift hit.
- The NPC crew members defend once with Athletics, which is Average (+1). Players can invoke aspects or use stunts to improve this defense, but they cannot provide a teamwork bonus. If the crew fails to defend, give them a ***Battered and Bruised*** aspect instead of stress or consequences. This aspect will last until the assault on the tower is complete.
- If the group brought climbing equipment and employs it intelligently, they can create an aspect such as ***Lashed Securely Together*** with a free invoke to help get past the ramps.
- Assume that Tianlin gets past the ramps with some assistance, but without suffering lasting harm.

The more insidious threat will be the psychological shock from the sheer scale of the underground tunnels and machinery, which is beyond anything ever constructed by human hands. Sometimes, the PCs will hear distorted echoes that seem to speak in their own voices, but in some unknown language. While navigating a tricky descent, they’ll hear a powerful grinding and creaking from above, as if the ruins themselves are shifting their weight. At one point, the player who rolls the best on Notice will hear the sound of distant scuttling, as if some enormous insect were moving in the shadows, even though, by all accounts, there is no surviving native life on Mars.

When most appropriate, the *Unsettling Alien Atmosphere* will deliver a Superb (+6) mental attack against the group.

- The PCs defend against this attack using Will. Again, they can assist each other to get a teamwork bonus, but each character in the team receives the full shift value of the attack if the team's defense fails.
- The NPC crew defends using Will, which is Mediocre (+0). Players can assist with skills or aspects as appropriate, but cannot contribute a teamwork bonus. If this defense fails, give the crew a *Failing Courage* aspect instead of stress or consequences. This aspect will last until the assault on the tower is complete.
- Tianlin has spent months in the ruins, so she's accustomed to the strangeness of it all.

Eventually, Tianlin will point out a round stone door at the end of a short tunnel. She will explain that beyond this door is a ramp leading up to the base of the Martian tower, and that she can open it with her purple metal plate whenever the PCs are prepared.

## The Tower

When the PCs enter the tower by way of the tunnels, they will bypass most of the prepared defenses. If anyone approaches the tower on the surface, though, they will first encounter sentries hidden in the surrounding buildings. There are three pairs of these soldiers in different locations; at the first sign of an approaching enemy, they will fire their rifles in the air. Due to these guards, the neighborhood around the tower has the aspect *Silent Sentinels*, and the soldiers have one free invoke on this aspect.

The tower is twenty stories high, and slender, only fifty feet across at the base and twenty feet across at the summit. It is lime green, made of the same translucent crystal as the other structures in the ruins. The crystal walls are a foot thick and durable—only prolonged labor with picks and hammers, or a heavy prometheum charge, could put a hole in one.

There is only one entrance at ground level, a thirty-foot-wide opening in the east face. A few small windows allow light and air into the structure at various points along its height, and at the top is a sheltered enclosure similar to the top of a bell tower. A sharp-eyed observer might spot a green, gleaming ten-foot-wide disk suspended in this enclosure.

In the base of the tower is a metallic pyramid, twenty feet across and twenty feet high. This is the central mechanism of the disintegration ray. When activated from the control platform at the top of the tower, the pyramid projects a green beam up through the center of the structure. The beam strikes the crystal lens at the tower's summit, and the lens directs the beam at the chosen target.

There are twenty soldiers stationed inside the tower on the east side of the pyramid, behind sandbags, facing the east entrance. They are armed with repeating rifles and bayonets, as well as two multi-barrel rotating rifles. The rotating rifles are tripod-mounted weapons capable of a devastating rate of fire. The soldiers themselves have the aspect ***Dug In***, and the zone immediately outside the east entrance has the aspect ***Focused Fire***. The soldiers have one free invocation on each aspect.

There are another twenty soldiers on the west side of the pyramid. These soldiers are resting while their comrades are on duty. A stone ramp descends underground here, leading to the door. Tianlin will lead the PCs to this door—something, as far as the soldiers know, no one has ever figured out how to open.

On the north side of the pyramid is a green crystal ramp ascending higher into the tower. The ramp winds upward around the walls of the tower, leading to the summit, while leaving a clear space through the center for the energy beam. This ramp isn't as steep as some of the ramps in the underground tunnels, but it is ***Smooth as Glass***.

At the top of the tower, the ramp leads to a platform. On this platform are the beam controls: a wide console made of the same green metal as the pyramid in the tower's base, with dials and levers marked with Martian sigils. There are ten soldiers here, keeping watch over three nervous Martian scientists who are responsible for operating the console. At this level, there are wide openings in the tower walls, giving the scientists a clear view of their surroundings so they can aim the disintegration ray. The console controls are precise enough to hit any target within sight, out to the Martian horizon. There is also a five-foot-wide hole in the floor here, and in the ceiling above, which the energy beam passes through.

One more ramp leads up from here to the lens platform. The ten-foot-wide crystal aiming lens is suspended from a rotating mount, which is controlled from the console below.

## Destroying the Weapon

Tianlin knows that the beam projector at the base of the tower is tamper-proof and nearly indestructible. The control console near the top of the tower is more vulnerable. Prying off the console's panels will reveal delicate metal and crystal tubes, which the PCs can easily smash to bits.

As soon as the PCs attack, a few of the soldiers stationed at the tower will break and run, disappearing into the ruins. At least one of the sentinels surrounding the tower will do the same. They will head directly for Jiujiang to tell the governor what happened. The governor will rescind his orders for the ground defense guns to hold their fire, and will send soldiers to the sky harbor to demand answers from the five remaining ship captains.

If the PCs rush back to Jiujiang after disabling the ray controls, they might reach the *Half Moon* while the fifty soldiers guarding the harbor are still unaware of what happened. In this case, the PCs could coordinate with Captain Lafarge and the other captains to attack and disable the ground defense guns. Since the combined ship crews outnumber the soldiers by better than ten to one, the soldiers won't be able to put up much resistance. You could play this attack as a challenge rather than a conflict, just to see if the soldiers manage to harm the PCs or damage the *Half Moon* before they're overwhelmed. Individual tasks in the challenge might include fighting through the general melee in the port, taking control of the ground defense guns, or turning back soldiers attempting to board the *Half Moon*. Give these tasks Fair (+2) opposition.

If the PCs delay their return, they will arrive to find a hundred soldiers guarding the harbor and the defense guns. These forewarned and well-armed soldiers will provide Great (+4) opposition to the challenge of leaving port. The governor will always keep fifty soldiers in reserve to guard his walled estate against unruly peasants and sailors.

When all five ships leave the harbor, the *Saint Lazare's* sails will develop a problem. Upon unfolding their masts, their upper mainmast will fail to lock into place, and will flop back against the hull. If the *Half Moon* pauses or approaches, the *Saint Lazare* will signal them to proceed. When the *Half Moon* departs, the *Saint Lazare* will still be in low orbit, its crew still trying to repair their masts.





## Rheostorm!

After a day of flight, one of the PCs serving a lookout shift will notice that a ship is approaching from behind. At first, the other ship will be merely a dot seen through a spyglass, but as the ship approaches it will become clear that it is trying to intercept the *Half Moon*.

This is the *Saint Lazare*. While the *Lazare* was stuck in orbit around Mars, they received a high-powered lantern signal from Jiujiang with a business proposition. Initially suspicious, Captain Lafarge brought her ship down in the desert to meet a messenger from the governor. The governor offered Lafarge a substantial reward to capture and bring back the *Half Moon*, along with all its crew and passengers.

When Fu An heard that the PCs had emerged from the underground tunnels to attack the tower, he deduced that Sophia was with them. Also, based on the language and appearance of the sailors who attacked the tower, he also assumed that the crew of the *Half Moon* made the attack, since only the *Half Moon* had a predominantly Arabic crew. He concluded that the *Half Moon* carried Sophia off of Mars, so he sent the *Saint Lazare* to fetch her.

At first, the PCs will not be able to identify their pursuer as the *Saint Lazare*. They will see that the ship is larger than the *Half Moon* and has better sails—it will be able to catch the *Half Moon* even if the PCs put on full sail. The PCs might consider out-navigating their pursuers, but before long the ship's rheusounding instruments will detect that a rheostorm is forming.

Normally, it's possible to identify an approaching storm up to a day in advance, but this storm is likely to break within the hour, and the PCs know it. When a rheostorm is approaching, standard practice is to retract the sails. If the PCs choose to do this, though, they will be coasting on inertia, with only the momentum they had before bringing the sails down. If the *Saint Lazare* keeps its sails up, it will keep accelerating and might catch up.

If the PCs want to avoid confrontation entirely, they could attempt to “run dark” by extinguishing the ship's running lanterns and interior lights, and by retracting the sails, which are somewhat reflective. This will only work if done while the *Saint Lazare* is at extreme range, before the PCs can determine its identity. By making a final, hasty maneuver before retracting the sails, the PCs can leave the *Lazare* in doubt as to which direction the *Half Moon* was headed



before it disappeared. Performing this maneuver is a *Sail* roll, opposed by the *Saint Lazare* in two separate rolls with *Notice and Sail*. If the *Lazare's* *Notice* roll beats the PCs' *Sail* roll, the *Lazare's* lookouts will spot the *Half Moon*. If the *Lazare's* *Sail* roll is higher than the PCs, the *Lazare's* navigator will correctly predict which way the *Half Moon* was headed. If the *Half Moon* initially eludes the *Saint Lazare*, Captain Lafarge will retract her sails until the rheostorm passes, and will then make one more attempt to find the *Half Moon*, which is resolved just like the initial attempt. If this second attempt also fails, the *Saint Lazare* will have no choice but to abandon the chase.

If the PCs do not attempt to disappear, the *Saint Lazare* will get close enough for the PCs to identify it before the rheostorm breaks. Captain Lafarge will transmit a message using her ship's lanterns, explaining that she wants "the alchemist," and is willing to buy her from the PCs. If the PCs refuse or do not respond, Lafarge will send another message threatening to capture and board the *Half Moon*.

The PCs' decision to keep their sails up or put them down will dictate what happens next. Regardless of what the players choose, these things happen:

- The **Rheostorm** aspect is in effect over the scene.
- At the beginning of every turn, if a ship has its sails up, the storm will make a Fair (+2) attack against that ship. Ships defend against this attack using *Sail*.
- Whenever possible, Captain Lafarge will use *Provoke* to drive her crew, imposing aspects such as **Work Faster, You Dogs!**, which they invoke to improve their rolls. During the rheostorm, however, the storm's fury provides Fair (+2) opposition to both ships' attempts to create aspects on crew to improve their performance.

If the PCs keep their sails up, the scene becomes a chase through the fury of the rheostorm, with victory going to the ship that can keep its sails intact the longest. Run this chase as a contest.

If the PCs bring their sails down, they will find that the *Saint Lazare* catches up to them quickly, and will fire on them just as the rheostorm breaks. The PCs might decide to raise their sails again, to flee or to maneuver in battle, but they won't be able to escape without a fight.

## Betrayal

As the *Half Moon* approaches Earth, Sophia will consider her plans for building a new laboratory. To pursue the principles she discovered in the Martian ruins, she knows that she needs a top-class laboratory, filled with the finest equipment and a stock of rare alchemical components. She will realize that the gemstones she stole from the ruins will not be worth enough to pay for everything she needs. Seeing an opportunity, she will decide to bring the *Half Moon* under her power so that she can sell the ship, its cargo, and its crew.

She will attempt to gain access to the alchemical supplies in the ship's doctor's room. There are enough chemicals commonly available in public areas of the ship for her to concoct a small amount of acid, which she can use to dissolve the lock to the doctor's door when no one is looking.

Once she has access to medical chemicals, she will formulate a gas that will flood the ship, rendering its crew unconscious. The gas imposes **Knockout Gas** over the entire ship, and makes a Good (+3) physical attack against everyone inside once per exchange. Characters defend against this attack using Physique.

Sophia will also mix a solution to render herself immune to the sleep gas. When she is the only person still conscious on board, she will try to find the ship's navigator, inject him with a slow poison, and then awaken him. With a pistol in her hand, she will inform the navigator that he will die unless he pilots the ship to Tripoli. Once there, Sophia will put the navigator back to sleep and administer the antidote as promised. Then she will sell the ship's crew into slavery, and will sell the ship and its cargo as swiftly as she can.

Give at least one PC the opportunity to catch Sophia in the act while she's scavenging the chemicals she needs for her plan. She'll try to hide what she's doing, with a combination of subterfuge and lies, but she is an alchemist, not a burglar, as her skill ratings reflect.

If Sophia is somehow fortunate enough to collect and mix her chemicals undetected, and release the gas into the ship, NPC crew members will start to drop quickly. More durable characters will have a little time to react before falling unconscious. Characters who can get to breathing masks or pressure helmets will be able to protect themselves from the gas. If someone can reach the atmosphere refresher tanks in the engine room, she could increase the flow of the impurity-scrubbing chemicals and speed up the air pumps in order to remove the sleep gas from the ship. Setting the refresher correctly is an overcome action using Craft or Alchemy of Fair (+2) difficulty.

In the worst case, if Sophia gets her way, the PCs will wake to find themselves prisoners in a Tripoli slave market. What happens next would be the subject of another adventure.



## Extra Subplots

You can add drama to this adventure by introducing more elements that connect to the players' aspects. Here are a few suggestions.

### A Fistful of Francs

This subplot is suitable for characters with a criminal history or a mercenary nature.

Farouk, the owner of a small tea shop near the Jiujiang sky harbor, recognizes one of the PCs and asks for her help. He is running a drug smuggling operation out of his shop, moving hallucinogens harvested from the dark seas of Neptune to markets on Earth. He has kept this side business hidden from the colonial governor in order to avoid sharing his profits. Wenjuan, the wife of the harbormaster, has become aware of Farouk's dealings. She's been blackmailing him, threatening to spill his secret to her husband. Farouk will pay or pressure the PCs to put an end to Wenjuan's threats, by any means necessary. Wenjuan is an experienced black marketeer in her own right, and she will offer to outbid Farouk if the PCs can help her take control of Farouk's operation.

### The Algorithm

This subplot is best for academically oriented characters or for anyone susceptible to handsome, young mathematicians.

Somewhere in the crowded alleys of Jiujiang, one of the PCs runs across a badly wounded European man. Edmond is a French mathematician who claims to have devised a system for improving the calculating power of arithmetic mills tenfold. He also claims that a secret society called the Watchmaker's Guild is trying to prevent him from publishing his discovery. He fled Earth to save his life, but a Guild assassin pursued him to Mars and nearly killed him. He had paid for passage on the *Dolorosa*, but the assassination attempt caused him to miss the ship's departure. His story sounds irrational, but there truly is an assassin hunting him: a woman who has a variety of deadly mechanical equipment grafted into her body.

## Dreams of Dragons

This subplot is best for characters who are interested in scientific curiosities or who are merely impulsive.

A peddler sells one of the PCs a pendant with a multicolored stone, on which is a rough engraving of a dragon. The stone appears to be nothing but a worthless scrap of Martian rock, but the peddler insists that it is a good luck charm, retrieved from the nearby ruins. If the PC brings the pendant into the tunnels beneath the ruins, it will begin to tug her toward a large chamber that holds a rainbow-hued crystal shard. A character who rolls at least Good (+3) using Lore will have heard stories that crystals like this are pieces of dragon's eggs, worth a fortune to any alchemist wise enough to recognize it. This shard is guarded by several ancient Martian traps, but these are not the only dangers the crystal carries. If the PCs take the crystal off-planet, the crew will begin to suffer dreams of being watched by a vast, powerful, inhuman presence. Fear and fatigue will plague the crew. Sophia Reinking, whose will is stronger than most, will take advantage of this when she attempts to seize control of the ship. Only giving away or throwing away the shard will free the crew of the crystal's influence.