Flying Circus

The High-Flying Adventure Game!

An RPG by
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Credits

Font Listing

Balthazar, Koch Fette Deutsche Schrift, Hipchick

To play, you'll want the printable playbooks. These can be downloaded as a free PDF from DriveThruRPG or Ich.io. You will also find collections of aircraft, tools to make your own, and expansions to the game as they are released.

If you found this book in the post-internet apocalypse, you can still play using only the information in this book.

Dedicated to my Great Uncle Joe. I grew
too big to fit in the aeroplane you built
me, so I wrote this to keep on flying.

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POWERED BY THE APOCALYPSE

A Pilot's Creed

I. *Ich sichere mir immer die Vorteile des Luftkampfes, und greife aus der Sonne an.*

> I will always secure my advantages before I attack, and I will descend from the sun.

2. *Ich werde jeden Angriff zuende bringen.*

> When I attack, I will see it through to the end.

3. *Ich nehme meinen Gegner sicher ins Visier, und feuere aus nächster Nähe.*

> I will fire my machine-gun up close, and only when I am sure to land hits.

4. *Ich werde meinen Gegner nie aus den Augen lassen.*

> I will never lose sight of my enemy.

5. *Ich nähere mich meinem Gegner immer von hinten.*

> I will always approach my enemy from behind.

6. *Ich werde vor dem Sturzflug meines Feindes nicht fliehen, sonder mich ihm entgegenstellen.*

> When the enemy dives upon me, I will not flee. I will fly up to meet him.

7. *Ich jage niemals die Beute meiner Kameraden.*

> When the fight breaks into duels, I will not chase a plane my comrade has in their sights.

8. *Ich behalte in feindlichen Ländern stets den Heimweg im Kopf.*

> When I am high above hostile lands, I will always remember the way home.

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Introduction

The Game

Flying Circus is a roleplaying game about the the fantasy and reality of being a flying ace in the days of early air combat. Over the course of the game, players will take their ramshackle aircraft into battle, find triumph and defeat, get blackout drunk and have ill-advised sex with each other, and find a way to somehow pay for it all. They will be heroes and scoundrels, knights errant and killers for hire, and they just might find out who they are and where they belong, if they don't crash and burn first.

Flying Circus runs on a heavily modified version of the *Powered by the Apocalypse* framework, originally developed by Vincent and Meguey Baker, but adds many additional systems and mechanical details to make the experience of flight authentic (and authentically dangerous).

Central to the experience is daring air warfare in a free-form environment, without maps or miniatures, constrained instead by air speed and altitude. The game models the behaviours and characteristics of early aircraft in detail, both fictional and historical models, and is paired with a complex and highly detailed aircraft construction system.

It can be a bit of a dense game to learn, and there are a lot of moving parts. It can seem very intimidating at first, but when you master the system, you'll be able to fly.

The Setting

Flying Circus is set in a fantasy world on the continent of <u>Himmilgard</u>, a sprawling land mass of soaring mountains and tangled forests. Himmilgard draws on early 20th century rural Germany, European fairy tales, and the cozy apocalypse aesthetic of early Ghibli to create a world of industry and fantasy where the aeroplane is the dominant form of travel. Humans have flown since before the wheel, so there are no roads, just airways and trade winds. The wilderness is dark and filled with magic.

Picture a world from a Hayao Miyazaki film. There are peaceful little towns and vast beautiful landscapes, a warmth to everything even when things are grim. Everything is rustic and worn and lived-in, and most folks are decent, more or less. Aeroplanes are beautifully rendered dreams, the detritus of a long-ago war litters the landscape, and in the shadows lurk things that are difficult to understand.

Not long ago, Himmilgard was ruled by a number of imperial states, who carved out cities of stone and steel from the wilderness. Smoke-belching factory complexes churned forth a dizzying array of aeroplanes and war machines. An ever-widening gulf between rich and poor brought intense social pressure, and armed conflict was used as a release valve.

These petty conflicts soon sparked something far greater and more terrible. In this titanic conflict, hundreds of thousands of aircraft were produced and destroyed and millions were marched to their deaths. Eventually, the great empires wiped each other out with poison gas, leaving only isolated rural communities to pick up the pieces.

These communities were beset on all sides by monsters, bandits, deserters, and tyrants, and so they turned to heroes to save them. Brave pilots took up the surplus machinery of war, painted in bright and inspiring colours, and flew in their defence.

It's been about two decades since then. The world is recovering and people are reconnecting with one another, but is no less dangerous, so the Flying Circuses still take to the air. Some are still valient heroes, other are opportunists looking to make some quick cash, but all brave terror and death with every flight.

Getting Started

Flying Circus is a roleplaying game. You (hopefully) already know what that is. If you don't, page 16 has a definition for you.

This game can be played in one-shots, but it intended for multi-session campaign play where players need to engage with stress mechanics, finances, and long-term consequences. The first session will likely be taken up entirely by set-up, creating characters and fleshing out their world. This preparation time is often known as Session Zero.

One of our players is a Game Master (GM) while the other players take the role of the mercenary pilots the story is about. Each of these player characters (PCs) are a natural-born pilot picked from one of ten backgrounds. These backgrounds represent their life before taking to the skies and give a cross section of the kind of places in the world, so you know that behind every pilot is a community with a defined character.

Together, the characters form a Flying Circus, a mercenary company that hires itself out to settlements in need of protection, assistance, or muscle. They're an adventuring party in the traditional sense, but also a business which is often perilously close to folding under the expenses associated with keeping their planes running.

Resources

Flying Circus uses printable handouts to make running the game easier. There's a lot, so determine early what you'll need to cut down on ink costs.

Every player will need...
- Background Playbook
- Instrument Panel
- Component cards or scrap paper.

You should also print out the GM resources, a Mastery sheet or two, and the play references, plus a single Company Roster for the group. Having a calculator on the table might help, just in case.
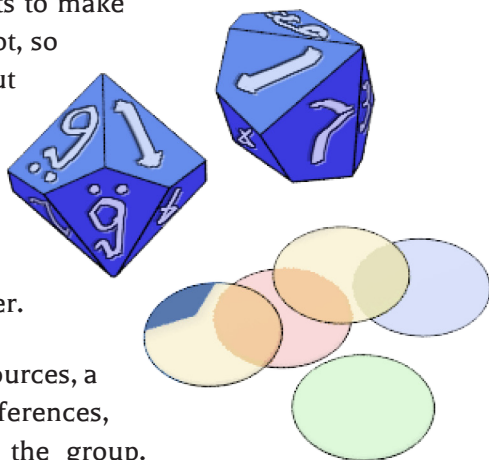
Flying Circus uses some smaller printouts on 3x5 inch index cards, such as engine and weapon tracking cards. Most modern printers should be able to print these; check with your library or a print shop. If you can't print them, though, you can hand-copy the information from the PDFs or print multiple of them on a single piece of paper.

For dice, Flying Circus uses d10s and d20s. That's 10 and 20 sided dice, for those out of the loop. Best practice is to have two d10s for every player and a large pile of d20s. A third d10 of a different colour is also helpful.

You should also have a nice collection of tokens. The best candidates are the transparent, multi-coloured counting chips often used to teach kindergarten students the basics of mathematics. They are cheap (you can get hundreds of them for a pittance), colourful, and you can see through them when you place them on sheets as trackers. You can also use them (or a stack of poker chips) to represent coins in the company's coffers!
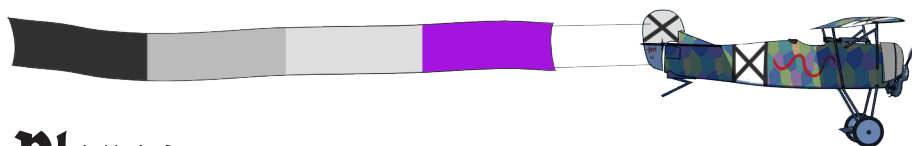
Planes

This book has a 10 generic planes listed in the back of the document, plus additional premade aircraft available in PDFs online, including the forty-five free starter designs in the playbooks. Using these during the game is straightforward, as you need only to reference the numbers already recorded. For the most part, the rules presume players will just use premade planes, and if you never move past this, that's fine!

For smaller changes, like swapping weapons or tuning up engines, see the plane modifying rules on page 203. These are simple and quick to use, and will probably suffice for most campaigns.

If you want to really modify a plane or design a whole new one, you'll want to use the free *Aircraft Engineering* PDF. These rules much more complex than anything in the game proper, and plane design generally shouldn't take place during the course of a session. There's no concessions to making things easy at the table; it is designed to create interesting aircraft with realistic limitations and properties, and that's an involved process.

Content & Safety

Flying Circus is a game for adults. It embraces a variety of adult themes and uses them to explore ideas surrounding identity, self-discovery, cultural histories, violence, and intimacy. It isn't intended to be edgy or shocking, but to explore these themes in a textured and mature way. For more detail on how the game handles these issues, refer to page 286.

Culture, Race, & Identity

Flying Circus takes place in a fictional world modelled on a sort of idyllic rural Germany of the 19th and early 20th century. It lingers on beautiful landscapes of thick forests and soaring mountains, cozy alpine towns, and the dress and traditions of Germany, especially the cultural practices of Bavaria and military history of Prussia. This is to invoke the imagery and mindset of both the First World War and Grimms' Fairy Tales which, along with the works of Hayao Miyazaki, are the basis of the setting.

However, this imagery has a context. The mythology of a racially and culturally homogenized historical Germanic people and homeland formed the core of the propaganda spread by the Nazi Party during their rise and reign, and was used as part of a machine to justify and perform systematic genocide.

Thus, it is important that this imagery is not used carelessly. Firstly, there is refutation of this hateful mythology by rejecting the premise of a homogeneous people. *Flying Circus* builds a variety of cultures, both fantastical and familiar, into the process of character creation, and centres a narrative of cultural exchange. Some playbooks (especially the Skyborn playbook, page 166) focusing specifically on one of these cultures.

The cultural groups are explicitly made phenotypically diverse in order to head off any idea that you should play a white character to 'match the setting'. Your character can look like anyone. There's no false pretense of statistical historical averages to bow to here.

Players should enter this game knowing it that Himmilgard is neither actual historical Germany, nor the fascist imagining of it. It is a messy fantasy world with many cultural groups, one where the lines between these groups are, in many places, ambiguous, conditional, or changing.

Violence & Death

Violence is inherent to the conceit of *Flying Circus*. You are mercenary soldiers in dangerous aircraft. You get into lethal battles with both human and non-human opponents, and people die. This can be slightly mitigated in your playgroup (you could conceivably portray stunt pilots, merchants, non-violent smugglers, and so forth) but it will always be present.

How this violence is portrayed is up to your group. It is okay to simply gloss over it, to describe a plane going down and not linger on the idea that a human being would be behind the control. It is best to be morbid and honest, but not lurid or exploitative. Violence and death is an unfortunate reality of cool aeroplane battles, not the main draw.

Player character death is handled with special rules in this game to keep the story moving, allowing players to decide when their stories end. There are no shocking, out of nowhere player character deaths in this game; you always have a chance to decide what happens to your character.

Queerness, Sex, & Intimacy

Flying Circus characterizes the culture of pilots in its universe as essentially a queer one, both directly and through metaphor. The central narrative of every character's life is of leaving home due to incompatibility and finding a new family of people who share your passion.

This game presents sex as part of the hedonistic, thrill-seeking lifestyle it portrays. There is never need to go into any detail: you can always fade to black. If this is a problem, even implications of sex can be excised: the game's mechanics will be preserved through *emotionally* intimate moments. But it's there if you want it to be.

Remember to always talk to one another as players around these events, before, during, and after play, and double check that everyone is comfortable with the scenes playing out at every stage.
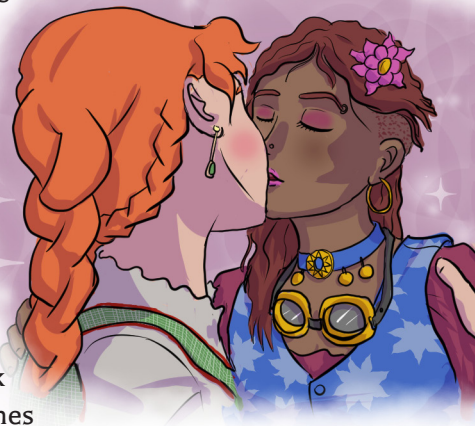
Excess, Drinking, & Drug Use

An idea that comes up repeatedly in these mechanics is that pilots are not kind to their bodies. They drink to excess, use drugs, have unwise sex, and put themselves in physical danger for the rush. The substances and methods used are named on the playbooks, and it will come up very frequently as part of the game's mechanical cycle. Pilots fly, brave death, and then deal with the stress with whatever tools they have available.

This is an area where discussion ahead of time is absolutely vital, because many people have had traumatic experiences around drugs and alcohol and it is important to be careful around these subjects. It's as easy as going down the list of potential vices on everyone's character sheets and crossing out any that aren't acceptable at your table. Don't interrogate one another over why; just accept it and remove it from your game. If you need to to preserve the available variety of options, come up with safer alternatives or pull vices from other playbooks.

Youth

Flying Circus is built around coming of age narratives, a *bildungsroman* if you will. While an adventure game, its thematic roots are in the experiences of pilots in the First World War, and the experience that those young people faced high above the trenches. We know that these pilots were as young as 16, and some may have been even younger.

There's also a clash between our modern idea of childhood and historical norm. The current recognition of childhood and teen years as a vulnerable time is just a little over a hundred years old. For most of human history, the idea of a minor needing to be sheltered from violence and sex was foreign. The potential to play very young characters unsuited for this world is a representation of that.

Talk this theme out with your fellow players. Are you comfortable with such young characters in the game? Is this a theme you want at your table? What do you want to confront in this context?

It's okay to simply mandate that all characters are of the age of majority and move on. The option to do otherwise exists to explore, if you want to, the unfortunate reality that the world are not always so kind.

Safety Tools

Having safety tools at the table will improve your game. Not only will you be safeguarding the wellbeing of the participants, but players and GMs alike will be more willing to tackle uncomfortable subjects when they know there is a way to back out. You will climb higher with a safety line.

Before you Start

Go back through the previous sections, and ask each player at the table what their comfort levels are with each of those topics. It can be helpful at the beginning to specify topics which you wish to see handled carefully, and which you wish to simply never come up. You should also talk about what you *do* want to see: it is okay to want your game to go to dark places.

Remember, anything in this book can be changed or left out. It's okay to simply ignore certain Threats, veto Background moves, remove playbooks entirely, and rewrite the world to be friendlier for your group. Do not try to compromise people's boundaries, and err on the side of caution.

At the Table

During play, it is vital that pausing play for any reason be completely normalized. GMs should lead by example, calling frequent pauses and encouraging players to do the same.

The GM must make a habit of stopping and asking if players are comfortable and wish to continue, especially in tense moments. Often, people who are overwhelmed will not be in a position to call for a halt. *You must be proactive.*

It is also important to put tools in the hands of players, even if it is not enough on its own. The exact method is not important, but it must be consistent and should be used regularly.

A simple system is to adapt stoplight safe word from BDSM, using agreed on words, signals, or phrases (classically, *Red, Yellow, Green*) to indicated "Please stop", "Dial it back, but don't stop play", and "This is good, more of this please". Remember, though, this is no substitute for checking on one another.
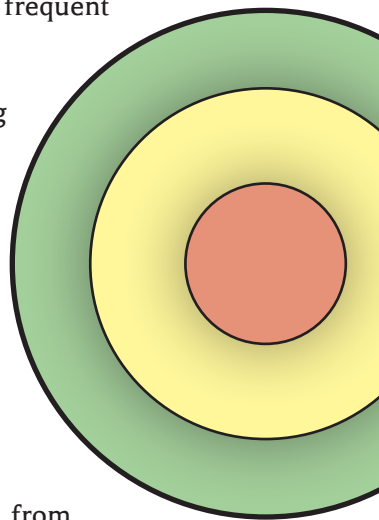
Basic Play

The Conversation

A roleplaying game is a conversation that creates a compelling story through actions and reactions. The rules govern this conversation by providing prompts, limiting or proscribing outcomes, creating twists, and pushing things in new directions. It's like a dance: It can be orderly or chaotic, carefully planned or spontaneous, but the best are intense and intimate and scandalize any old folks who might be watching.

The conversation in *Flying Circus* has a certain familiar rhythm. The GM establishes the circumstance and the stakes, acting as the eyes and ears of the characters. The players describe how their characters act in light of what they know, and ask clarifying questions. The GM adjusts and refines the circumstances in reaction, and the cycle repeats.

Or, more simply...

"This thing happens and it's important. What do you do?"

"I do this. What happens when I do?"

"Cool. That causes this to happen. What do you do now?"
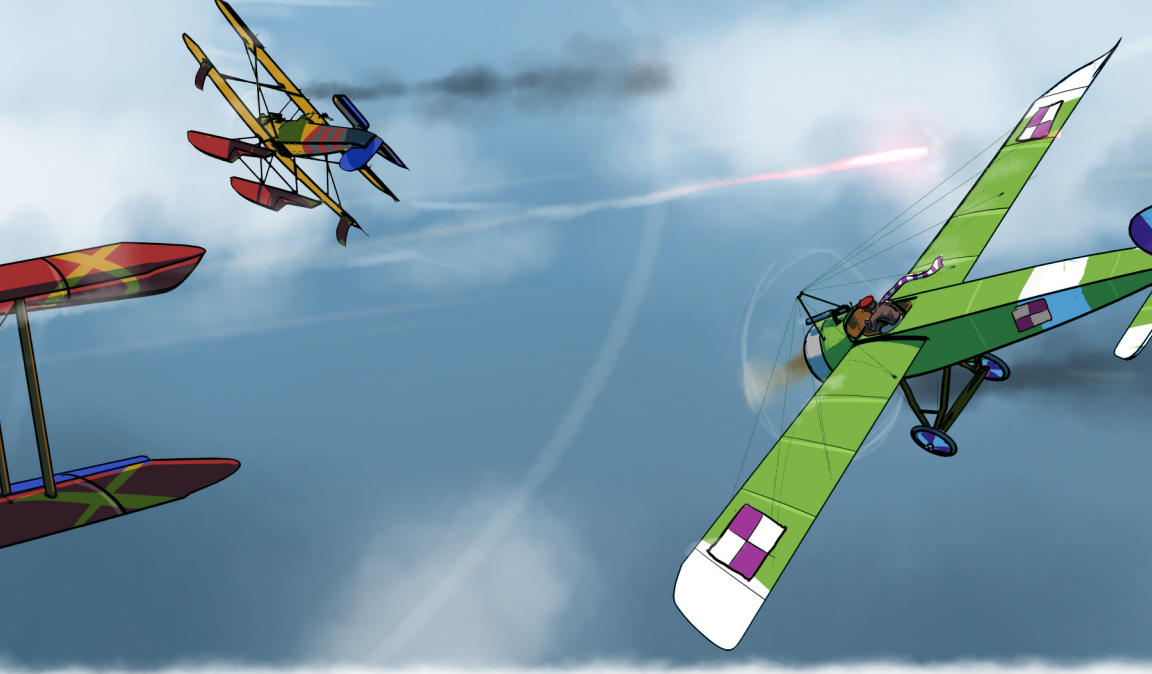
This is the basic unit of roleplaying. Players and GM keep reacting to one another, and that makes a story happen. Everything else is bookkeeping.

The most important part of the Conversation is to roll with it. When the GM introduces new information, the players react to the information in the fiction rather than argue about it. When the players try to do something outlandish or improbable, the GM tries to work it in anyway, asking clarifying questions, rolling the dice, or saying "yes" instead of shutting it down in or out of the fiction.

The other important thing is to keep in mind what has come before. Don't invalidate the previously established fiction. Remember who characters are and what limitations have been placed on the world. Work within those boundaries.

We use rules in a roleplaying game to make things happen that we don't want to happen. When we want to face danger and uncertainty, we use these impartial systems to shape our experiences. If the GM makes something bad happen to you out of the blue, that can be an upsetting interpersonal experience. When the rules tell you your wing snaps off, well, that's just the roll of the dice, isn't it?

Core Rules

The Conversation is a pretty robust framework; you can tell a story with it on its own, which is known as freeform roleplay. But freeform has its own pitfalls, and the use of agreed-upon rules can make the experience better for everyone. That's what these are.

Moves

This game is *Powered by the Apocalypse*, building atop the structure established in *Apocalypse World* by D.Vincent and Meguey Baker. A pillar of this structure that Flying Circus embraces is the concepts of <u>Moves</u>, which are a specific means of bringing rules into narrative play.

These moves are laid out on a reference sheet, and the way they work is that they have a **trigger** that corresponds to action in the narrative. So the move Evade Danger, for example, is triggered "*When you swerve to avoid an impact.*" So when this trigger happens during your conversation, you look up the move and follow the rules laid out there.

The trigger doesn't have to be exact, it just tells you what to look for in the narrative. If you know anything about programming, you can think of it as an if-then structure: if somebody does this, then do that.

Moves work best when you bring them in to match what was just said in the narrative, rather than invoking them overtly to make something happen. We call that "To do it, you do it." Don't say, "I want to Evade". Tell everyone how you evade, what you do to avoid crashing. That'll add more context to the move, and give you and the GM more to work with.

Another difficulty that can come up is a player not wanting to use a Move, but speaking the trigger. "I tell him he needs to help us, or else." "Cool, you <u>Pressing the Issue</u>?" "Oh, no, I just wanted to scare him!" When that happens, the GM needs to make it clear which Move needs to be made in that moment.

A Lot of Moves!

If you're a veteran of PbtA games, you may be intimidated by the number of moves. It's a lot, but they are divided by context: you only use a few at a time, and many of these moves are just ways of structuring simple rules.

"If you want to intimidate him, you have to Press the Issue." Remember, to do it, you do it, which also means if you do it, you've done it!

The GM can make you roll a move as a consequence of the narrative. This is called **pushing a move**. For instance, they might push the move Go Down if a player messes up during a low dive. Sometimes a Move will tell you to use another Move, or the narrative outcome of a Move is obviously another Move. This is called *snowballing*.

Things that aren't covered by the moves aren't important for the game mechanics, so just work it out through consensus. You don't need to roll dice to walk to the mayors office and give him a piece of your mind, unless what you say triggers a move. There's no rule to figure out if you can play an instrument or not, so it's acceptable to just say "Yeah, I can play guitar".

Dice

Many Moves involve rolling to determine what happens. Most rolls are 2 ten-sided dice (2d10, from 1 to 10) with the results added together. An 11+ is a **hit** and a 10 or less is a **miss**. A 11-15 is a **partial hit** and a 16+ is a **full hit**. Moves will tell you what happens on a full or partial hit, giving you the path forward. When you miss, the GM throws in a twist instead.

Simply rolling 2d10 is referred to as *rolling flat*. By contrast, when you're asked to roll + a stat (eg: +Hard, +Calm), you simply add the stat to the final result of your 2d10 roll. If the stat is negative, it instead decreases the final result. A roll might further change due to contextual modifiers. There's no maximum bonus or penalty in this game.

Some moves ask you to roll a number of twenty-sided dice (d20s), but still looking for 16+ or 11-15, and sometimes adding a stat. Apply your modifiers to each d20 individually, treating each like you'd treat 2d10.

The GM never *has* to roll dice for any mechanical purpose. They may roll dice to randomly generate some results, or for enemy fire if they want to, but generally, players are the only people who touch the dice.

On rare occasions, you will be asked to roll a d5. Because 5 sided dice are awful, roll a d10 and divide the results in half, rounding up.
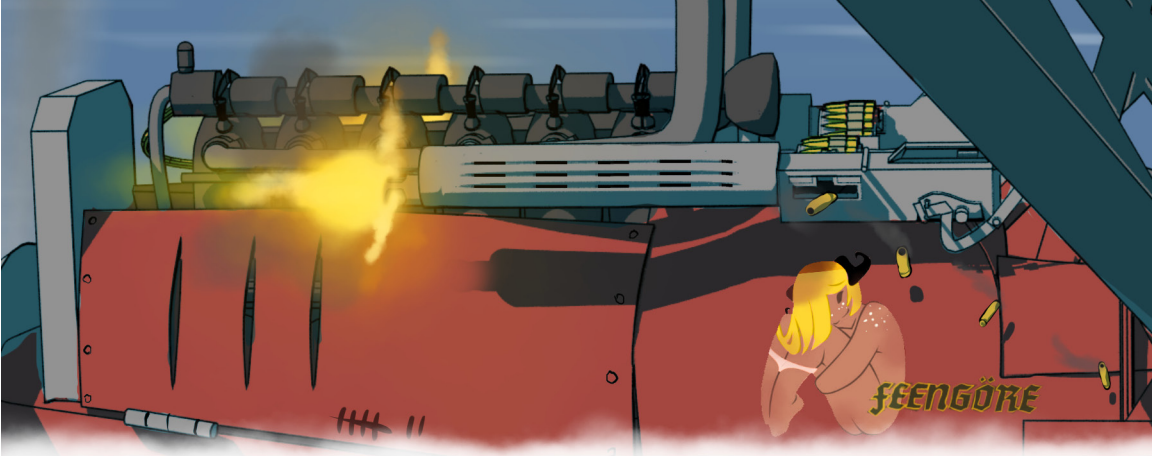
Forward, Ongoing, & Hold

When the rules say "Take +X forward", that means that on the next roll you make (of the +Stat variety), you add that bonus or penalty to your stat. You don't get a choice when you use it; it's always the next roll.

This can come with a condition. For instance, "+1 forward *when you dodge*", which means it fires the next time you do something dodge-like in the narrative. In the meantime, you can make other rolls that don't use your forward.

When the rules say "Take +X ongoing until...", you get a modifier to your stat until the condition is met (or stops being met). There can also be additional conditions for which rolls the bonus applies to within that time.

Finally, when the rules tell you to "hold" something, it means you get to keep it and spend it when you want for certain benefits, though conditions may apply. A hold could be a narrative bonus, a stat modifier, or similar. A hold could give the user a modifier forward or ongoing when used. You can keep a hold as long as you like, unless it has an involuntary trigger, and keep as many holds as you can get your hands on.

If you are told to hold or take forward "+results", that means that when you make an appropriate move which lets you pick from a list of options, you get to pick additional options.

Timing Out

There's no set time at which a forward or hold goes away. It could potentially carry between scenes or sessions.

Advantage & Disadvantage

When you have Advantage, on a move that rolls the standard 2d10+Stat dice you roll an additional die, using the result of the two highest dice. If you are Disadvantage, you do the same, but use the two lowest dice. If you have both Advantage and Disadvantage, they cancel each other out.

Advantage and Disadvantage can be the result of the Help/Hinder move, other moves, or at the discretion of the GM. The extra die should be of a different colour, or rolled by the player that provided it.

If the extra dice is a 1 (for Advantage) or 10 (for Disadvantage), this is called a Fault. If the extra dice is the result of interference (Help/Hindering usually), the GM makes a Hard Move against the player who provided it. So while you successfully covered for your friend as they went in for the attack run, perhaps you caught some flak...

NPC Assistance

PCs aren't the only ones who can lend Advantage. When NPCs help you out on actions, they give Advantage the same way. A Fault places those NPCs at the mercy of the GM; it'll often spell their doom.

Stress & Experience

During the course of a dangerous mission or a tense situation, player characters will encounter many tense situations. When pilots land and have time to process what they just experienced, these will be converted to **Stress**.

Stress has to be dealt with sooner rather than later, because characters will quickly find themselves burning out if they don't. Acquiring a great deal of Stress will prevent character advancement, and eventually cause a character to snap and act out.

Stress comes to a head just before the characters go back up in the air, so in between the game focuses on reducing stress through hedonistic excess and interpersonal relationships.

Every time a point of Stress is cleared, the player gets an **Experience Point** (XP). By spending XP, they can learn new Moves, improve their Stats, and otherwise add to their character. Generally, the fastest way to advance as a character is to take a lot of stress and then work it off, but this is a dangerous tightrope to walk. This is explored in more detail on page 123.

Injury & Death

Player characters take Injury when they get personally hurt, as a result of enemy fire, a bad crash, a lost fight, or some other mechanism.

You take an Ongoing penalty to all Attributes equal to the amount of Injury you have sustained until you are healed. Once you reach 3 or more Injury, you pass out, at least for now. You can keep receiving Injury past that point, and keep acting if you are revived, though further injury will knock you out again. A pilot could potentially have five or more Injury and need extensive medical treatment, but still be alive.

In *Flying Circus*, you can only die if you choose to. It might be narratively appropriate; you pass out at 2500 meters altitude with a wing missing, you're probably not going to make it out alive. However, it's always your choice. You can say "I don't think this is the end of my story", and you'll miraculously survive... though you might wish you hadn't.

Injury is healed through medical attention, so injured characters need to see a doctor of some kind to recover (end of Page 105). When characters start getting hurt, this is a sign to stop fighting and start running.

NPCs also take points of Injury, but it's just a useful abstraction.

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Keeping Track

Flying Circus uses a variety of methods on the playbook sheets to track information. The most simple are checkboxes, which can be laid out in a track. When you're told to mark a track, it means you check the next box.

A clock is a track laid out in a circle of segments, usually 4, 6, or 8. You fill it in one slice at a time as a countdown.

Gauges help you track damage to locations on your aircraft, and your altitude, air speed, and fuel. Because Gauges change often, use a token to track your location on them.

Finally, a good way to track just about any resource is to use tokens of some kind: pennies, beads, or game pieces.
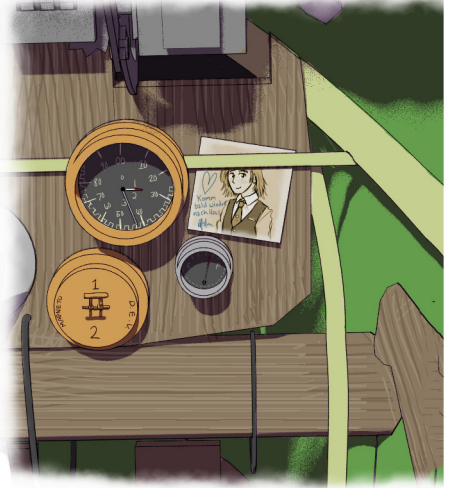
Trust

Relationships between player characters in *Flying Circus* is handled with a mechanic called Trust. Trust is a binary, non-reciprocal state handled with a simple checkmark on your character sheet; do you trust this person?

When you trust somebody, you'd die for them. If they get in a fight, you're right there throwing punches. Even when they're wrong, you'll back them up. If they need money, you won't hesitate to lend to them.

When you don't trust somebody, they're scum. You don't lend them money, you don't stand up for them, you don't help them out of trouble they got themselves into. You only work with them because you have to.

When you defy death on a daily basis, you live in the moment, because you could well die tomorrow. This environment of nebulous consequences drives pilots to be quick to anger and equally quick to forgive.

Players can break Trust with other players over anything they want, or nothing at all. Rebuilding that Trust happens when a character decides to put their distaste for another to stand by them or help them. With one exception (see page 92), Trust only applies between player characters.

Money

Flying Circus is primarily about flying dangerous missions in even more dangerous aircraft, but it's also a game about running a business. An aircraft company drinks money like a rotary engine drinks fuel and castor oil, so you bounce from job to job to keep your finances in the black.

The fall of the Old World took its money with it. In its place, every town issues their own currency, even if it's just cheap bills, tokens, or bottlecaps, which are referred to as scrip. Scrip is almost beneath your notice.

To regulate trade between towns, the trading companies use a currency called a **Thaler**, which is a big spoked gold coin the size of a beer coaster with a glass bead in the middle. We represent it with a þ through this text. A thaler is worth a lot of money, like a few months pay for a poor labourer.

The game only cares about the company budget. It's up to the players to work out how individual spending should work, how profits are shared, and when they can dip into the budget for personal expenses.

A thaler coin (to scale) from the Post-War era. The symbols shows it was minted in the air on a trade airship of "South Winds Trading Co". In the centre is a glass bead: a merchant could hold it to the light to check for the marble pattern of the company which issued it as an anti-counterfeiting measure.

Session Zero

Getting Started

The preparation phase of a campaign is Session Zero: In either an actual session of play, or just the days leading up to the first session, you talk to one another in order to establish your characters, create the company they belong to, and define the world they live in.

Follow this structure.

- *As a group*, agree on the sort of game you want to play. Discuss the tone of the game and characters, any story ideas you want to explore, and go over the Content & Safety chapter together.
- *Individually* or *as a group*, create your characters.
- *As a group*, answer the Trust Questions for each character.
- *As a group*, create the Company and the Region Map.
- *As a group*, check in to make sure everyone is still on board, and make any changes you need to.
- *As a group*, play your first session!

Character Creation

To create a character, the first thing you must do is choose a Background. Your background tells us where your character comes from and why they started flying, setting up the story of a young pilot's personal history.

Playbooks have two sheets. The first is used to create the character initially, but is not needed beyond that. The second is the sheet used for play.

If two people decide to play characters of the same background, you might decide that you come from the same place. A family connection or a preexisting romantic relationship are both strong hooks.

The backgrounds are...
- <u>A Farmer</u>, a naive rural bush pilot with incredible potential.
- <u>A Soldier</u>, a holdout carrying on the martial traditions of the past.
- <u>A Fisher</u>, a stranger from coastal lands with ties to dark powers.
- <u>A Skyborn</u>, an outsider who has lived their life in the air.
- <u>A Student</u>, a pupil from an academic holdout run ragged.
- <u>A Believer</u>, a radical with strong ideas of how the world should be.
- <u>A Scion</u>, a remnant of the nobility venturing forth from safety.
- <u>A Survivor</u>, a half-feral child of the broken cities clinging to life.
- <u>A Witch</u>, a wildling whose proximity to the fae has granted magic.
- <u>A Worker</u>, a soul made weary by makework here for the paycheck.

Each playbook has a series of lists you can select options from. These lists are never exhaustive: you can always choose to write in your own options. Each background's details are explored in more detail starting on page 127, so take a look there before making a choice.

Name & Hometown

On each sheet are lists of names you can select for your character. The first list are primarily masculine, the second list is primarily feminine, and the final offset list are family names. Any name will do, and it does not even need to be a real name as this is a fantasy world, but a Germanic sound will probably have the best fit for most characters.

Additionally, there are a list of town names, and some sample age ranges. These ages will give you an idea how old your character might be, and how that is perceived in their culture or to outside observers.

People

There are many different ethnic, national, and cultural groups in Himmilgard that can help ground your character in a place and history. While each background suggests a number that would be a natural fit, you can usually feel free to take any. You are also aren't in any way restricted to just one. The world is a vast and diverse place.

The cultures are summarized on eight printable culture cards. Each culture card includes a brief summary of your culture's history, identity, and values, as well as hair, eye, and skin colour suggestions and setting notes. More details about each culture can be found on page 268.

Expectations

These backgrounds are more than just mechanical flavours for player characters. They represent trends and demographics inside the world, and with those come expectations, both stereotypes that other people have about you and ideals that your fellows have about themselves.

The Expectations section use this idea to help flesh out your character. The bullet points tackle the archetypical image about this background's range of gender presentation, beliefs and ideals, body and hands, and clothing. Which of these expectations resonate? In what ways are you different?

The gender section deserves particular attention, as the options are often sharply and unfairly limited. Again, these are expectations which are meant to be defied, not truths about the world. Your answer doesn't have to be drawn from here, or match the pronouns you write on your sheet.

History & Questions

Next is a series of multiple choice choice questions, and after that there are some more freeform questions. Answer as truthfully as you wish.

An option present for most backgrounds is that they left home because they were "too queer". This isn't a requirement for playing a queer character: it just means their queerness was a factor in their leaving home.

The Trust questions should happen last. Sometimes the player can answer those questions themselves, and sometimes they need to ask everyone else. This is a great bonding experience for players.

Start With...

Every character starts with stuff. We divide this stuff into three parts, your Assets, your Baggage, and your Plane. Exactly what mechanical or narrative effects, the details of these things, are up to you and the GM. If you take a person with you, you can define which kind of employee (Page 106) they are. If it's a weapon, look at the options on Page 172 and choose an appropriate one, or make up stats with the GM.

In addition to all this stuff, you can reasonably assume your character has their flying leathers, extra clothes, goggles, a notepad and pencil, a watch, basic regional maps in a stiff casing, cigarettes, a matchbook or tinderbox, emergency rations (like malted milk tablets or chocolate), a simple toolkit, some basic first aid supplies, a compass, and a canteen.

Assets & Baggage

Your Assets are practical stuff for everyday use. Every character starts with a small number of Thaler and a selection of two or three additional assets. These are generally weapons, armour, backup aircraft, practical equipment like parachutes, or employees already working for you.

Your Baggage, on the other hand, is more esoteric: Letters from home, heirlooms, maps, friendships, scars, deeds to land. Some are completely abstract; a dark past, a promise, somebody's last words. It's up to you which you take and how you use it in the game.

Your Plane

Every background has four suggested aircraft: they can be found in the online playbooks, with a selection of them duplicated on page 308. They can also buy any plane they can afford with the budget given: used planes cost half as much, but you'll need to roll on the chart on page 109.

Your plane will need a cool paint scheme, and could probably use some nose art: Heraldry, slogans, political symbols, funny drawings, or just hot people in a state of undress. Examples of nose art are scattered throughout the book, but there's a nice collection of samples on page 282.

Melde mich zum Dienst!

Attribute Selection

The core stats which are assigned to a character, and the ones you'll be rolling most times you roll dice, are your Attributes.

- <u>Hard</u> means hard-hearted, aggressive, mean, cold, cruel. You roll Hard when you start fights, take lives, and make tough decisions. It's the stat you want for putting down enemy planes.
- <u>Keen</u> means keen senses, bright, aware, on-the-ball, head on a swivel. You roll Keen to dodge fire, navigate, and talk your way out of trouble. It's the stat you want to stay on top of things.
- <u>Calm</u> means calm and composed, careful, considerate, by the book. You roll Calm to safely land a plane, make repairs, negotiate, and make human connections. It's the stat you want for survival.
- <u>Daring</u> means derring-do, glory-seeking, living on the edge, out of your mind. You roll Daring when you put your plane, or yourself, through the impossible, and when you want to brag about it. It's the stat you want to be a hero.

Each background has four starting attribute lines to pick from, called your Temperaments. These represent archetypical representations of your background. Pick one, and then add a +1 to any of your stats.

Stress & Familar Vices

Characters build up stress over time, and must get rid of it with their Vices. The only thing you have to select here is your Familiar Vices, which are ways of blowing off steam your pilot is accustomed to, but you can use this as a chance to get a handle on your Stress Triggers and Vents.

Most characters start with drinking already checked off, as Himmilgard has a strong culture of social alcohol consumption. The others tend to be a bit more tied to the nature of the background, though there is overlap.

Personal Moves

Every character has a selection of Personal Moves, which represent skills and natures brought in from a character's background. These special moves give them an edge, and can eventually be taught to your comrades as you share your culture and experiences.

Each character has at least one default move already checked off, which is their Core Move. This move generally represents some central vulnerability or hindrance that the character must manage.

Characters also have an Intimacy Move, which is employed... well, when things get intimate. Basically, this move is played when two or more characters allow themselves to be physically, emotionally, and/or sexually vulnerable with each other. This is detailed further on page 43.

In addition to Core and Intimacy Moves, every character picks Personal Moves, usually 3 of them. The other Moves are still part of their heritage and are available to them later, but we won't see them in the story yet.

Masteries

Your Mastery is the way you fly your plane in combat, your favoured tactics and strategies. Go check page 124, there are details there.

Each Mastery has conditions that earn you Victories, which you need to become a recognized Flying Ace, as well as a list of special Moves your character has access to. Taking a Mastery unlocks the core move of that Mastery for air combat, but you'll need to earn the others.
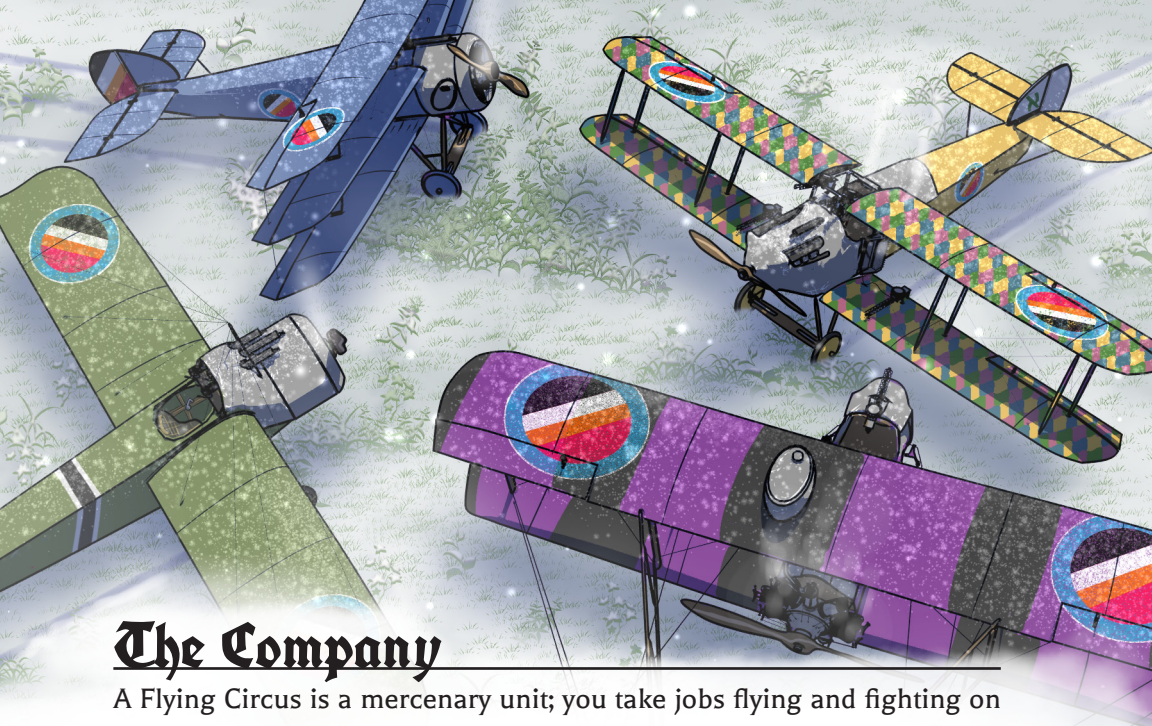
The Company

A Flying Circus is a mercenary unit; you take jobs flying and fighting on behalf of clients. The organization, founding purpose, and makeup of these companies can differ wildly, from cooperatives owned jointly by the pilots to traditional top-down companies to barely organized pirate bands.

The mechanics don't account for any personal finances: it just assumes that everyone has agreed to pool their money and spend as they need it. But maybe you want a different organization? A Circus could be a co-op where all the members share profits beyond the operating expenses, or the PC pilots could form a sort of board of executives. Maybe there's one player you trust to be the CEO, or perhaps the squadron has an investor, like a wealthy reclusive or a town taking up collection.

As you form the company, ask and answer the following questions as a group. It's okay if you don't have answers right away: maybe your company hasn't figure that stuff out yet either.

- How did you all meet?
- Why did you decide to form the company?
- What is the purpose of the company?
- What kind of missions do you specialize in?
- Have you flown your first mission yet?
- How is the company organized?
- How is pay handled?

Paint Schemes

Flying Circuses are so named because every member of the company typically paints their planes to suit their own preferences, creating a wild mess of colours. This term originated in real life with Mannfred von Richthofen's Jagdgeschwader I, a WWI fighter wing whose planes each bore distinct bright colours, including that of the Red Baron himself.

A good paint job involves bright colours, flash on tails and spinners, bands of contrast, and patterns like checkerboards, strips, and spirals. Camouflage might be painted, airbrushed, or dyed into the canvas, often in interlocking diamonds or hexagons. The flanks bear paintings of cool animals and hot people as well as kill tallies and/or the pilot's name.

Roundels

Planes are identified as part of a company using a symbol called a Roundel. Roundels are traditionally placed on the top of the upper wing, the underside of the lower wing, and either the sides or the tail. A good roundel is easy to describe, reproduce, and identify at long distance.

In-universe, the military roundels of the Old World nations are based on card suits, with major nations using the classic French suit. These symbols had long cultural histories before national militaries appropriated them, so many pilots still use them, often in new colours.

A simple classic is a tricolour 'bullseye' or 'cockade' roundel. While many classic examples in real life typically used white as the intermediate colour, not all of them did, so any combination of colours will work.
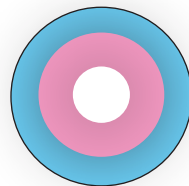
Variations on the bullseye can be created with other shapes, like triangles or stars. Such a shape could be placed inside a circle. You could also use checkerboard patterns, or perhaps arrows.

Finally, you could abandon the coloured patterns entirely and just use a symbol or shape. Perhaps this symbol could reflect the culture the founding pilots were from, like a religious icon or coat of arms?

The Company Roster

Just as players and planes have character sheets, the Circus has a Company Roster. One column of the Roster contains slots for employees, the other tracks planes. You need to pay upkeep on all these, representing salaries, replacement parts, labour, lodging, repairs, and other expenses.

Write the names of every player character down as employees, and all the NPCs you brought along. Check page 106 for details on the costs, but in summary, Pilots (PC & NPC), Confidants, and Fixers cost 1þ, Doctors cost 2þ, and everyone else costs ½þ each.

In the plane section, write in every plane that the company has between them. For expenses, planes have associated Upkeep costs, scaling with the poewer of their engines.

Add up the expenses for each column at the bottom of the sheet and round up to a whole number. That's your operating costs. Meet it.

Employees

As the game goes on, your Circus will expand, gaining employees who can do things for you. Ideally, you'll eventually end up with a small army of people who will make your life cheaper, easier, and more manageable.

- Pilots fly planes, obviously! NPC pilots flesh out your numbers.
- Civilian pilots fly planes that don't fight, like cargo and rescue craft.
- Mechanics repair planes cheaply and consistently.
- Guards defend your planes and fight for you on the ground.
- Doctors heal injured members of the company.
- Observers fire turrets and personal weapons, and watch the skies.
- Navigators help direct planes on long journeys.
- Bombardiers drop bombs using specialized bomb sights.
- Attendants help members of the company handle stress.
- Fixers help you smooth talk your way through negotiations.

You'll need to find a way to move your employees from site to site, but otherwise you don't need to worry about them much, unless the GM decides you do. Treat them poorly, they'll probably quit, or worse, *unionize.*

Company Value

Your Company Value (CV) is a stat which loosely represents the fighting power of your company to potential clients. It is equal to the size of the force you field, so the lowest between your active combat pilots or your working combat planes. The person hiring you doesn't care about how many mechanics or doctors you have on call!

Particilarly distinguished pilots will give bonuses to the CV (page 124).

A different sort of Circus might need to work out a different means of determining their CV. If your company does infrastructure work, then you could use the number of manned utility aircraft. A barnstorming company might use the number of individuals who participate in the stunt show.

Fame & Infamy

This part of your sheet covers your company's long-term reputation. As it is a brand new company, this should usually be left blank. However, you might be forming a *Legacy Squadron*, using the name and livery of a first-generation Circus. If you are, pick one Fame and one Infamy Move that lingers from the first incarnation of this group.

The World

It's been about twenty years since the end of the end of the world. The old cities are gone; only outliers remain. These small, isolated communities are trying to reconnect to one another, reestablish the ancient trade routes, and reacquire useful technology. They hire private companies of mercenary pilots to protect them and advance these goals; that's you. To play this game, you need to know who you are and where you're from.

Region Map

A campaign of *Flying Circus* will get a lot of mileage out of maps, so after the characters are picked you should draw one up on a blank piece of paper. This will be a Region Map, covering a large area of the world. Think of this map as a cultural and geographic region, like the Southwestern United States, the Korean Peninsula, or East Africa in the real world. This is a place with a unique and distinct climate, culture, and history.

The scale of this map is deliberately left ambiguous; it is more about where things are relative to other things rather than exactly how far between elements. It is also left mostly blank; people aren't actually sure what is where anymore, beyond a few defined geographical boundaries.

This region will need a name. As a general rule, places and nations in *Flying Circus* are named for real world aircraft companies, especially German and Austro-Hungarian companies of the First World War. They might be the rainy Sopwith Isles in the Ostsee, the rocky Daimler coast, the frozen Sablatnig steppe, or the poisoned industrial heartland of the Gotha mountain range.

If you need inspiration, you can refer to a list of places and brief descriptions on page 258, but feel free to make up your own.

Regions need a geographical and climatic identity. Himmilgard is a subequatorial continent, so the northern end is tropical while the southern end is frozen. For the most part, it is based on the climate and geographic elements of central Europe, with climates from the rest of the continent and a bit of North Africa featured as well, but that shouldn't stop you from having dense jungles, tropical beaches, or vast deserts if you want them.

Next up, you should add about a half-dozen settlements to the map. Towns (Page 86) typically correspond to one of the Background that players use. Everyone can have input, but the GM will generally choose where they go. This won't be every settlement in the region, but they're a start. Remember to name everything as you go. You can take names from the background sheets or just make up names that sound vaguely Germanic (or not!).

Generally most characters will have come from outside this region, but if it makes sense for a character or story, you can include the settlement of one or more of the players on the map.

Fill out a few more details on the map; mountain ranges and valleys especially. Remember; there are no roads, and the spaces between settlements are dark and mysterious. Add a few points of interest, but leave plenty of blank space.

- A deep and impenetrable forest or swamp.
- A massive mountain, taller than the best plane can fly.
- A haven city for pirates and bandits.
- A warlord's citadel, controlling nearby towns.
- An immense downed airship, so large you can fly inside it.
- A Sky-Whale graveyard, carefully guarded.
- A split in the ground leading to deep, unexplored caverns.
- A suspended Sky-Line cable train, long silent.

Now, decide where the adventure starts, preferably somewhere none of the pilots are from. Through hook and crook, they got themselves, all their stuff, and their aeroplanes here. Funds are running low. Time to find a job and begin your adventure!

The Routine

Game Structure

Flying Circus is built around a structural concept called The Routine. A routine is the fixed loop of Flying Circus; from when you take off at the start of a flight until just before you go on the next one. The routine is what gives Flying Circus structure, and it meters out the financial system of the game to make sure your pilots can always afford to fly their cutting-edge aeroplanes and go on fantastical adventures.

Broadly, the two parts of the routine are The Mission and Business & Pleasure. Generally speaking, a Routine begins and ends at the Preflight Check portion, just before you go off on another daring mission.

These two sections are dependant on each other, creating a constant cycle. You take missions and fly to get money. You spend money to deal with injuries, improve your planes, and mitigate stress. Repeat.

Your first game can start anywhere on the Routine, though jumping straight into the action is best. You could play a dozen minor routines in a session or spend three sessions exploring every aspect of one phase. Both phases have natural termination points; you'll run out of fuel in the air, and out of money (or consciousness) on the ground.
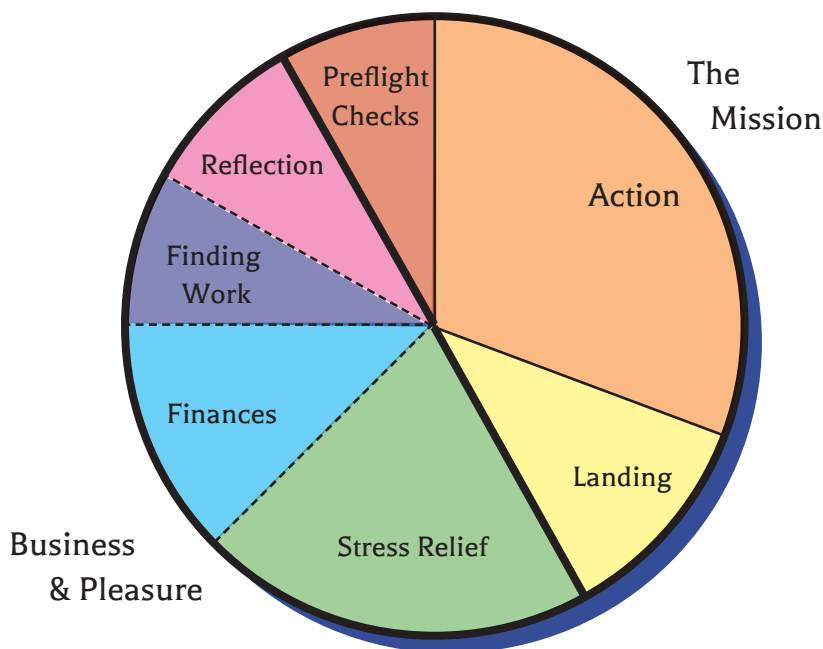
Phase Summary

- In Preflight Checks, players handle the prep and book-keeping needed to go in the air, and check if their character is ready for another mission.
- During Action, the players engage in daring combat in the air or on the ground. The most complex phase, this covers Air Combat & Manoeuvres, Bombing, and Ground Exploration.
- When Landing, players come back from the mission and figure out how much stress their characters took.
- During Stress Relief, characters indulge their vices and engage in interpersonal drama.
- During Finances, players spend their hard-earned cash on upkeep, salaries, and new toys.
- During Finding Work, players canvas the town for jobs and negotiate payment.
- In Reflection, the pilots select advances as they wait to fly again.

This natural loop will keep a game going to new and interesting places, and segments the mechanical complexity into isolated chunks.

Universal Moves

These moves can be used freely in any part of the routine.

Press your Luck

When you take a risk, <u>you do it</u>, and consequences unfold.

Complications will arise naturally from GM moves, so if it isn't covered by a specific move, *leave the dice alone.* Pilots do not roll skill checks!

Break Trust

When you lose trust in a comrade, erase their mark and choose one.
- Keep your feelings hidden, and <u>take 1 Stress</u>.
- Show directly and explicitly how you feel, and <u>remove 1 Stress</u>.

Remember, show, don't tell. Slap them in the face, scream at them, throw things at them, slam the door in their face, make love to their sweetheart in broad daylight atop their favourite plane. Make drama!

But remember, this is something that happens between characters, not players. Please don't actually assault or yell at your friends!

Restore Trust

When you show faith in a comrade, mark Trust and take 1 Stress.

Saying "I trust you" means a lot less than giving something up, protecting them, sharing a familiar gesture, leaving your life in their hands, or kissing them passionately atop a burning zeppelin. As usual, this is between characters, not players, unless you two actually do want to make out.

Help/Hinder

When you put yourself at risk help a comrade, give them Advantage forward. If you didn't trust them, Restore Trust.

When you make a point to hinder a comrade, give them Disadvantage forward. If you trusted them, Break Trust.

Help/Hinder is the primary way that Advantage and Disadvantage enters play, and is an extremely important move. However, this assistance must go beyond just being present with an event, or doing the same thing at the same time. There must be danger, you must put yourself at risk to protect/screw over your friend!

The risk is important. Help or hindrance that doesn't put you at risk doesn't count, because there's nothing special about it.

Multiple people helping doesn't add any more dice, but it does let a team come together and restore (or break) trust, with the helping or hindering being able to trigger Break and Restore Trust. If multiple people are involved when a Fault is rolled, the GM can ask for a volunteer, select somebody on a whim, or collectively affect everyone.

Discover Beauty

Once per routine, when you witness beauty in the world, describe how you are moved by what you see, and lose 1 Stress.

Flying Circus has its roots in Studio Ghibli films, and a running theme through many of these films is that both the natural world and the lives we live are beautiful, and worth experiencing for its own sake.

The lives of the player characters are going to be difficult, dangerous, and frightening. The moments like this, where they feel small before something vast, when they look on a place or a person with unreserved awe, are the moments, the experiences, that make it all worth it.

This move is for when the GM describes a breathtaking landscape, when you come over the hill and see a lovely little town, when you return to your childhood home after a long absence, or when you first catch sight of your lover on your wedding day.

It's up to the player when this move kicks in, but it shouldn't be done casually. This move defines what you character sees as beautiful, and this beauty must be unexpected, unique, or special, a single fleeting and exceptional moment. Nothing about it can be routine or usual, and you shouldn't use the same thing twice for this move.

Intimacy

When you share a moment of emotional (and possibly physical) intimacy with one or more characters, all PCs activate their Intimacy Move.

To be clear: Intimacy does not mean sex, but it also doesn't *not* mean sex. It represents a moment of closeness and vulnerability between two (or more) characters *for its own sake*. If you're trying to manipulate somebody, Press the Issue +Keen. If there's no strings attached, it's a Vice.

This distinction creates several nuanced meanings to sex and attraction in the game. A character might engage in casual sex as a Vice, and not be afraid of using sex to get ahead, but one day she kisses her best friend and it's more real and scary and meaningful than she was ready for.

Because this move isn't necessarily sex, a character's asexuality, or incompatible orientations, doesn't need to matter. Likewise, it doesn't need to imply romantic love: an aromantic character can still share an Intimate moment. Furthermore, nothing about this move implies there should only be two partners involved.

Intimacy with important NPC characters can activate this move, but oftentimes some effects won't apply because the NPCs usually don't roll dice. In these cases, any time an NPC would get a dice bonus from the activation of an intimacy move, they instead automatically accomplish whatever task is affected or they are saved from harm's way, as appropriate.

Though you probably shouldn't play out intimate scenes at your table (unless you have one of *those* groups), generally speaking there should at least be the implication that this act of intimacy has happened within the narrative. You can't retroactively be like "Well he's my boyfriend so presumably..." with some suggestive hand gestures. Earn it in the story!

Preflight Checks

Set-Up

When you get ready to fly, most of the the relevant information will be on your instrument panel and component cards, though your character sheet and masteries should be close by for reference. This is mostly a preparation phase, so this chapter we'll to go over the basics.

Instrument Panel

Your Instrument Panel helps you keep track of all the various elements and stats of your aircraft as they change from damage, bombs dropped, and fuel consumed. Your Component Cards (Page 49-51) are a part of it as well, though can just use a notepad instead of printing them out.

Make sure your Instrument Panel numbers match all the latest information from your aircraft, and that everything is accurate. You'll be glancing at this sheet a lot, so you want to make sure it's reliable. Set all your gauges to zero. Place a marker on the 0 position of Air Speed and Altitude. Write down your current Structure count. Make sure the photo on your instrument panel has a cute drawing of your sweetheart.
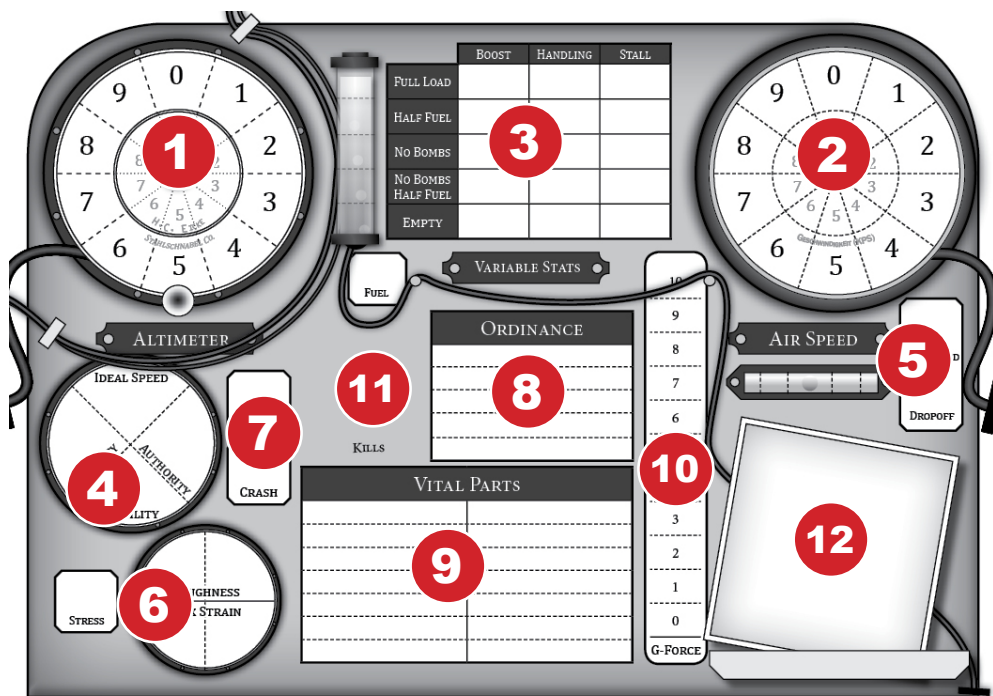
1. Altimeter: Tracks your Altitude.
2. Air Speed Indicator: Tracks your Air Speed.
3. Wet Stats: This displays the stats that change with fuel use, the bar tracking it, and the number of uses.
4. Dry Stats: Shows your Cornering Speed, Blind Spots, Control, and Stability stats, plus per-flight Stress. These stats don't change during play.
5. Speed Stats: How fast your plane goes!
6. Integrity: Tells you your Max Strain and Toughness stats, which together act as your health/hit points.
7. Safety Stats: Modifiers to when you bail out of or crash a plane.
8. Ordnance: Tracks your bomb load and it's mass.
9. Vital Parts: Lists the various parts of your aeroplane.
10. G-Force Chart: Used to track the Gees sustained by the plane.
11. Kill Tracker: Where you list the number of kills you've scored.
12. Picture: A picture of what your pilot is fighting for.

1. Altimeter

Your Altimeter gauge is a two-part circular gauge which separate tracks the 1s and 10s place of your Altitude stat. This gauge will change quite frequently over the course of play.

Place two tokens on your Altimeter. The usual convention is for the outer ring to represent the 1s place and the inner ring to represent the 10s, because it's easier to move and read the outside and the 1s place changes changes more frequently and dramatically.
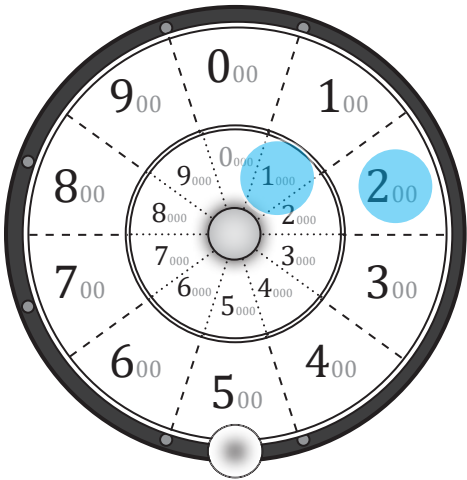
An Altimeter reading 12 Altitude (1200m)

2. Air Speed Indicator

Your Air Speed Indicator works exactly like your Altimeter, using the same convention for indicating the 1s and 10s place. Place and use your tokens on it the same way. Write your Thrust stat in the appropriate box: that controls your plane's acceleration, essentially.

	Boost	Handling	Stall
Full Load	2	−8	8
Half Fuel Bombs	3	−6	7
Full Fuel No Bombs	2	−7	8
No Bombs Half Fuel	3	−5	6
Empty	3	−4	5

A typical fuel gauge. Half the fuel is gone, so it uses the second stat line.

3. Wet Stats

The stats a plane has change as they lose mass. We don't care at all about partial effects here. We only care when the fuel hits half or less, when all the bombs are gone, or when the fuel tank is completely empty.

Boost is acceleration, Handling is nimbleness, and Stall Speed is when you stall out.

6. Dry Stats

Your Dry Stats are stats that don't change during a sortie. Your Visibility tell you how hard it is to see out of your plane. Energy Loss is how much speed you lose to air resistence, while Turn Bleed is how much it changes while making combat turns. Stability is rolled when your plane goes out of control, and per-flight Stress is how taxing the aircraft is to fly.

5. Speed Stats

These two simple stats track your top speed at level and the point at which your engine boosts you more effectively. If you are carrying external parts you can get rid of (like drop tanks or bombs outside of a bomb bay) write your Max Speed as Loaded Speed/Empty Speed.

6. Integrity

Max Strain and Toughness combine to act as the hit points of your plane. Your Max Strain is how many G-Forces your plane can withstand, with the important number being the tens place. Your Toughness is a buffer of bonus hit points above that. Use the quartered circle to list them as Remaining/ Total to make tracking easier.

This plane has taken II damage, reducing the Toughness first.

Damage subtracts first from Toughness, then from Max Strain. Once Max Strain reaches 0, the plane disintegrates in midair and you probably die, though the wings probably fall off earlier from G-forces.

7. Safety Stats

The Safety Stats are only every rolled when you jump out of a plane or crash land it, representing how easy it is to do both. Just copy them from your aircraft design sheet and hope you never need to roll them.

8. Ordnance

The is a list you can use to track the number of bombs, rockets, drop tanks, and other expendable doodads your plane might be carrying that they'll use up.

Only once you've used up everything here do you use the No Bombs statlines. It's all or nothing: if you want your best performance, drop or shoot off everything still attached before the fight starts.

ORDNANCE
x15 1 mass HE
x1 3 mass Fire
x8 AP Rocket

Somebody's planning a party.

9. Vital Parts & Armour

This section of the Instrument Panel is used to track damage to specific components on the aeroplane. Copy them down from the appropriate part of your aircraft. When parts get hit, mark them or cross them out so you know they don't work anymore.

The Armour is used to ward off incoming attacks, and is listed here.

VITAL PARTS
x2 MG
Fuel Tank
Cockpit
Oil Tank ✗
Engine
Landing Gear ✗

Without an oil tank, you'll need to land soon. Without a landing gear, that isn't going to be fun.

10. G-Force Tracker

This long skinny track from 0 to 10 tells you how much strain the plane and pilot are currently experiences. Just place a marker down on 0 and move it when moves require it, simple as that. It's not 1-1 with real G-Forces, seeing as that's really complex. It's just an abstraction.

The G-Force tracker is a modifier to *all your rolls* while it is in effect, so always remember to check where it is before you roll your dice!

11. Kill Tally

Using the kill tally couldn't be simpler. Every time you get a kill (usually defined as forcing down or destroying a plane in the air, but this can vary depending on your Mastery) you mark a little scratch down. At five scratches, cross it over: you're an Ace now.

If you start to run out of room, use the back of the sheet. Also, *damn.* Slow down there, Herr Richthofen. Save some for the rest of us.

12. Picture

The most important part of any instrument panel is the picture of a loved one. This is probably a sweetheart (or sweethearts...) back on the ground, but it could also be your parents, a mentor, a deity, a beloved pet... whatever you think is appropriate.

Remember: you need the other stuff to fight, but you need the picture to remind you what you are fighting for.

LMG x2

Weapon System

WEAPON TYPE

x2 LMGs, upper wing mount

Ammo	AP	Jam
4 clips of 2	1	1/2

Range	Knife	Close	Long	Extreme
Hits	6	8	2	0
Damage	12	16	4	0

Tags: rapid-fire, accessible, flexible, shoots up and forward

Weapon System Cards

Weapons of the same (or similar) type form a single <u>Weapon System</u>. The sample card details a pair of light machine-guns mounted so that the pilot can access them and even point them upward in combat!

- • *Type* tells you what sort of weapon it is so you can keep track.
- • *AP* tells you how much armour the weapon goes through.
- • *Ammo* tells you how many shots you carry. It's a good idea to track your ammo with tokens or by writing it down.
- • *Jam Chance* is reliability: it is always the highest number in a system. Rapid-fire weapons have a second number used for automatic fire.
- • *Tags* is where you put any special rules and descriptions.

Then, there's the Range Chart. Check the profiles on page 178, and use the Hits values there The Hits are modified by percentage at different ranges: Most guns will use 100/75/50/25 percent, rounding down, for each range band in sequence, but wing-mounted guns use 80/100/30/10. If you've got a mix, calculate separately, then add them together.

Then, for each band, multiply the Hits by the weapon's Damage stat.

- • *Hits* tells you how many shots will hit at this range.
- • *Damage* is how much damage is done at that range.

	RELIABILITY	IDEAL ALT.	OVERSPEED
Engine	−1	29	22

Notes: Take +1 when turning Left.

130hp rotary engine

Engine Cards

You'll need one of these for each engine on your plane. This card details a typical rotary engine that many fighter planes use, while to the right is a heavier V8 model for an attack plane.

Each engine has two gauges, with the first slot in each being 0. The RPM gauge tracks stress on the engine, while the Wear gauge tracks damage.
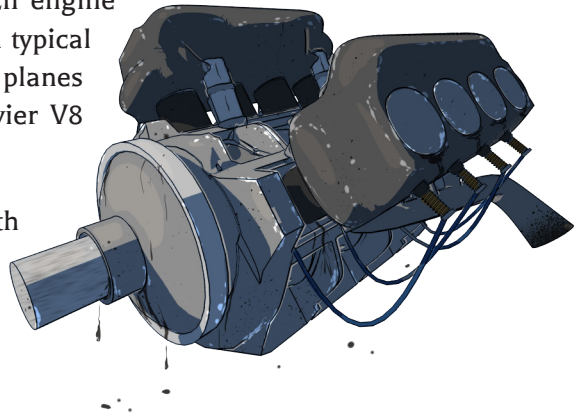
- *Reliability* is a modifier to Cool Off the engine. A low Reliability engine will frequently take damage from overworking itself.
- The *Ideal Altitude* is the maximum altitude that engine works optimally at. Above that, it is less effective.
- The *Overspeed* is the top speed the engine itself can handle before it breaks down. Some engines don't handle overtorque too well!
- Notes are where you add anything special. Rotary engines like this one have strong torque effects, so they add a +1 to Dogfight! when turning either left or right to represent that.

Radiator

MOUNT TYPE

High: When destroyed: 1 Injury to pilot, lasts 1 more Cool Down.

LIQUID

Salt Water (Safe)
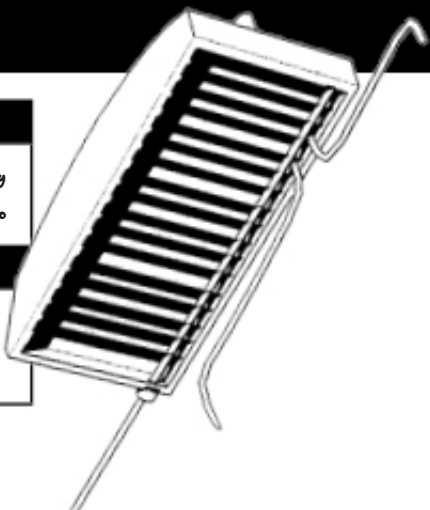
Radiator Cards

Some engines pump liquid in a cycle between the working parts and a series of exposed tubes to whisk away heat. When radiators are destroyed, RPM is converted straight to Wear when the engine Cools Down.

The *Mount* type applies special rules if the radiator is destroyed.
- Inline radiators have no special rules.
- Low radiators push Cool Down immediately when destroyed.
- High radiators still apply to the next Cool Down after being destroyed, which inflicts 1 Injury from hot, spraying water.
- High Offset radiators are High radiators, with no Injury.

The *Liquid* tells you what's in the radiator. It's usually hot water, but page 190 has a list of special fluids you might use instead.
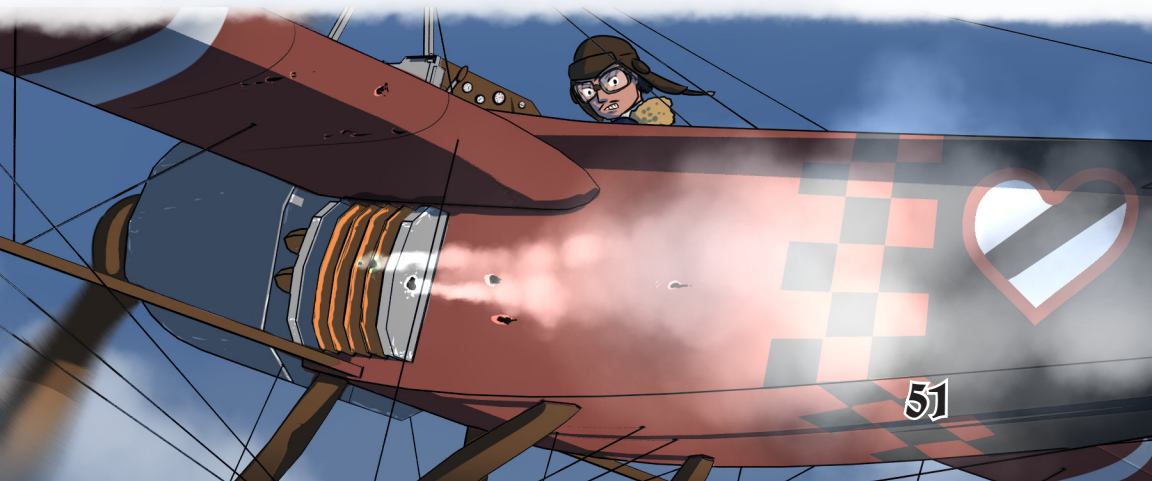
Get Going

Once the mission is locked in, your preflight checks are done, and you've calibrated your instruments, it's time to head for the skies.

CONTACT!

When you take off, the GM yells "Contact!" Respond "Switch On!", increase your RPM by 1 on all engines, set your speed to the lowest Max Speed in the squadron, and climb to a chosen altitude. Make engine noises as appropriate (see page 279).

This move has few mechanical repercussions: the initial RPM serves only to make players engage with and remember their engine systems through the upcoming mission. It's a group bonding exercise: nothing brings everyone together like yelling something silly before a game.

If you're stuck, 15 Altitude (1500m) is a good cruising altitude.

AIR PATROL

When you lead the squadron on a search, <u>roll +Calm</u>. Take +1 each time you roll this move in the same mission.

On a 16+, you find what you were looking for. On an 11-15, you find something else. On a miss, either something finds you and Engage is rolled at Disadvantage, or push Fuel Check and roll again.

Finding things in the air can be difficult. If you don't know exactly where you are going and how you're going to get there, you roll Air Patrol. This move represents going a long way between their starting point and the objective of their mission to give a sense of distance and time: before the mission can begin proper, the pilots need to spend minutes or even hours getting there and crossing vast landscapes, scanning the sky.

The GM gets to decide what exactly the players find when they find it, though if the players have an intent and roll a full success that narrows the space. The miss results are up to the GM and help establish the tone of the game: a more grounded, realistic campaign will go with the fuel check, slowly wearing players down, while a pulpier action campaign will cut straight to combat. What engages them could even be what the players were originally looking for!

Starting Procedures

Early aircraft didn't have starter motors. For most, the pilot would use a fuel pump in the cockpit while an attendant turned the propeller, drawing fuel and oil into the cylinders. Sometimes, fuel additives like benzine needed to be injected directly into the cylinders as well.

When the engine was ready, the attendant would yell "Contact!", telling them to switch the engine on and warning them they are holding the propeller. The pilot would then activate the magnetos, saying "Hot!" or "Switch On!" so the attendant knows the engine will start next time the propeller goes 'round.

The attendant then gripped the top of the propeller in both hands, and pulled down hard and away from the plane. They might have a helper grab their belt and pull them back just to be safe. If you were lucky, the spark plugs fired and the engine started. The engine would then usually be left to run for a time to warm it up. This is especially vital for liquid-cooled engines, which have an ideal temperature range.

Finally, the blocks would be pulled away from the wheels (usually by a long string), and the plane would start rolling for takeoff.

53
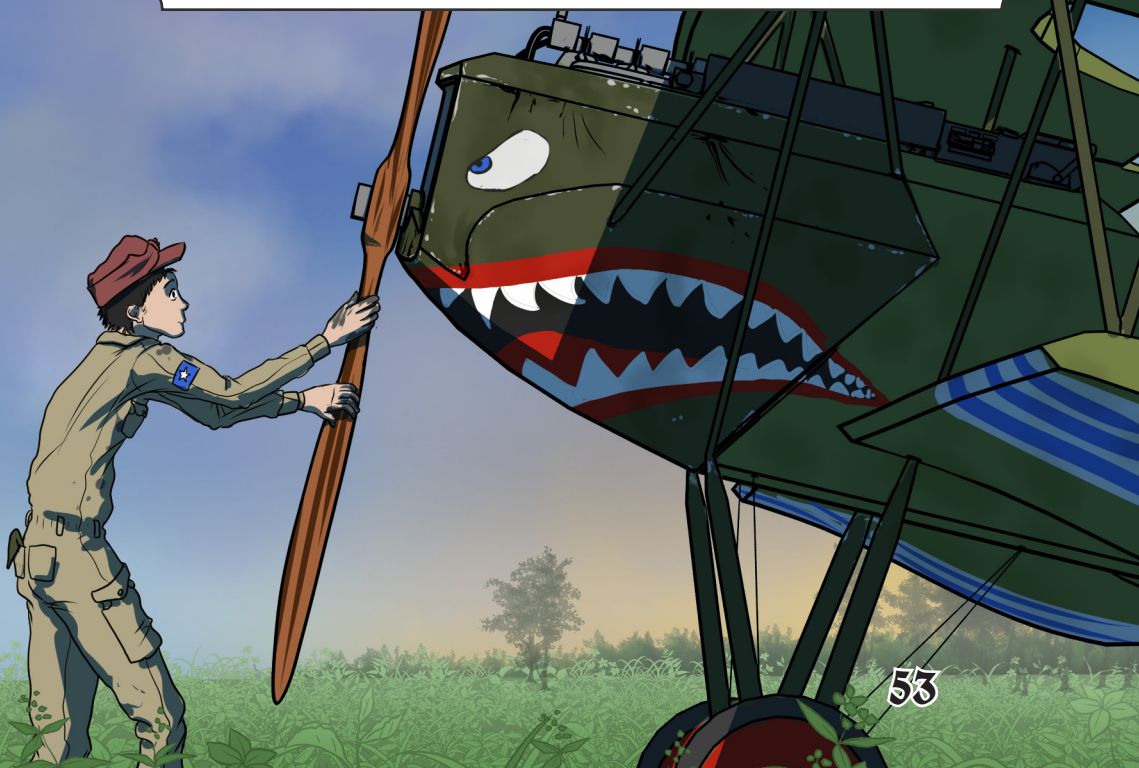
Air Combat

Air Combat

The mission is the meat of *Flying Circus,* where all those crunchy mechanics pay off. Usually, that means a daring duel to the death thousands of feet in the air, between the player's aeroplanes and a variety of threats, human and inhuman. This lethal waltz of contrails and tracers forms the mechanical core of the game, where pilots brave the skies in rickety machines and a single mistake can lead to death.

Flying Circus doesn't use map or models for combat; these things are all handled in the theatre of the mind. The relative locations of aircraft and ground features are always loosely defined and in flux; they only come up when relevant, and fade away when they aren't. When you aren't paying attention to something, it disappears until the GM or players need it again.

The thing that does matter is the state of your own aircraft, which is why you have an Instrument Panel. This panel tells you everything you need to know about where your plane is and where it's going. Much like a real pilot, you can't trust your sense of distance or scale when you're up in the air, so you need to fly by your instruments.

Basic Flight

Most of the time, when you fly, you just tell the GM where you're going, and you go there. There's no rolling that needs to happen for basic flight or simple manoeuvres. Heck, you can even do complex stunts without a problem, because you're a skilled pilot. Things can go wrong with basic flight when narratively appropriate; these are rickety and unreliable old planes, prone to spinning out or losing control. But generally, you can make your plane do what you want it to when you want it to.

Energy

The first thing you'll probably see on your instrument panel is your *Altimeter* and *Air Speed Indicator*. Collectively, these are your *Energy*: Air Speed represents kinetic energy, and Altitude is potential energy. This energy can be thought of as a big pool of currency which you can spend to increase your fighting potential.

Altitude

Altitude is how high you are in the air. Each point of Altitude represents roughly a roughly 100m tall space. Altitude 0 is sea level, and generally the ground, unless the GM specifies that ground level is higher. If you're still in control at ground level, you're just skimming the grass. Going into the negatives means hitting the ground.

Altitude is life. The higher you are in the air, the more potential speed you have, the more space you have to make mistakes, and the longer you have to fix a problem if something goes wrong.

(Space starts at 1000 Altitude. You're not going to reach it in your biplane.)

Air Speed

Each point of speed represents roughly 10kph. You need to stay above your Stall Speed (below that, your wings don't generate enough lift!), and hopefully as close to top speed as possible. Your engines also have a Overspeed value, the maximum speed that can sustain. Going very quickly and then turning or pulling up will cause you to experience G-Forces, and too many will break your delicate plane!

(The sound barrier is 120 speed. You're not going to hit it in your biplane.)

Speed Factor

As planes move faster and faster, their control characteristics change. To represent this, we use *Speed Factor*, shorted to SF in the text. Your SF is equal to the 10s place of your Air Speed. This figure determines several factors, most importantly how much speed it costs to manoeuvre, g-force penalties, and the difficulty of hitting a fast-moving target.

Altitude Effects

As you move into higher altitudes, it has some effects on the aerodynamics and mechanics of your aircraft. The air gets thinner, reducing both lift and drag. Engines struggle to get enough oxygen to power their reactions, and less air passes over the aircraft, reducing drag and control authority.

Your Altitude Factor (AF) works just like your Speed Factor, using the 10s place on your gauge. Altitude affects the performance of an aircraft, but it's not hugely important, so ignore it. If it does *becomes* important for whatever reason, add 10% (rounded down) to your Max Speed and Stall Speed for every Altitude Factor.

To represent engine power loss, every Altitude level you go above the Max Altitude of your engine (use the lowest) hits you with -1 Max Speed. Your flight ceiling is when your stall speed meets your max speed.

At high altitudes, pilots will need masks, pressurized cockpits, and other adaptations, or they suffer from oxygen depravation. This can cause Stress as a hard move at 40 Altitude, and each AF above 5 inflicts -1 Ongoing to all crew, treated as Injury penalty.

G-Force

The G-Force tracker monitors how much strain your airframe and pilot are under. Too many Gs, and pilots pass out as the wings come off!

The value of your G-Force tracker is taken as a penalty to all +Stat Moves, much like an Injury penalty. Excess g-forces can result in unconsciousness, temporary blindness, and death, so inflicting Injury as a consequence of failed moves under heavy g-forces is perfectly sensible.

The G-Force tracker can be reset during combat with moves like Cool Down and Extend, and is always reset in between combats.

Piloting Planes

A plane is only as good as its crew. This includes both player characters, in the pilot seat or elsewhere, as well as non-player characters.

Crew

The pilot controls all the particulars of how a plane moves, and they control the fixed guns. Planes generally need somebody to be behind the controls at all times, especially unstable fighter planes.

Speciality crew will provide bonuses to appropriate actions, and they will give you Advantage to Eyeball (page 76) if they can see out. Player can generally control the actions of NPC crew, and roll for NPC gunners and other crew, but they'll always roll flat, rather than + a stat.

- An Observer and can attack with small arms or gun turrets. Non-Observers firing these weapons are always at Disadvantage.
- A specialized Mechanic can perform in-air Maintenance.
- A specialized Bombardier gives Advantage to Bombs Away! rolls.
- A specialized Navigator will give Advantage on Navigate rolls.
- A co-pilot can take control, and reduce Flight Stress by 2 (min. 1).

Passengers

Many aircraft can carry passengers in dedicated seats or empty crew positions. Additional people (1 + 1 per Crew) can cling to the outside of the plane to ride it, but NPCs will fall off if you pull any Gs or exceed 20 Speed. PCs will face appropriate Stress and Wingwalk rolls.

Communication

Radios are too heavy to be practical, so all pilots share a sign language that can communicate directions, formations, insults, basic information, and intent to surrender. You have to get close: the farther away you get, the less you can use the nuanced signs. If you want, you can introduce a non-verbal element to your game by looking up real life signs or creating your own gestures for frequently addressed concepts.

Flare guns can convey concepts like "*Enemy!*", "*Attack now!*", or "*I'm over here!*" with colours that can be seen for kilometres. Meanings can be determined retroactively, but squadrons are limited to six colours max.

Signal lights can send words over a long distance with Morse code. This is slow and clumsy, not practical in combat, but comprehensive.

Crew on the same plane can communicate with one another if they can get near, but only by yelling themselves hoarse. Communicating across a plane, or in regular speaking tones, requires an intercom.

In summary, pilots can communicate urgent information, but it's not practical to have deep or meaningful conversations in the air.

Awareness

Pilots are like babies, they don't have object permanence.

The best way to handle pilot awareness is to simply assume that anything not immediately being dealt with has disappeared off into the cloud somewhere and can come back at any time. Don't bother trying to track everything in the fight: it is too difficult and ultimately won't add anything.

Fighting

These are warplanes! They carry weapons and are often tasked with shooting down other planes. In return, they get shot at themselves.

Weapons

Weapons fire in arcs: Forward (*Fore*), Back, Up, Down, Left, Right. By default weapons are *Fixed* to one of those directions. **Flexible** (*Flex*) weapons can be manipulated to change the arc they fire in, while **Turrets** require a dedicated gunner full-time, but can fire in many directions.

Weapons come in *Repeating, Rapid Fire, Manual,* and *Static.*

Repeating weapons reload themselves automatically, so fire every time the user pulls the trigger, or otherwise at a very slow rate. They have no special rules: if you aren't sure what a weapon is, it's Repeating.

Rapid Fire weapons are machine-guns: They can fire a lot of shots as long as the user keeps their finger on the trigger. Appropriately, Rapid Fire weapons all have the special (and nominative) ability to *Rapid Fire,* making scoring hits more likely by expending additional ammunition.

Manual weapons require loading a new shell or working the action. After you attack, you need to physically interact with it, taking up narrative time.

Finally, **Static** weapons are fixed on your plane and add some other bonus. A passive lightning arc or a big blade on your wing are static weapons. As these are rare, they will have unique rules.

Weapons might run on small clips of ammo or jam up. When this happens, the crew have to allocate time to reload or clear it, time they could have spent doing something else. There's nothing like trying to lock in another pan magazine for your upper wing gun while piloting with your feet!

Weapons that can be manipulated from your cockpit are **Accessible** (*Access.*), weapons that can't won't be tagged. If they aren't Accessible, you must wingwalk to fix jams or reload them.

Weapons with an *interrupter gear* are marked with a �֍. Increase these weapon's Jam chance by 1 (ie: jam on a 1-2 instead of a 1, 1-3 when rapid firing), and the guns stop working if the engine stops.

Damage

Planes can take Damage from weapons fire, collisions, g-forces, or just plain bad luck. Damage taken is immediately subtracted from the plane's Toughness, and when that runs out from the Max Strain.

As Max Strain is lost from damage, the plane's ability to withstand g-forces is likewise reduced, limiting the pilot's options. If a plane's Max Strain falls to 0, the wings fall off and it plummets to the ground. With the weapons avaliable in this era, this is a rarity, as vulnerable parts and crew will usually fail before the airframe does.

When a vital location is hit (a Crit), the victim chooses what gets struck from the list of their aircraft's vital parts. That part then stops working:

- A hit Fuel Tank begins leaking, causing it to use twice as much Fuel per Fuel Check. A tank is either leaking or it isn't.
- A hit to your Guns knocks out a whole weapon system from damaged guns, severed ammo belts, or broken trigger linkages.
- An Engine takes Wear equal to the damage. When the Wear hits the black line, it dies, and when it hits the black box, it catches fire.
- Each hit to Controls causes a -1 Ongoing to Dogfight and Go Down. At 3 hits, the plane becomes uncontrolled and crashes.
- A holed Radiator causes the plane to automatically fail all Cool Down rolls, quickly burning out the engine.
- Smashed Landing Gear means that you Go Down when you land.
- A destroyed Oil Tank for a rotary engine means there's always 1 additional Failure when you Cool Off that engine.
- Destroyed Electronics knock out everything dependent on it: radios, electric engines, advanced gunsights, etc.

You can choose a member of your Crew as the vital part, and on a 20+ a crew member is always hit. Crew take as much Injury as the GM decides to give, usually equal to the Damage of a single Hit from a weapon.

When you take a Crit, you may opt to take the hit to Structure directly, representing a vital support being struck. You take all the Damage again, this time directly to Max Strain, bypassing Toughness completely. This is rarely worth it, but it is an option if you have no other choice.

Armour

Aircraft will at most only have armoured plates specifically over vulnerable areas, like crew, engines, and control pieces, to save weight.

Thickness determines if the armour takes effect or not. An aircraft's Armour must be higher than the AP of the weapon that is attacking it to take effect. Otherwise, the attack blows right through the armour.

If the armour is thick enough, **Coverage** directly reduces the effective Hits of incoming fire *for the purposes of the Crit roll* (see page 74). This represents shots that would hit a vital part instead pinging off armour. The amount of Damage to the aircraft is not affected!

When a plane has multiple pieces of armour, add together the Coverage of all the armour that isn't penetrated.

Fire

As a result of incendiary weapons or blowing out your engine, you can catch fire. While your plane is on fire, you take 2d5 Structure damage any time the GM says it's your turn to act. When an enemy plane is on fire, the GM decides the consequences, but it's never good.

Fires can be put out with the Maintenance move, or through narrative action, such as diving so fast or climbing so high that the fire is starved, or flying through a waterfall.

Heading into Battle

Once a target is spotted, the two sides start moving towards the fight.

ENGAGE

Before combat, one player <u>rolls 2d10</u>. On a hit, choose 1. 16+, choose 2. The enemy then chooses 1. *When you join a fight or ambush*, just pick 1.

- Start with altitude advantage.
- Spot the enemy and act while they are unaware.
- Catch the enemy spread out.
- Come in behind your foe.

By default Engage is rolled flat. Certain backgrounds can give bonuses on this roll, but it is rolled 'as a group', not by one of the characters. This move can even be used on the ground: altitude becomes high ground, coming in from behind cuts off escape routes, and so forth.

If an option is not selected, assume it doesn't make a difference. If nobody has altitude advantage, they are level with each other, for example. On a miss, the GM can choose whatever they like, or otherwise make it bad.

FUEL CHECK

When you check your fuel, use up 1 Fuel Unit for each of the below since you last checked.
- If you've been flying under power.
- If you've flown a long distance.
- If you've engaged in combat.
- If you've climbed more than 10 Altitude.

If a fuel tank is leaking, lose twice as much fuel.

Fuel Check is only ever pushed by the GM, and typically get pushed before, after, and between engagements, though it can also be sprung mid-fight as a hard move. This tracks fuel without constantly having to manage numbers: the fuel gauge only moves when the pilots look at it.

Fuel Checks can also be pushed as a Hard Move during combat, and it works especially well if somebody has been pushing the engine hard. Obviously, if the fuel runs out, the plane can no longer regain speed from using the engine, and so will quickly have to land. A plane can glide a fair distance, but if you aren't in sight of home, you won't make it.

Manoeuvres

Manoeuvres are the moves you use to manage your aircraft's functions and features, and are the way you interact with your dials and gauges.

The important part is for players to *describe what they do*, and then you use as many or as few of the manoeuvres described to resolve it. "I dive in, attack, and pull up afterward," or "I dive away from the fight and then throttle back." are both valid, and each involves multiple Moves. You can also dive, attack, and then keep diving. A good cut-off point is that players can't make more than one distinct attack run, they can't run away from the fight and come back in one go, and they can't try the same thing twice.

This can even be dynamic; you can say, for instance, "I want to escape while diving far enough to recoup my lost speed". In this instance, you might Dogfight +Keen to escape, then afterward choose how far you Dive so you can gain back all the speed you lost. Picture a diving spiral towards the ground, with the aircraft rocketing off once they've gotten clear.

EXTEND

When you fly straight to regain speed, increase your speed up to Max Speed, add +1 RPM, and...
- If you are clear of immediate danger, disengage from the fight.
- If you are in the thick of thing, leave yourself vulnerable.

Reset your G-Force Tracker to 0.

In fighter pilot parlance, you extend when you leave a manoeuvre and move away in order to build speed or distance between you and the target. It's key to energy fighting: don't get drawn into a duel. Extend away to preserve your energy.

When the player disengages from the fight,they move away and they won't be able to get back for a while. When they leave themselves vulnerable, that means the GM should pounce on it. You're basically flying flat in a straight line for an extended period, so this is a good time for ground fire to really lay into them, or for a diving foe to put them at Disadvantage.

ALTITUDE ADJUSTMENT

When you point the nose up, trade Speed for Altitude, 5 to 1. If you are gliding, trade Speed for Altitude 6 to 1.

When you climb steady, +1 RPM and spend Speed for Altitude 3-1. Steady climbs make you an easy target, and can't be done while gliding.

When you point the nose down, trade Altitude for Speed, 1 to 3.

If you aren't diving, and your speed is above your Max Speed, reduce your Speed by your Energy Loss.

Aeroplanes turn the work of the engine and the lift of the wings into altitude. Gaining altitude is "building energy", because every meter you climb is potential energy that can be later be turned into kinetic energy, speed, by diving.

If you want to save fuel and build speed, diving is the fastest way to do so. Diving is a very common tactic for attackers and defenders both, as it's an easy way to recoup speed. Most fights tend to slowly spiral downward.

The most tempting target is a plane that is 'hanging' at the peak of a climb. On the other hand, the speed gained from diving is a double-edged sword. A fight occurring 500 meters below you can be as inaccessible as one happening 500 meters above you, if diving to it will cause your wings to fall off or your engine to blow up.
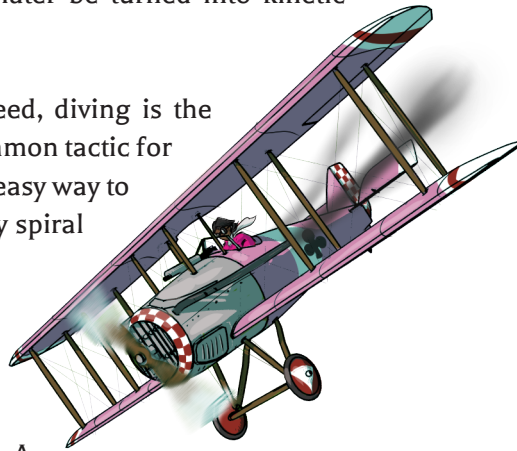
The level flight speed reduction kicks whenever players make a set of manoeuvres while above top speed, so once per 'turn'. Planes with lots of drag will blow through their excess speed too quickly to make much use of it, while a more streamlined plane can use that energy to either chase down a foe or climb safely back to altitude.

Pull Up

When you pull up from a steep dive or out of an attack, take G-Force equal to Speed Factor. Spend Altitude to reduce G-Force taken. 1-1. You can take no more G-Force than 1/10th your Handling.

If you pull up at Altitude 0, <u>Evade Danger.</u>

This move needs only be used for very dramatic dives, like a dive-bomber's near vertical descent or a long fall into combat. If you transition from a Dive to a Climb, or if your Speed is above your Max Speed, you Pull Up.

You can choose to lose more Altitude than your Speed Factor while Pulling Up to reduce your G-Force penalty.

Overstrain

When your G-Force exceeds the ten's place of your Max Strain, roll 1d10 per G (total, not over Strain) and take that much Damage. If your plane survives, reset G-Force to the tens place of your Max Strain.

Overstrain is one of those moves which players don't want to happen, but which is automatically pushed when the numbers dictate. Pulling too many Gs is dangerous for these fragile planes!

Overspeed

When you increase your Air Speed in excess of your engine's Overspeed, that engine gains 1 RPM, +1 per 5 Speed above Overspeed.

Early aircraft are 'direct-drive', meaning the propeller is connected directly to the engine, with no gearing in between. Overspeed occurs when air moving through the prop forcefully turned the crankshaft, pushing the RPM above the rated limit and damaging the engine.

If you stay at a high speed, Overspeed still won't hit more than once, unless the player exceeds the speed they were previously travelling at when they got hit with Overspeed. If your engine has no Overspeed stat, you simply never have to worry about this move happening!

BOOST

When you open the throttle, add your plane's Boost stat to your Speed, up to Max Speed. You can choose to add less than your full Boost.

If your Speed is below your Dropoff, double your Boost.

If you Boost in a dive, add to your Speed, even above your Max Speed.

Then, increase your engine RPM by 1.

Combat manoeuvres and climbs burn speed, so you'll be boosting constantly to keep up. It's okay to just say "I'm boosting" alongside another action, as there's only so many ways to describe moving a throttle lever.

Boosting in a dive, known as a power dive, lets you rapidly build up incredible speed, though few engines can handle it!
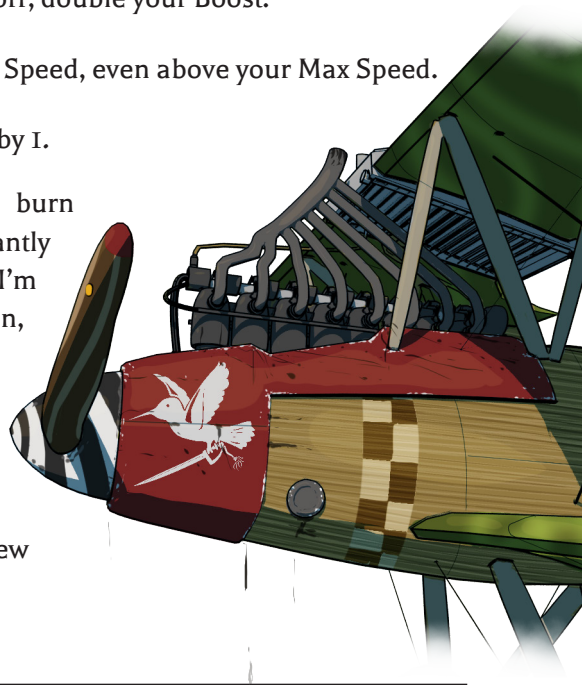
COOL OFF

When you pull back on the throttle to spare your engine, or when you exceed 7 RPM, reduce your Speed to your Max Speed or less.

For each engine, roll 1d20+Reliability for each RPM. Your engine takes 1 Wear per Failure.

Then, reduce RPM and G-Force to 0, and the GM makes a hard move.

When you've run your engine too hot, you need to give it time to cool off. This move basically resolves the quantum state of your engine's health. The question with this move is: Should I put off dealing with the hard move, and make the later consequences worse, or is now the time?

GMs can push this move at any time, though if they do they shouldn't add another hard move. After a battle, aircraft must always Cool Off: no winning the battle to magically avoid having to face the consequences!

Stall/Spin

When your Air Speed falls below your Stall Speed, you stall out. *When you lose control,* you spin out.

You may choose to induce either at any time.

In either case, choose one.
- Try to Recover.
- Make one last desperate move, and accept the consequences.

Recover

When you recover from a spin or stall, roll +Calm+Stability. On a 16+, you recover smoothly. On an 11-15, spin for 6. On a miss, spin for 12.

You must spend Energy (Speed and/or Altitude) equal to the spin to recover. You must then Dive and/or Boost back above your Stall Speed.

Stalling happens any time not enough lift is being generated to keep the plane airborne, and a stall can quickly become a spin, where unequal lift between the wings causes the aircraft to spiral controllable. Spinning out was a constant danger in early aircraft, and methods of escaping were not always common knowledge. Planes could spin because of pilot error, torque, control hiccups, wind, thermals, enemy fire, or sheer bad luck.

In either case, Stall/Spin is a move pushed by the GM, while Recover is an option for the player. If the player doesn't try to recover, they're fair game for whatever the GM comes up with. Having them spin for 12 as per a missed Recover and building from there is a good start.

Bail Out

When you bail out of a dying plane, tell the GM one thing you take with you and roll +Calm+Escape.

On a 16+, you make it out without trouble. On an 11-15, choose one: abandon your one item, land hard in a bad spot, or the plane loses 1d5 altitude before you can get out.

If the plane is spinning out, take Disadvantage.

When you jump from an intact, steady plane, you do it.

When you bail out without a chute, or below 300 meters, hit the ground.

Bailing out isn't very common, as parachutes are rare and pilots don't like to abandon their aircraft if they think they can save them. It's usually safer to ride a plane down than to take your chances in a chute anyway.

If the players make it out, any crew with parachute also make it. Crew without parachutes left behind in a dying plane should be dead, even if the player wasn't the pilot. This is a just reward for abandoning your crew.

Hit the ground means just that. Splat. Remember, the player gets to decide if they die or not, so a miracle could still happen, but they should never land and just be okay. People have survived falling from aeroplanes before.

Having a parachute simply fail to open and the character slam into the ground isn't very interesting. Think about bad places they could land, bad ways they could land, or things that could happen during their descent. If the chute does fail, ask what they do to get it open.

Go Down

> *When you put down anywhere you shouldn't,* roll <u>+Calm+Crash Safety</u>.
>
> On a hit, you land safely, more or less. 16+, choose 1. 11-15, choose 2.
> - Each member of the crew takes 1d5-1 Injury.
> - Take 1d10 x Speed Factor Structure damage.
> - You land somewhere deeply unfortunate.
>
> On a miss, take all three above, but choose one below as well.
> - You or your crew die.
> - The plane is completely totalled.
> - The place is the worst possible spot imaginable.
>
> *If you land hard with no control over your plane,* you're at Disadvantage.

When it came to landing, early aircraft were very robust. They had strong landing gear held far from the airframe with large wheels, meaning they could land on most any flat-ish surface. Most "airfields" were little more than grass fields that, if you were lucky, were cleared of rocks beforehand.

Therefore, this move should only be used when people put down in an bad spot. If a plane spins out and hits the ground or some other effect puts a plane into negative altitude, if you mess up a stunt and take your wing off on a tree, if you're landing into water, rocky ground, forests, mud, the middle of towns, with landing gear missing, you Go Down.

No control means just that; spinning wildly, with a wing missing, all the control surfaces dead, or in a flaming ball of wreckage rather than a plane.

Collision

> *When two planes collide,* roll <u>1d20 per Speed Factor</u> of the faster plane.
>
> *If it's head on,* roll <u>1d20 per Speed Factor</u> of both planes.
>
> Both planes take that much damage.

Watch where you're going! Deliberating ramming other planes in combat is surprisingly difficult, but accidently collisions are all too common. This move resolves either case. This move is one players will rarely invoke on purpose, but can be pushed after botched head-on attacks or similar.

Air Combat Moves

The next few pages will get pretty complex, so remember: all you really need to focus on is speed, altitude, and who is chasing who.

Stay on Target

When you press on through danger, roll +Calm. On a hit, you make it to the target, and only then face consequences. On an 16+, choose 1: take Advantage forward, or soften the consequences.

When the GM asks "What do you do?" the player may need to say "I stay on target." They can't react: they're doing a bombing run, flying down a narrow trench, or wrapping a Leviathan's legs in wire. Pressing on means accepting a hard move (page 214) but a hit will at least delay the effects.

An entire bombing run can be made out of a progress clock, with a prompt to stay on target or abort the run at each step.

Evade Danger

When you swerve to avoid an impact, roll +Keen.

On a 16+, you did it. On an 11-15, choose one. On a miss, take all three.
- You are left vulnerable as you recover your nerves.
- Take 1d10xSpeed Factor Structure damage.
- Go into a spin.

Often, planes will be in danger of hitting something: another plane, parts flying off a target, treetops, a mountainside... This move is not for evading enemy fire: Use Dogfight! to get out from under the guns.

Overwatch

When you watch over a friend, hold one. Spend your hold to...
- Help or Hinder one of their Moves.
- Place yourself between them and a pursuer.
- Drop on the tail of their pursuer, no roll required.

This move is a way of passing over your turn to act and playing reactively instead. It positions you to always be ready to help. If you're being somebody's wingman, you're on Overwatch.
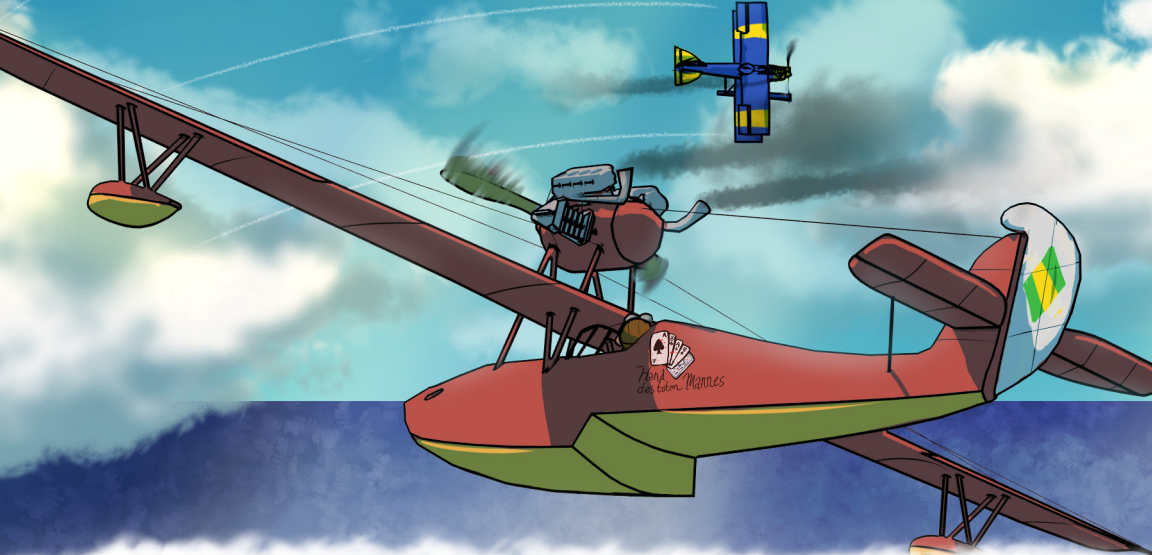
Dogfight!

When you battle another plane for dominance, spend Speed equal to your Turn Bleed + Speed Factor, and choose one:

- *... chase them, make an attack, line up a shot,* <u>roll+Hard+Agility.</u>
- *... escape a bad spot, bait them, defend,* <u>roll+Keen+Agility.</u>
- *... to turn the tables on your pursuer,* <u>roll+Daring+Agility.</u>

You may spend Speed to increase the results by *Committing to the Turn.* Each multiple of your Turn Bleed spent gives +1 to your result. Gain G-Force equal to your Speed Factor, +1 for every 10 Speed spent.

On a 16+, get what you wanted. On an 11-15, you did it, but only briefly, with a compromise, or by putting yourself at risk, GM's choice. *If you are turning the tables*, the GM picks 2 results.

After resolving*, if there is a 10+ Speed difference between planes,* there is at best a brief window to attack, then the planes move apart.

When a foe tries to escape, Dogfight! to stay on them. When an opponent is behind you, Dogfight! to escape. If you want to ram somebody, Dogfight!

A successful Dogfight puts you where you want to be. If you are attacking, it'll put you at close range. If they are at a different altitude, you dive or climb to attack: you don't have to get level, but it'll change the range.

A risk might be getting hit by a turret or enemy deflection fire. A compromise might be having to engage at a hard angle or a longer range. A brief window means after the manoeuvre, the planes move apart.

Agility Bonus

Dogfight! is an oppositional move, so we compare the Handling of the two aircraft to get an Agility bonus. Even if there are multiple planes involved, there is a primary attacker and a primary target whose stats are used.

If the PC has better handling than their foe, even just 1 point better, their Agility bonus is +1. After that, every 10 points of Handling difference between the two planes gives an additional +1, up to a maximum of +5.

This works in reverse: if the player's plane has less Handling than their opponent, their Agility is -1. If it has 10 less Handling, -2, and so forth.

Commit to the Turn

When you Commit to the Turn, you add a bonus to your result which costs Speed equal to the bonus you need times your Turn Bleed.

If you reduced your speed this way, increase your G-Force Tracker by your Speed Factor, and an additional +1 for every full 10 Speed reduction.

If a manoeuvre would cause negative g by nosing down, the G-force penalty is doubled on the next roll as blood rushes to their head!

CHASE!

When there's a straight line chase or race, compare speeds.
- *If you're at equal speed*, nothing changes.
- *If the pursuer is faster*, move one range band closer.
- *If the defender is faster*, move one range by farther away.

A different of speed of 10 or more means the chase immediately ends: the pursuer gets as close as they want, or the defender gets out of range.

If a plane is forced to turn, they count as slower regardless of speed.

If you're on someone, but not close enough, or they're on you and you can't shake them, use this move. As the GM doesn't track NPC speed directly, they should usually just use the plane's top speed, modified down if the plane was just manoeuvring, and increased if there was a dive, using the same ratios the players do. This means that, engines being equal, a PC will always catch an NPC if they are willing to run up the RPM gauge.

Shooting Moves

Gunnery in aircraft is very difficult, as the ballistics are affected by a wide variety of high-speed forces while the shooter attempts to lead the target.

The Range Chart

Every weapon system has a Range Chart. The four boxes in the chart list the number of hits and the amount of damage a weapon can expect to inflict at various ranges. These categories are:

- Knife Range. Up to 10 meters. Parts flying off is a real danger.
- Close Range. Up to 100 meters, use this range by default.
- Long Range. Up to 300 meters. Some weapons still have a chance.
- Extreme Range. Past 300 meters. Most weapons are useless.

When a plane fires at another, you determine the range to the target in the narrative, and that's your starting point. The roll will then *shift* the result of the attack left or right on the Range Chart, nearer or farther respectively, representing a more or less effective attack than expected.

If you go past the far end of the range chart, you miss entirely. If you go past the close end, just use the Knife range results.

Crits

Structural damage is often less important than damage to vital parts, as discussed on page 60. When an attack is a *Crit*, a vital part is damaged. The target always chooses which vital part is hit unless otherwise specified.

Modifiers

A *deflection shot* is where the target is moving at a sizable angle relative to the shooter, requiring considerable leading. If the GM declares an attack a Deflection Shot, subtract the target's Speed Factor from the attack roll.

Some weapons like machine-guns can choose to Rapid Fire. A rapid fire attack expends one additional Ammo, but grants Advantage.

Jams

If the *first* d20 rolled for Crits is equal to or less than a weapon's Jam Chance, there's a Jam. While the current attack isn't affected, time must be taken to clear the jam before the weapon can be fired again.

OPEN FIRE

When you shoot, spend Ammo, determine the range, and <u>roll +Hard</u>.

On an 11-15, shift the Range farther by 1. On a miss, shift farther by 2. On a 20+, shift closer 1. Inflict Damage and Hits accordingly.

Additionally, <u>roll 1d20+Hits, -Target Armour Coverage</u>.

On a 20+, the attack Crits; roll another Crit Check at -10. (This penalty stacks with each additional Crit Check.)

A natural 20 always strikes a crewmember, a natural 1 never Crits.

TAKE FIRE

When you are shot at, determine the range, and <u>roll -Keen</u>.
When another PC shoots at you, roll <u>+Shooter's Hard, - Target's Keen</u>.

Resolve exactly as you would Open Fire, including Crits, except the player rolling is the target.

-Keen means you're subtracting rather than adding the player's Keen stat: if they normally roll Keen +2, then they Take Fire -2. This represents the pilot flying defensively, dodging, and otherwise being hard to hit.

The GM may opt to roll Take Fire on behalf of the player, to add more of an oppositional tone at the table, but NPCs themselves still never roll.

DRAW A BEAD

When you carefully line up a shot, choose 1, then Open Fire.
- Name a part or crew member. If you Crit, that's what you hit.
- Measure your range: Roll your attack +Calm.
- Maximum time on target: Move one range band left.
- Clustered Shots: Roll +1 Crit die.

After you shoot, the GM reveals the consequence of your tunnel vision.

This move presumes you already have the enemy in position to fire at them, and you're holding a moment to make sure you get them. Basically, you are trading a guarantee you'll receive a Hard Move for a chance to hit the enemy harder than usual.

Support Moves

These moves are for gunners, observers, and other support crew, though pilots will be called to make some of these actions themselves.

Eyeball

When you scan around you, ask one of these questions (or devise a new one) and <u>roll +Keen, +Visibility.</u> If you aren't currently flying the plane, <u>add +3</u>. If you have other crew looking as well, take <u>Advantage</u>.
- Where have they gone?
- What is that? (plane/creature/machine)
- Who is that? (pilot/company/figure)
- What is hidden there? (sun/clouds/shadow/terrain)
- Where is their weak point?

Regardless of your roll, the GM gives an answer, and you take Advantage forward to react. On a 16+, the answer puts you in a position of strength. On a miss, the answer is one you don't want to hear.

Eyeball ties into the "no object permanence" rule mentioned on page 58. Frequently, over the course of a fight, players will lose sight of things. Not even through hard moves, just as a result of the general chaos of the combat. To find them again, they use Eyeball.

This is also a way for the GM to introduce new information and create escalations. If they ask who the target is and roll badly... well, now their target is a feared enemy ace, right? You didn't have anything hidden in the clouds before, but now there's a dragon!

Empty Seat

When there is nobody flying the plane, <u>roll +Stability.</u>

On a 16+, it ploughs on for a while. On an 11-15, the plane starts listing, turning, or diving. On a miss, it immediately goes out of control.

If a PC is stuck in an an aircraft with no pilot, like if they leave their seat to wingwalk, pass out, or if they are a gunner and the pilot gets hit, roll this to find out what happens. A partial hit is a good excuse to give Disadvantage on a Wingwalk roll.

WINGWALK

When you leave the safe areas of the plane, <u>roll +Daring, -Speed Factor.</u>

On a 16+, you keep a sure footing. On an 11-15, take Disadvantage forward. On a miss, choose: you turn back, task unfinished, or you fall off the plane.

There are plenty of reasons a pilot or crew member might have to get out of their seat and clamour over their aircraft in flight. This can be rolled in conjunction with Empty Seat.

PATCH FIX

When you work on a damaged engine, <u>roll +Keen.</u>

On a 16+, choose 2. On an 11-15, choose 1.
- Negate 1 Wear. (Can choose more than once)
- Put out a fire.
- Patch and refill a damaged radiator.
- Restart an engine.

On a miss, you make the problem worse.

In a single-seater plane, you will almost always have to wing-walk out to get to the vital parts of your plane that need attention. We can presume the characters always have what they need on-hand to make the fix.
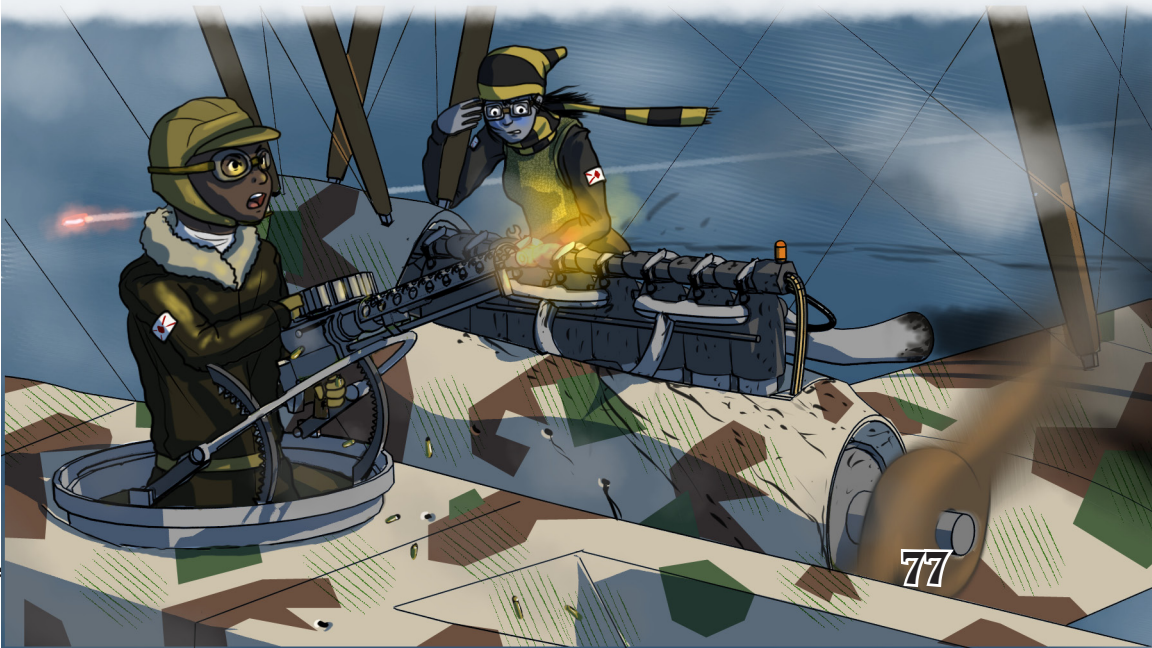
On the Ground

On-Foot Moves

There's a lot of ways a mission could hit the ground. The most common is if you get shot down in unfamiliar territory. You might also land in a dead city and fight your way through to treasure, or seize an airfield and start looting. You might decide to attack a town, or defend it against marauders. Maybe you have a running gun battle through a zeppelin's interior.

You can also use relevant moves from other sections. Eyeball is always relevant, for instance. You might Get Real with a tortured ghost, Brawl to take a brainwashed Goth conscript prisoner, or even Turn on the Charm as you swordfight your hated yet infuriatingly charming rival.

Weapons & Armour

If you fight, you use weapons. Weapon stats are located on page 172: if you started with a weapon from your Background, you'll want to have worked out what exact it is. Rules for amour is located on page 175.

Unarmed characters are 1 Damage, 1 Hit, 0AP melee. Throwing something uses the same profile, just... thrown, up to Knife Fight distance away.

The Wilderness

When you land in the wilderness and you don't know where you are, getting home will be an ordeal. Not only due to the distance involved, but also because the world of Himmilgard is filled with strange and terrible things. Forests are forbidden places, ruled by the fae and soaked in magic. Cities are tombs, filled with poison and the spectres of the long-dead. The mountains that divide the world are vast and rough. You fly because, for all the danger, it is safer than walking.

Ground distances are measured in 'Treks', a unit representing a considerable amount of effort and time more than actual distance. As with most things, the best way to track this is a little countdown clock. Exact positions, directions, and distances don't matter much: the Wild doesn't really care much for geography. The will to press on will get you through it, if something doesn't get you first.

Explore the Wild

When you lead the group forward into the wild, <u>roll +Daring.</u>

On a hit, overcome 1 Trek. 16+, choose 2. On an 11-15, choose 1.
- Move safely and quietly.
- Advantage forward to Engage (until the next Trek is made).
- Overcome another Trek.
- Leave a trail, giving Advantage to backtrack.

This is the basic move used whenever all you're doing is moving back towards town. It is, essentially, a generator used to create encounters as you move, and see how well the ground is handling their hike.

A group moving together overcome Treks together, but once separated, each group must roll on their own. This can quickly lead to people strung out and isolated after battles or in misleading terrain.

Players can try to leave a trail behind them regardless of what option they choose, but only the selected option will ensure the trail is effective. Otherwise, it could lead something nasty to them, or be lost to animals or the shifting nature of the location.

CONFRONT YOUR FEARS

When you stand against that which stalks you, state what you fear it is and <u>roll Flat.</u>

On a 16+, the GM reveals how it is more innocuous than you suspected. On a 11-15, the GM reveals how it is stranger than you suspected. On a miss, the GM reveals how it was far worse than you feared.

This move isn't used for all reveals in the Wild. Rather, it is specifically rolled when a player decides, actively, to stop moving, stop running, to confront something unknown.

Roll using the stat of the group's leader, the usually the one who rolled to Explore the Wild. There should almost never be Help used on this move.

This move was inspired by the move "Shiver from Fear" from Magpie Game's *Bluebeard's Bride*, written and designed by Whitney "Strix" Beltrán, Marissa Kelly, and Sarah Richardson.

PARLAY WITH THE STRANGE

When you try to strike a deal with supernatural forces, <u>state what you want</u> and <u>name two things you'd be willing to do or lose in exchange.</u> *If the offers are worthy,* <u>roll Flat.</u>

On a 16+, they take one of your offers and give you what you want, no strings attached. On an 11-15, they take one, and the GM chooses 1.
- They take the other offer too.
- They'll collect a favour from you in the nebulous future.
- They demand something else. Something more.
- What they give you isn't quite what you asked for.

On a miss, the GM chooses as many as they want, and maybe the player gets something. On a 20, you get what you want and keep everything.

This move is designed to make the supernatural feel fickle, arbitrary, and frightening. A good offer should be thematically relevant, impose a personal cost on the players, and feel strange. The Fae might take just hearing a riddle or song, or they'll take your memories or steal away Trust between friends. Generally, the bigger the ask, the more you need to offer.

On the Ground

Seize the Initiative

When you encounter the enemy on foot, take 1 Stress and roll +Keen.

On a 16+, you find cover and take your next steps rationally. On an 11-15, choose 1. On a miss, the GM chooses for you.
- You see red, rushing in or shooting first, but fail to get to cover.
- You run for it. You can't attack, but you're a low priority target.
- You freeze up after you find cover, and act after everyone else.

Personal Attack

When a PC attacks with a personal weapon, roll 1d20 per Hit, +Hard.
When a PC is attacked, roll 1d20 per Hit, -Keen.

An 11+ hits for listed damage, a natural 20 is a Crit (x2 damage vs non-planes), a natural 1 is a jam or misfire. When firing against targets in cover or moving planes, only a 16+ hits.

When you use a melee weapon against a plane, you may damage a vital part of your choice on an 11+ instead of doing structure damage.

When Goth troops land on your plane, the militia starts shooting, or a dryad attacks as you try to crawl out of your crashed plane, Seize the Initiative is used to determine how everyone reacts initially. Only PCs roll, with NPCs reacting according to their narrative capabilities and awareness. Unless they explicitly go first or last, all sets of Personal Attacks are resolved at once, so roll both sides of an exchange of shots or blows at once.

Landing

Coming Home

This section of the game consists of some brief book-keeping before we move onto the next stage. It isn't really a part of the game that is "roleplayed", usually. Like Preflight Checks, it's about setting up for the next phase of gameplay, and it probably only takes a few minutes, though it might be a little more involved if you are landing somewhere new.

Starting the Phase

Generally speaking, Landing only starts when everyone makes it home safe and the mission is done. If you're landing just long enough to refuel and rearm before going back out, that isn't the Landing phase, you just continue the action. Landing only counts when you're done.

We presume there's a 'no man left behind' philosophy governing a Flying Circus. The mission only ends and this phase only starts when everyone is back home safe. If you want to split the narrative, say that most members of the team think somebody is dead when they aren't, then you might start resolving and moving into one phase while the lost character gets home. This can be difficult to roleplay, but won't break anything mechanically.

Taking Stress

After their mission, the adrenaline wears off and the emotional and physical consequences of what the pilots have done and seen come flooding in all at once. That Stress will need to be dealt with over the course of the next Phase.

Each plane has a Flight Stress stat. When you land after flying a mission in that plane, combat or not, you take that much Stress, representing the physical and mental strain of flying this particular aircraft.

In addition, every playbook has a list of Stress Triggers. Review your mission as a group, and for each trigger that occurred, mark 1 Stress. If you are unsure if you should take Stress, err on the side of more Stress. Remember, taking more Stress gives you more Experience in the long run.

In extraordinary circumstances, the GM can opt to assign additional Stress. The stress triggers can't cover everything, after all. Likewise, if you feel it is justified, you may opt to take more Stress than the rules strictly say, with GM permission. Sometimes, things just hit you particularly hard.

Characters can only ever have 10 Stress, so beyond that point more Stress simply isn't taken. That means there's both no penalty, and no potential benefit in the form of XP, for taking more Stress than 10.

83
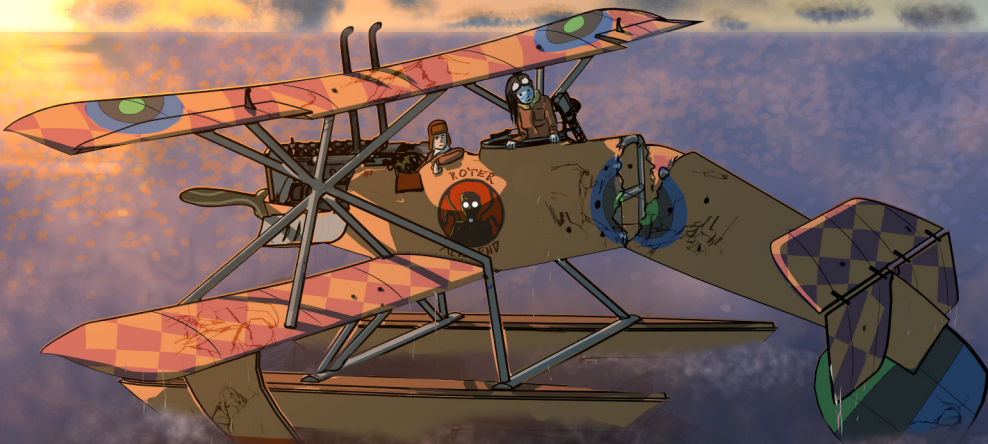
Company Reputation

Flying Circuses aren't just petty sellswords and lowlives. To be clear, they *are* both those things, but they are also folk heroes, larger-than-life figures of lay mythology. Regular people follow the battles, rivalries, and tragedies of the companies that operate in their lands, and children aspire to one day be like them... or perhaps to shoot them down.

At the end of every mission, we check to see how the mission has changed the squadron's reputation. This can unlock Moves that apply to the whole squadron which reflect the way people see them.

For each of the following that is true, mark 1 Fame.
- Did this job indisputably, measurably make the world a better place?
- Was the mission witnessed and end up making you look skilled?
- Did you forgo pay for this job?

For each of the following that is true, mark 1 Infamy.
- Did this job measurably make the greater world a worse place?
- Did you do something morally repugnant during the mission?
- Did this job target or exploit innocent people?

When the Fame track reaches 5, erase it and select a Fame move as a group. When the Infamy track reaches 5, the GM chooses an Infamy move they believe is appropriate, removes a Fame reputation that no longer makes sense, or makes a Hard Move against the company as a whole.

Fame Moves

Defenders: If you are defending a town, halve your Tab before rolling.

Hard at Work: Get +1d10 pay for jobs that don't mandate combat.

Good Bosses: Your Labour Clock has 8 Segments, and you have Advantage to Get Stuff when hiring.

Good Credit: When you take a loan, you may choose to half the interest or forgo the collateral.

Feared: In a large battle, the enemy starts with 1 mark on their Battle Clock.

This move also interacts with advanced rules, namely the large battle system on page 196. Your company's reputation is such that nobody really wants to tangle with you.

Solid: Add +3 to your Company Value.

Infamy Moves

Bad Sports: Your foes will never respect any attempt to surrender on your part.

Gone Soft: Towns will offer -1d10 for jobs when they have a sob story.

This is a really good Infamy move to throw at teams that are otherwise mostly upstanding despite the acquired infamy, representing the company being perceived as suckers.

Raiders: Add a result to Get Work, "The work is on the level". If you don't take it, the work is always morally dubious.

Resented: The Labour Clock is reduced to 4 Segments.

If the company already has Good Bosses, then instead of giving them Resented, take away Good Bosses.

Death Mark: Name an organization or Circus with long reach that are not hostile. They will shoot on sight.

Losing Infamy Moves

People are often quick to forgive pilots if they do something grand. If a company does a mission that checks all three Fame markers, instead of taking the Fame, they can choose to have an Infamy move removed. The replacement of a squadron's leader also tends to lead to second chances.

Towns

Anywhere you land that isn't the middle of hostile wilderness is a Town. Towns are where you buy things, find work, and blow off steam. They are customers, employers, shops, and your home away from home.

Every town should be interesting in some way, and when you first enter a town you should go through the following and figure out what makes the place unique. The GM can prepare each town ahead of the players, or creating it can be a collaborative effort.

Town Basics

There are many different kinds of settlements left over since the end of the world, and while no two are alike exactly, they fall into familiar patterns. Determining what kind of town you've come to should be your first step.

A good rule of thumb is to base each town off one of the Backgrounds, which gives you an idea what the essential character of the town is like and what the people from there value. This will also be an easy way to pick a name for the town: just reference what names are available for that background and use one of those. Ask yourself the following.

- Where is the landscape around the town like?
- How many people live here? To what Peoples do they belong?
- What is the primary industry in the town?
- What resources do they need to trade for with outsiders?
- What political issues does the town face?
- How big and well armed is their guard, police force, or militia?
- Do they have combat aeroplanes and/or anti-air guns?
- What symbols does the town use? Flags, roundels, coats of arms?
- What does their internal currency look like?
- Who is in charge of the town? Who is *really* in charge?

That last one is of particular importance, because you'll probably work with them. Most towns will have a mayor (bürgermeister/bürgermeisterin) which could be a democratic or hereditary position, but other important (perhaps more important) figures could be union bosses, heads of local industry, wealthy recluses, retired pilots, the leader of the town guard, trade company capitalists, or village elders.

Town Wealth

Every Town has a single stat called Wealth, which ranges from -3 to +5. This stat represents how well the town is handling life after the end of the world. It might help to think of it as a hierarchy of needs that the town is slowly climbing up as it rebuilds itself. The wealth stat represents the surplus capital that is being directed towards each goal in turn.

Actualizing ideological goals.	4+
Securing prosperity, luxuries, reclaiming cultural and industrial goods.	+2 to +3
Ensuring security, trade, medicine, and sustainable industry.	0 to +1
Acquiring basics: Food, water, heat, shelter.	Negatives
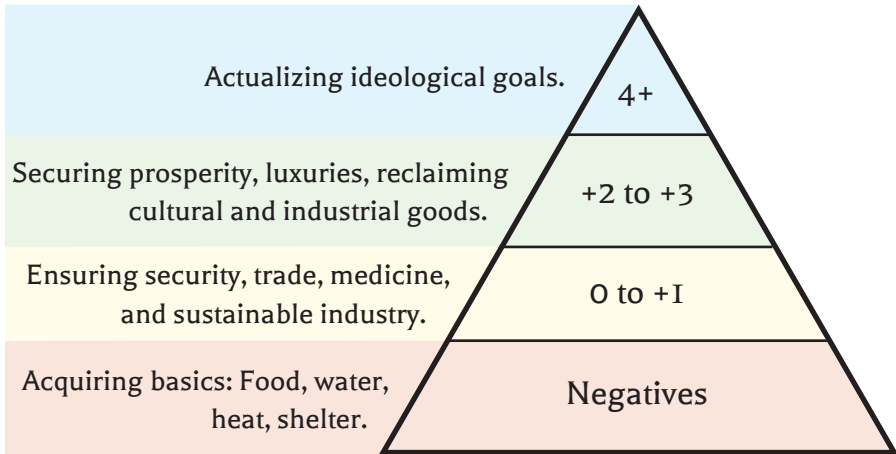
Rich towns can afford to pay well and can either produce or trade for rare goods. Poorer towns have fewer specialized workers, less variety of goods, less trade, worse facilities, and can't pay nearly as much. On the other hand, goods and labour are cheaper, people can be desperate to leave, and the jobs they offer will often be less morally ambiguous.

A town's wealth is not fixed. Not only can the jobs you perform enrich a town, but they are often so small that a single Circus coming in with a lot of outside currency and spending it can dramatically alter the economy. Similarly, a town which is being robbed, raided, or shaken down will soon start sliding down the wealth scale, and losing access to a key resources or industry can turn a prosperous town into a poor one extremely quickly.

Running out of Patience

For each town, the GM should create a six-segment countdown clock. Every time the pilots do something that annoys the town, like starting fights, breaking stuff, or sleeping with important people's family members, the clock gets marked. Whenever they spend a lot of money or do a job, a spot gets erased. If the clock gets filled, the Circus gets kicked out!

Stress Relief

A Good Time

You know that saying, 'Business before Pleasure'?

Well, pilots in *Flying Circus* don't. The first thing want to do when their feet hit solid ground is to drown their worries in booze, drugs, music, companionship, and anything else that might distract them from the fact that they just nearly died while flying a motorized kite.

They'll figure out how to pay for it later.

That said, the ground moves in the next three chapters can, for the most part, happen in any order, or be mixed organically during play. That's fine. For the purposes of organizing the book, however, we'll tackle them one at a time, starting with Stress, Vice, and social interaction rules.

Having calculated up Stress from during Landing, we set our scene. The pilots are in a (mostly) safe town. They've got money either burning a hole in their pockets or about to come in. They're young, stressed, and stupid. Face it: They're not going to behave responsibly.

Stress

Your Stress Track is a scale from 0-10 of Stress, with everything from 5-10 in a separate box. As you take Stress, mark it off as you go. A little Stress is good, because Stress removed is converted 1-1 to Experience Points. It's when you hit 5 or more Stress that things get hairy.

Stressed

Once you hit 5 or more Stress, your character is officially Stressed. Things are starting to get to them, and it is affecting their daily lives. When you are Stressed, you can't spend XP. You need to be in a more level place before your character can work on themselves and improve.

Burnt Out & Venting

When you reach 10 Stress, you end up *Burnt Out*. Write that down in your note section. Your character has reached their limit, and can't go on.

A character will stay Burnt Out until they lower their Stress enough that they are no longer Stressed. While they are Burnt Out, they are at Disadvantage to Press the Issue, Negotiate Pay, and Get Real, and they *cannot* fly again until they are no longer Burnt Out. Because we don't want people to wait out a mission, the group can't fly until they are ready.

While a character is Burnt Out, they can use the Vent move to cool off, usually at the expense of other pilots. Don't let your friends burn out!

VENT

When you are Burnt Out and use a Vent action, lose 2 Stress.

The victim(s) of your Venting, if any, take 1 Stress.

The GM determines who qualifies as a victim of Venting, and this basically gives them a choice between taking Stress or breaking Trust with you. If you vent to an NPC, they'll just not take it very well and will react naturally.

Because this move can hurt other player characters, it can be a good idea to ask permission, one player to another, before using it. Otherwise, GMs should remind players that they can use safety tools to undo Venting when it infringes on their experience. Characters should be jerks, not players!

Vice

A pilot's primary means of getting rid of stress is indulging in Vice. In between missions, the average squadron will drink a town dry, pick fights with half the population, and sleep with the other half. This isn't actually solving anything, but these pilots aren't looking for solutions, they are looking for short-term relief, something to steady their nerves enough so they can get back in the cockpit tomorrow morning.

In the mechanics of *Flying Circus*, a Vice is anything, done for personal gratification, that is or can be harmful or self-consuming. Vice implies excess, indulgence, recklessness, and disregard for consequence.

Having a beer with a meal, smoking habitually, or reading a novel for pleasure or are not Vices as the rules defines the term. Getting drunk, anxiously smoking a pack in an hour, or ignoring your duties to read a few more chapters are all Vices.

Beyond that, though, a Vice can be anything you can make an argument for. It's impossible to list the full possibility space, but if you can sell to the table that you are engaging in an activity to a degree of excess or self-destruction that might qualify, it almost certainly does.

Vice Track

The Vice Track goes from 0-5, and marks how deep into debauchery your character has gotten over the course of the night. It is marked over using the *Indulge in Vice* move, and resolved with *End of Night*.

At 5 Vice, the End of Night kicks in. This is generally when your character has run out of steam and either goes to bed or passes out in a ditch.

INDULGE IN VICE

When you indulge a Vice, add +1 to the Vice Track, and then face consequences in the form of ongoing Disadvantage or a GM move.

When you go back to the same Vice again, additionally take 1 miss forward to End of Night. The consequences scale appropriately.

When you engage in an unfamiliar Vice, roll +Daring and mark the track. If somebody familiar with with vice guides you, that's Help.

On a 16+, treat it like a Familiar Vice. 11-15, treat it as engaging the same Vice twice. On a miss, choose either bad consequences or End of Night.

The third time you engage the same Vice, it becomes Familiar.

Appropriate consequences are whatever the GM and players come up with. If you drink to excess, you get drunk, and that can be reflected with Disadvantage when trying to do anything involving fine motor skills. Stimulants will make Calm rolls harder, Depressants will affect Keen and Daring, distractions will cause lost time, etc.

END OF NIGHT

When you end the night, or hit 5 Vice, roll 1d20 for each mark on the Vice Track, then clear the track. Take +1 for each Attendant hold spent.

11-15, remove 1 Stress. 16+, remove 2 Stress.

If you get 3 or more misses (1-10), choose one below.
- You become Addicted to a Vice you indulged.
- You become Immune to a Vice you indulged.
- You take +4 Stress immediately.

When you are Addicted to a Vice, you take 2 Stress if you haven't Indulged that Vice by End of Night. When you are Immune, indulging it merely adds 1 miss to your End of Night roll. It does not increase your Vice track.

This Move can only be used once per Routine. You can continue to mark the Vice Track, but you can't clear stress with it again this Routine.

Confidants

Confidants are the people who make coming back to the ground worth it; your sweetheart. Or sweethearts! Things might get a little polyamorous. It's the post-apocalypse, who are you to judge?

Confidant Basics

A Confidant is an important NPC tied to one (or more!) player characters. They can be played by the GM, or by another player you trust. Confidants are not random hook-ups: they are ongoing relationships, even if those relationships are long distance.

Confidants do not have to be lovers, though that is the presumption. Close friends, beloved mentors, or trusted family could also count.

When an NPC Confidant is created, make a little index card for them. Working with the GM, put down their name, why they like their PC(s), and one or two strong character features. You can also put other information that is relevant to them, like where they live and training they have.

They also have one or more Standards that they want the player to meet to stay in the relationship. Things like "Don't attack this town, my mom lives there" or "Remain monogamous" or "Stop drinking so much". If players violate these standards, well, that's going to go poorly for the relationship.

Beatrix Hildebrandt
Nadia's Confidant, Non-Combat Pilot
Likes Nadia's bravery & style

- small-time smuggler
- makes dumb cat puns :3
- pretends to be cooler than she is

Standards
- "tell me before you fool around"
- "don't ever lie to me"

Confidant Trust

Unlike most NPC in the game, Confidants share a mechanic with the PC in that they also have Trust with PC they are associated with.

This Trust is one-sided; it matters if the Confidant Trusts the PC, but PC's don't, mechanically, Trust or Not Trust their Confidants. A Confidant is effectively only a Confidant while they Trust a player character. If they don't, they go back to being a regular NPC.

When players violate one of the Confidant's Standards, that's usually a cause of broken Trust, and can be the end of the relationship. Confidants aren't psychics who can detect any violations (usually), but they aren't stupid either. Even if the player was travelling, their teammates will talk about their adventures, and in small towns that means everyone knows.

If players want to win a confidant back, they'll need to, well, do that. Talking over the issue (the Get Real move) or making gestures that appeal to why the Confidant liked the player in the first place are the usual ways to restore a relationship. A good rule of thumb is that, if a Confidant is won back, they should have an additional Standard going forward.

Confidant Details

Confidants either live somewhere independently, or they travel with the Circus as an employee. If a Confidant is an employee, they take on whatever is the most appropriate job for them, and require upkeep no different from any other. No discounts just because they like your character! If they don't have an applicable skill, they can act as an Attendant.

Whether or not an ex-Confidant stays with the company after a breakup is up to the players, GM, and the nature of the event.

A Confidant can, technically, be another PC. This isn't always wise, but it's totally doable. If both parties Trust each other and agree to be each other's Confidants, it is done. You don't need to make cards or anything.

Losing a Confidant can be devastating to a character. If the Confidant breaks Trust with the PC and things aren't repaired that routine, that's 3 Stress. A Confidant being wounded inflicts 5 Stress, and a Confidant dying inflicts 10. Don't let that happen!

Quality Time

With all these restrictions, you might be wondering why a pilot would take on a Confidant at all. The answer is the Quality Time move.

QUALITY TIME

When you devote time and attention to your trusting Confidant, remove 2 Stress.

This move can be used once per Routine.

After a few routines struggling with the Vice system to remove stress, the power of this move will become clear. At no cost except narrative time, the player can instantly remove 2 Stress, and get 2 XP. They can do this every routine like clockwork.

In other words, a Confidant allows pilots to mellow out a little. Settle down. Stop drinking themselves into oblivion every night.

What exactly counts as devoting time and attention is variable, but can be treated very generously, or even just handled entirely off-screen and presumed unless there's something else pressing happening.

Note that one use per Routine means once per pilot, no matter how many Confidants they have. Being poly is cool, but not magic.

Ground Moves

PRESS THE ISSUE

When you try to get somebody to do what you want...
- *... with money,* pay their price and they'll do it.
- *... with intimidation or force,* roll +Hard.
- *... with honest reasoning,* roll +Calm.
- *... with lies or misdirection,* roll +Keen.

On a hit, they'll do it. On a 11-15, the GM chooses 1.
- They need something from you first.
- They'll resent this, and that'll be a problem later.
- They'll do it, but only the bare minimum.

This move always requires there to be some form of leverage over the target: you can't *just* talk down the person who was paid to kill you or the loan shark you own money. However, leverage does not need to be power. It could be sympathy or solidarity, for instance. A sob story can work where intimidation wouldn't. It can also be wealth disparity, gratitude, or even the subject finding you attractive.

When you offer money, the person you offer it to doesn't have to take it. Offering can even offend people, even (or perhaps especially) people who are desperate enough that they break down and take your money anyway.

TURN ON THE CHARM

When you entice an interested party, roll +Daring. If they aren't inclined to be interested, the move has no effect.

On a 16+, they choose 2. On an 11-15, they choose 1.
- They throw themselves at you.
- They do you a favour or show you a kindness.
- They'll listen to what you have to say.

Straightforwardly, this move is for seducing people, PCs and NPCs. It's very loose to allow the 'target' plenty of wiggle room, and the fun of the move is you can't decide how people will react to your advances.

PCs can always opt to simply say 'no" and the move has no effect.

Get Real

When you speak the truth from your heart, and they are willing to listen, choose a goal from below, take 1 Stress, and <u>roll +Calm.</u>
- Restore their Trust in you. They do not take Stress.
- Take them on as a Confidant, or repair a relationship.
- Begin a Move Exchange.
- Remove 3 Stress from the other person.
- Remove 3 Stress from yourself (Net -2 Stress total).

On a hit, you do it. On a 16+, additionally choose one.
- Both of you take 2 XP.
- Both of you lose 1 additional Stress.
- Hold one. Either of you may spend the hold to gain Advantage while addressing a problem discussed in the conversation.

If you miss, all parties take 1 additional Stress, and the GM asks the move target, "What did they say which hurt you?"

This move is the 'act like a grown-up and have a real conversion' move. We all agree this is gross and you should do it as infrequently as possible.

But maybe something that happened in the last mission is chewing up your insides. Dieter is hurting and needs to talk to somebody. You can't stand the rift that's formed between you and Miriam. You need to finally tell Anton how you feel about him. That sort of thing.

So you have a drink to steady your nerves and you Get Real. Calm is generally a dump stat for most pilots, and a miss will especially hurt when one or both sides of the conversation are already stressed out. This is a move best left to those with the temperament for it, but you don't always have that luxury. Growing up means having hard talks sometimes.

Though this can get pretty intimate and you might not want to play out the whole conversation, it can be a good idea to talk about what you talk about, so everyone understands and you can reference it later.

If you bring together two people who really need to talk, you are Helping, and a Fault might mean that what you overhear, or what they talk about, is Stressful for you, puts you in a bad spot, or makes you not trust them.

Move Exchange

One special option of Get Real is called the Move Exchange. In fiction, this represents a discussion about the character's background, their heritage, the skills they've learned, and the lessons they have to teach. It can be a student and a teacher or it can be mutual, but in any case, knowledge is offered, not taken.

A Move Exchange costs 4 XP per move being transmitted. That XP can come from either party. Each participant can offer a Move to the other from their own Background. It is up to each player what Move the other can take, if any. You don't have to offer anything.

Move Exchanges are strictly between two characters, and each character can only learn a maximum of 1 Move from the Exchange, no matter how much XP they want to spend.

You can only teach characters Moves from your own Playbook: you can't teach Moves you learned from other playbooks using Move Exchange or similar. That is borrowed knowledge, and it's not necessarily yours to spread further.

Unless they have special rules that say otherwise, only Personal Moves that aren't preselected Core Moves can be transferred through a Move Exchange. A heart to heart talk isn't going to teach people how to do an Immelmann Turn, so you can't teach Mastery moves either.

There's nothing stopping you from doing Move Exchanges with NPCs. You just have to provide all the XP, the GM chooses an appropriate Move, and you get taught it. As a general rule, NPCs only have one move to teach.

Brawl

When you start something, verbal or physical, <u>roll +Hard.</u>

On a 16+, choose 2. On a 11-15, choose 1.
- Hurt somebody bad.
    - Hurt a whole lot of folks.
- Win the fight, whatever that means.
- Get out clean and relatively unscathed.
- Remove 1 Stress.

First thing's first, this move is meant exclusively for fights that are not purposefully lethal, and where nobody involved has any intention of escalating it to lethality. Lethal fighting rules are page 81.

The consequences of not getting out clean can include:
- 1 Injury from fighting.
- 1 additional injury from fighting very serious people.
- Property damage or social disruption.
- Stress taken.
- Trust being broken.
- A response from whatever passes for law enforcement in the town.

When players start a fight over something, if they choose to win the fight, they take control of or are recognized for that thing. Otherwise, this option means the other side gives ground or gives up definitively.

When a player chooses to remove a Stress, even if they lose the fight from there, fight has some sort of viscerally satisfying conclusion agreeable to the players and GM. You embarrassed your foe, snatched something valuable off them, ruined their good looks, or maybe they just got arrested by the town militia after they got finished tap dancing on your face. Not a win in a traditional sense, but a moral victory, maybe.

A miss is when things can start going very wrong. Usually, a miss is when the players lose the fight and face the consequences: they get the stuffing beat out of them and then get hit with the bill to fix the place. But there are other possibilities as well: the GM can essentially pick as many consequences on the opposite page as they think makes sense.

A very compelling consequence appropriate for characters of particular lethality, like hardened soldiers, is going too far. Killing or seriously injuring somebody in a petty fight over nothing is one of those unexpected consequences that works very well with the nature of this move. It was just a dumb argument, over drinks or money or a boy. Why did it come to this?

Finances

Money Money Money

Flying Circuses don't work for free. Between the constant drain of maintenance for aircraft and the expense of their pilot's lifestyles, it isn't possible. Sure, some companies might take the occasional pro-bono work, but it's not sustainable in the long run.

Phase Structure

This phase can blend in with the Stress Relief phase, but it generally happens after that stuff is done. This is is the most book-keepy phase and generally has the least actual roleplaying or action, consisting mostly of short descriptions, updating numbers, and making a few rolls. If you get the sequence down correctly, you can get this part done very quickly and move on to other, more exciting things.

This phase usually opens with going to your previous employer and getting paid for you work. Then there's shopping, so people can buy upgrades for their planes, new equipment to use, new aircraft, new employees for the company, and so forth. Finally, it's time to pay up expenses, settle the tab, and move on to finding work.

Getting Paid

This is by far the easiest and most straightforward part of the phase, and requires very little work. You go to the people who hired you, they give you the money for a job well done, and you go on your way. It can be resolved in a single sentence and a number changing.

Reluctant Clients

There may be situations where a client doesn't want to pay up. Maybe they feel like you didn't do a good enough job. Maybe they're just cheap, or they gambled all the money away in between missions. It happens.

When this situation comes up, you can use Pressing the Issue, Getting Real, Brawling, or perhaps even the ground combat rules to settle it. Maybe you're intimidating or guilting them into paying you. Maybe you're raiding their house and taking the money by force!

Typically, everyone will be sympathetic to a Circus that got cheated after an honest job, but there are limits. Folks don't usually like it when you get violent over a missed payment, but it might be worth it to leave a message to anyone who tries to cheat you in the future.

Failed Missions

On the other hand, if you didn't get the mission done, there's not going to be a lot of sympathy if you didn't get paid. Trying to squeeze a client for their money after not doing the things they ask is generally seen as stealing or racketeering, and gets the town guard on your case.

Spending Money

Buying stuff is a complex and multifaceted aspect of the game, so let's lay down some ground rules. Firstly, for those of you just joining us in capitalism, money can be exchanged for goods and services.

As a rule, the prices offered are the prices after the characters have haggled to an agreement. Don't ever roll Press the Issue to adjust prices.

Don't worry about repairing or maintaining your aeroplane, paying salaries, or buying food or a place to stay. This stuff is all rolled into the Expenses at the end of the routine, and we can safely assume every single town has mechanics to work on planes, some kind of inn, and some food.

Scrip & The Tab

Local currency is different for every town; you should establish what the town uses for money when you come into the town. Could be real bills and coins, could be engine parts, could be bottlecaps: Doesn't matter.

As you might imagine, this currency seems small and unreal to pilots used to handling money in coaster-sized gold coins.

When you land in a place, take a piece of paper or a sticky note and write TAB on it in big letters. When you spend money, and it's not a whole thaler, tally it on the sheet. Buy a beer? Mark it. Buy a round for the whole bar? Mark it. Pay for the subsequent repairs on the bar? Mark it.

When it's time to do Expenses later, start by resolving your Tab. Roll 1d10 for every mark on the Tab, and add dice equal to the town's Wealth. This means wealthier towns are more expensive, maybe even making you pay if you didn't buy anything, and small numbers of purchases are effectively free in towns with negative Wealth scores.

For each 1 rolled, the routine's Expenses go up by 1. How this happens, what purchase put you over, doesn't matter. We never care about how much gets spent on any one thing, only how frequently it's spent.

Shopping

There's a chance you'll find anything in a market, but no guarantees. If you're dealing in bulk, use the Piracy & Salvage rules on page 121.

GET STUFF

When you want to purchase something, <u>roll +Wealth.</u> If it's one of the town's specialities, take Advantage.

On a 16+, pay for it and it's yours. On a 11-15, the GM chooses one.
- It's similar, but not exactly what you want.
- It's available, but it's more expensive than usual.
- They don't have it, but they know where you can get it.

On a miss, they just don't have it, or more than one complication is true. Don't roll for things that are offered or already established to exist.

This move covers everything you might exchange money for: labour, land, properties, employees, planes, maps, the location of possible salvage...

Absolute staples are exempt, providing the town doesn't have a shortage of said staples specifically. Staples are generally food, water, labour, companionship, housing, basic small arms like bolt-action rifles and revolvers, tools, and information about the town and surroundings.

Employees will start work without being paid up front, but if they are more expensive than usual that should manifest as demanding a hiring bonus.

SELL STUFF

When you want to sell something, <u>roll +Wealth.</u> If the town already has it in abundance, take Disadvantage.

On an 11-15, it sells at market value. 16+, you make a little profit, GM's discretion. Otherwise, expect a lackluster offer or sketchy clients.

Pilots often have trouble off-loading used goods, given their lack of accountability. This move is designed to make selling things difficult, because unless they're trading in bulk (page 121) pilots rarely bother. You also can't sell things in the same town you bought them, because if somebody needed it, they'd go to a local instead of some scummy pilots.

Prices

The prices for the objects you want to purchase are set using the item listings on page 176 for objects, page 177 for services, or the prices in the Aircraft Engineering Guide if you're really getting into it.

If what you're buying doesn't fall under that, the GM sets the price, and can do so fairly arbitrarily. Here's some examples.

Things that cost Scrip.
- A refurbished weapon.
- Fine, locally made clothes.
- A high quality meal of fresh food.
- Companionship for the night.
- A new paint job for your aeroplane.
- Hiring a youngster to be your servant for a week.
- A bribe for the night watchman.
- A coin to a beggar.

Things that cost 1-3 Thaler.
- A few days manual labour from a dozen workers.
- The services of a skilled craftsman for a week.
- A bribe for a burgermeister.
- Industrial quantities of raw resources.
- A year's rent in dubious conditions.

Things that cost 4-9 Thaler.
- An old ground-based anti-air cannon.
- A prewar experimental groundcar or motorcycle.
- Hiring a transport plane to fly to a nearby town with your stuff.
- A small workshop, modest house, or family farm.
- Buying out the town guard.
- A new electric generator.
- A crate of rifles for a revolution.

Things that cost 10+ Thaler.
- Refurbishing a disused factory or mine.
- Buying a large plot of land.
- Rigging a town election.
- Rearming the local militia to excellent standards.

Medical Treatment

Unless it's a specific problem for the town, everywhere has some kind of healer, and the medical treatments available in the world of *Flying Circus* are extremely effective. If you can get to a doctor, a lovely mix of turn of the century medicine, semi-magical herbal treatments, and horrifying mad science experiments will turn broken bones and gunshots into nuisances instead of life-threatening events. This allows players to take a beating and always come back for more.

Unless you have a doctor on payroll, the costs of medical treatment is fixed. You pay 1 Thaler, you get 1 Injury removed. Simple as that.

As for healing times, there are two options.

The first is <u>Slow Healing</u>. In this model, it takes about 3 days to heal 1 Injury. This method is convenient when the team isn't in much of a rush, and you can skip some days in a single sentence if you need to pad for time. We assume that the character is still healing through Stress Relief, so they suffer their Injury penalty, though they might take it easy a few days before getting their personal party started.

The second is <u>Fast Healing</u>. There's a lot of ways to get healed quickly in Himmilgard, but they're never fun for the patient. Fast Healing will heal 1 Injury every 3 hours, or be done for the next Mission, whichever comes first. The downside is that you convert that Injury directly to Stress.

Fast Healing is always weird and grotesque, and generally no fun. But you need to be back up in the air immediately, you can take the stress and just get it over with. This is a good excuse to come up with icky medicine or magical methods of healing to gross the table out, if people are down with that!

Employees

Your Company doesn't just consist of pilots, or at least it probably won't for long. You have Employees, and they have a tangible effect on the running of the company.

NPC Combat Pilots

If they have a combat plane to fly, an NPC combat pilot bulks out the squadron, adding to the Combat Value and providing Advantage on-call: you can always say "Hey, I want Hans to cover me as I do this" and Hans will swoop in and lend Help, possibly getting in trouble along the way.

Outside of battle, you don't really have to worry about these pilots or what they're up to. Assume some of the pay you're giving them is going towards them keeping their aircraft competitive with the rest of the team, though they'll always be pretty basic. An NPC's plane only needs to be defined beyond the absolute basics if a player climbs into one.

Civilian Pilots

These pilots fly your cargo planes and other non-combat aircraft, ferrying aircraft, equipment, and employees between job sites. They aren't good at fighting or are pacifists, so while they can fly planes on a mission if needed, they never willingly dogfight or do bombing runs.

Mechanics

Come repair time (page 110), a Mechanic will fix 2 Vital Parts, including engines, as well as Strain damage on 1 plane, for no cost beyond their salary. They can also perform Maintenance in mid-air if you take them up.

Guards

Guards fight on the ground, providing Help in ground combat by loading guns, providing covering fire, or rolling extra attacks on their own. They can also fire weapons from aircraft like an Observer, but at Disadvantage.

Doctors

Having a Doctor on the team is extremely helpful, because maintaining a Doctor means that, from this point forward, all your healing is 'free'. You only have to pay the doctor's salary, and you don't have to pay him more if there's a lot of work to do.

Observers

Observers can fire small arms and turreted weapons from planes, and count as players for the visibility bonus of extra seats. If you have planes with turrets and a PC isn't manning them, hire these guys.

Navigators & Bombardiers

Navigators offer Assistance on Navigation rolls and Bombardiers give Assistance on Bombs Away rolls, which can be useful for teams that travel long distances and drop stuff on things. Otherwise, they don't do much.

Attendants

The Attendants job is to handle the annoying little things so everyone else can focus. They do laundry, clean the planes, make sure everyone is fed, and do paperwork. Basically, they're interns. Each attendant generates 3 holds per routine: these holds can be spent for a +1 on all d20s in an End of Night move. Multiple holds can be spent by one character, up to 5, representing escalating degrees of intervention in the pilot's normal duties. These holds disappear at the end of the routine if not used.

Fixers

Fixers are professional negotiators or contract lawyers. They give a +3 to a single Negotiate a Contract roll per Routine. This doesn't stack: you can't flood the room with Fixers for a better deal.

Multi-Speciality Employees

Sometimes it's to your benefit to have an employee trained in multiple things. For example, you might want an Observer who is also a Mechanic to man the guns on a temperamental plane, or a Navigator who is also a Guard that can protect you if your plan goes down in the wilderness. These employees do exist, and you can also train your existing employees (for 1 Thaler) to learn new specialities.

However, these characters are worth a lot more on the job market, and they know it. They'll collect not only the salary for both their jobs, but an additional +1 Thaler in upkeep for each additional job they can do. A smooth-talking, two-fisted Doctor/Fixer/Guard can pretty much set their own salary.

Labour Problems

If the players start mistreating their employees, or failing to value their contribution, the GM should start a secret Labour clock. This will normally be six segments, though it might be shorter to match a company with an ideological bent that isn't reflected in their labour practices.

The Labour clock should get ticked if...
- The employees don't get paid on time.
- A pilot treats an employee poorly.
- An employee is wrongfully fired.
- When employees are asked to go above and beyond to get it done on time.
- When employees are put in danger, beyond the expectations of their job type.
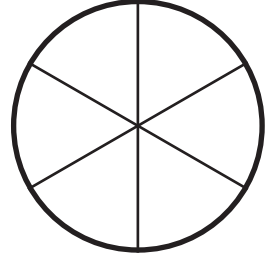
The Labour Clock can be reduced if...
- The employees get a bonus (double pay) for a routine.
- The employees get a raise, adding 1 thaler per 5 spent in salary to the overall Expenses of the team. This is permanent.
- The employee's demands are met in negotiation.

At around 3 ticks, the employees start muttering about unions, collective action, and otherwise doing something about their situation. If it gets full up, the employees strike, holding the planes hostage. Strike demands might include a percentage cut of profits from jobs, raises, back pay, better working conditions, or the firing of particularly odious pilots.

Used Planes

It's been twenty years since the apocalypse, and many of the planes are are thirty or even forty years old at this point. Some are remarkably well-preserved or freshly rebuilt, but most... aren't.

The profiles of planes are when they are New. Most planes that players buy or salvage are Used. Used planes cost half of the sticker price in thaler (rounding down), but have one of the following drawbacks. After you buy it, roll 1d10 to find out what's wrong with it! Remember, round down.

1	Wreck	Roll again, twice! If you get this again, ignore it.
2	Burnt Out	Engines are at -1 Reliability.
3	Ragged	Reduce your Max Speed by 10%
4	Hefty	Increase your Stall Speeds by 20%
5	Sticky Guns	Increase the chance of guns jamming by 1.
6	Weak	Cut the plane's Toughness in half.
7	Fragile	Reduce Strain by 20%.
8	Leaky	Reduce the maximum fuel capacity by 20%.
9	Sluggish	Reduce your Handling by 5%.
10	Mint	No penalty.

It costs 5 Thaler to restore a Used plane and remove the drawback, and you need to fly at least one mission before it can be fixed. Every subsequent flight reduces the cost by 1: you work it out for free after six flights.

Plane Repairs

Plane repairs are not something the team usually worry about in-character. They get back to town, they hand the plane over to the mechanics, tell them what's wrong, and when they get back a bill is waiting for them. Of course, things are not always so simple.

Planes are always fully repaired in between every routine providing the next flight doesn't start immediately after the previous one ended, without a chance to go through the rest of the Routine. You can imagine mechanics working furiously through the night restringing wire and patching canvas. It won't always be pretty, but it'll work.

Likewise, you almost never have to worry about sourcing replacement parts, unless it's a specific plot point. Somehow, the mechanics always seem to have the right parts wherever you are.

If a plane is totally trashed, you can rebuild it for half its value in thalers. The result will count as a Used plane!

Repair Costs

The expenses associated with planes (their upkeep stat) cover all the basic maintenance and repairs to the aircraft. Replacing spark plugs and sewing up holes don't cost anything extra, so it's always free to repair all the Wear an engine took unless it was knocked out, and to repair all damage taken to Toughness. These little things just go away.
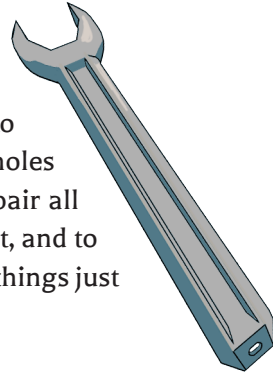
Past that, repairs cost you. Every Vital Part that needs fixing costs Iþ, as does restoring a disabled engine to working order. Repairing Strain damage also costs Iþ. The cost stays the same if you are repairing I damage or 20: You're paying for the labour to take apart and inspect the plane's structure, not just for some birch spars!

An option you can take, if you're desperate, is to not pay for these repairs, or to only pay for some. There's nothing stopping you from going back into the air with missing Strain or broken parts. If you do this, your Toughness will still be restored, but your Strain won't be.

Final Expenses

At the end of Finances, you must pay off your Expenses. These expenses cover all the routine costs of the company. You never have to worry about buying fuel, ammo, or spare parts for the planes yourself, securing housing, or buying food for you and your employees. That's all covered.

You can treat this as an actual action in the fiction ("Fritz is going to go sit down with the books now.") but it's best if it just happens in the background during the rest of the narrative. Maybe elect the player who is best with numbers to act as the company's Treasurer and let them handle it in a moment when their character isn't doing something.

Expense List

Here's a master list of what everything costs.

From Aircraft
- Aircraft Upkeep ....Variable
- Strain Damage Repairs...1þ
- Repairing 1 Vital Part...1þ
- Engine Restoration 1þ
- Upgrades & New Planes ....Variable

From People
- Player Character..1þ
- NPC Combat Pilot..1þ
- Fixers 1þ
- Doctors..2þ
- Observers ....½þ
- Guards..½þ
- Mechanics ....½þ
- Bombardiers ....½þ
- Navigators...½þ
- Attendants ....½þ
- Additional Wages ....Variable
- Paying off your Tab...Variable
- Purchased Equipment...Variable
- Medical Treatment..1 per Injury Healed

Round your total up to whole numbers.

Cost Overrun

When a squadron runs out of money and is unable to pay their expenses, they must select one Cost Overrun. If they fall short by a multiple of their Company Value, they must select another equal to the multiple. Don't carry over expenses between missions, though.

Even after they are in the black, the Overruns persist until they are paid off. It costs thaler equal to your Company Value to pay off each Cost Overrun. If the Cost Overrun wouldn't apply to your company, or to your next mission, you can't select it! It always needs to have an impact.

Go Up with Half Fuel
The squadron's fuel budget is being restricted, so every aircraft needs to make do with half the regular fuel load.

Go Up with Half Ammo
As above, except it is for ammunition for all the squadron's weapons. This also cuts off the use of any speciality ammunition from the Advanced Rules, if you're doing that.

Bombs at -3 Attack
You've had to make do with improvised or unreliable bombs, so when you roll Damage Assessment after you bomb, take -3.

+1 to Jam Values
Whatever the Jam value of your weapons are, it is increased by 1 because you haven't been able to keep up payments to maintain your weapons.

Rotary Engines -3 Reliability
You haven't been able to afford castor oil, the expensive lubricant that makes rotary engines work, so instead you've had to use inferior and cheaper synthetic substitutions. In real life, the German air force had to do this in World War One, and their engines kept exploding!

No Free Repairs
You can't afford to pay the hanger mechanics anymore, so they aren't patching up the canvas on your aircraft. Therefore, your planes retain all the Toughness damage they took between missions.

Upset Employees

This one isn't a mechanical penalty so much as a juicy narrative hook for the GM. If you've been falling short on the payment for your employees, they won't want to be your employees very much longer. In other words, this is a mark on the Labour clock.

Take +1 Stress per Routine

This represents the squadron having to settle for less in their basics. Instead of the good food, it's gruel. Instead of sleeping at the inn, you rent out a barn or sleep in the park. It's undignified.

No More Scrip

Expense accounts are being curtailed. If something costs Scrip, you just can't have it, so no buying anything beyond the absolute basics. This will generally cut the players off from all their Vices, so it's a last-ditch emergency selection.

Getting a Loan

If you're desperate you can get a loan of up to 10þ plus the Wealth level of the town. You'll need to offer some kind of collateral, often a plane, valuable goods, or (if the loan shark is exceptionally terrible) a person. Loans must be paid back plus +50% (round up) before the end of the next

Finding Work

Freelancing

You're a business, you do jobs for people. Finding work and completing it is how you start adventures! You gotta seek it out and get a contract, and jobs you don't take might get done by somebody else.

A *Flying Circus* mission typically follows a structure: Somebody has money and a problem that a half a dozen idiots in aeroplanes can solve. You *are* half a dozen idiots in aeroplanes, so learn what thing you need to do, go do it, come back, and get paid.

This structure means a campaign doesn't usually have a central plotline. Players can create one by doing long-term work for the same client, or the GM can set up a larger conflict for the players to dive into, but the episodic model works fine most of the time. *Flying Circus* is character-driven, not plot-driven, so the role of he missions is to provide an exciting context for the characters to interact with each other and the world in.

If the players want, they can also try to rustle up scores outside of being hired. You don't need a client to engage in piracy, salvaging, extortion, or, heaven's forbid, *trading*, and these are all valid ways of playing.

FIND WORK

When the company looks for work, pick a client and , roll +Wealth.

On a hit, there's a job. On a 16+, there's good work to be had. The GM rolls up a mission with 2 complications. Players pick one option below.

- The employer is desperate. Add +1d10 to their starting offer.
- The job is simple and straightforward, no complications.
- Lean times gives Advantage the players in negotiations.
- The client is offering two contracts the players can pick between.

On an 11-15, the GM rolls up a mission with 2 complications.

On a miss, the GM rolls up a particularly dangerous mission, or there isn't any work to be had here and you must move on.

Then, move on to Negotiation.

Every Routine, you can hit up every client you have access to once to look for a job. Clients are the folks in Town who can offer you jobs, and are detailed on the next page, though they can change with circumstances.

For example, a company town, or a commune with no private property, are going compress the government and commercial clients into one entity. A trading post might only have other fliers. Maybe the place you're at has wealthy individuals, people taking up collection, or other unusual mechanisms. It's up to the players to figure out who might have a job, ask, and roll the dice to see what's on offer.

Pilots don't often get to choose what jobs people will offer, a fair summary of the perils of freelancing. The work might be morally dubious, not pay enough for the risk, or just be kind of awful. If you don't like the options, you can move on to see what other jobs are available from other clients, but eventually you need to take one to keep the lights on. Wait too long on any one job, and you'll likely face competition from other Circuses, not to mention the job itself might get more difficult as things get worse.

Missions are made up by the GM, assisted by the prompt generator on the next page if they need the help. It's best they do so after the roll gets made, so they have a lot of room to incorporate complications.

Random Mission Generator

If the GM has a mission in mind, just go with that, but rolling up a mission can be a good way to figure out where to go next if nobody is sure.

Payment Offers

The GM rolls to determine the pay for the job and offers it to the players. The town's Wealth stat is added to each d10 rolled individually, so a 3d10 job from a Wealth -2 town would pay 3d10-6 thalers.

Roll 1d10, and an additional 1d10 for each of the following that applies.
- Combat is expected as part of the job.
- The job requires special gear (bomber, helicopter, cargo plane, etc)
- The job requires multiple flights.
- The 'Desperate Employer' option was chosen from Find Work.

Job Sources

Generally speaking, there are five broad kinds of clients that have the means and reason to hire a Flying Circus. The GM should determine what group their client falls in when the team goes job hunting, and it affects their rolls on the Job Type chart on the opposite page.
- <u>Government:</u> Local public organizations, such as the burgermeister of a town or a village council. Their jobs are usually simple, boring, and safe. Roll 2 d20s and take the lowest on the Job Type chart.
- <u>Private Interests:</u> Trade companies, manufacturing corporations, investor capitalists, and eccentric rich weirdos. Roll 1d20 on the Job Type chart, but count the town's Wealth as one higher for the purposes of payment.
- <u>Military:</u> Working with town militias or warlords. Roll 2 d20s and take the highest on the Job Type chart.
- <u>Other Pilots:</u> Other Flying Circuses, lone trade planes, pirates, and other adventurers. Roll 1d20 on the Job Type chart.
- <u>Desperate People:</u> Small groups of private individuals, like the citizens of a town, the congregation of a church, or a labour union, pooling their resources to get a job done. Roll 1d20 for Job Type and count the town's Wealth as one lower for payment. These jobs almost always come with good reputation.
- <u>The Fae:</u> If you happen to get hired by the lords of the Wild, they won't pay you in money, but they *will* pay you.

Job Type - d20 Chart

1	Air Show	The pilots must put on some kind of elaborate display to raise spirits or as a show of force.
2	Salvage	The pilots are commissioned to retrieve something of value. This will probably require a ground element.
3	Pick-Up	Somebody is in trouble and needs to be brought home.
4	Labour	Mundane work, like stringing out telegraph lines, dusting crops, seeding clouds, test flights, or demolition.
5	Deliver	The company needs to move goods somewhere.
6	Tourism	A rich client wants to tag along. They might bring a plane or ride along, and they'll make stupid, outlandish demands.
7	Contact	The client wants the pilots to make contact with a community that might be isolated or reclusive.
8	Recon	The pilots need to gather information on a location, sketch out a map, or spy on somebody.
9	Infiltrate	Like Contact, but the locals need to be tricked or spied on.
10	Decoy	The pilots need to act as bait to pull hostiles away while something else gets done.
11	Air Support	The client wants the pilots to secure a location, and wants you to fly cover for the soldiers on the ground.
12	Anti-Flak	The pilots are tasked with destroying enemy anti-aircraft guns... in their aeroplanes. Very dangerous.
13	Patrol	The client wants the pilots to fly through a dangerous area regularly a few times to confront or scare off threats.
14	Escort	The pilots need to protect something of value on a journey.
15	Defense	Somebody is accosting the client. They want you to fly up to stop them and prevent damage to their stuff.
16	Superiority	The client wants the players to eliminate an group of fliers.
17	Bombing	There's something on the ground the client doesn't want to exist anymore.
18	Piracy	The client wants a cargo hauler forced down or boarded so the goods within can be looted.
19	Eliminate	Essentially, an airborne assassination mission.
20	Ambush	The client wants the players to shoot down something passing nearby, with no regard to salvage after.

Complications ~ d10 Chart

1	Landscape	The players must travel into an undocumented or notably dangerous location to undergo this mission.
2	Banditry	In addition to other threats, bandits and pirates hunt in the mission area and tend to be indiscriminate in targeting.
3	Wildlife	There are horrible monsters here and players will need to confront them.
4	Weather	The job requires flying in terrible conditions.
5	Night	For whatever reason, the job must be done at night.
6	Competition	There's another Circus who wants, or worse, already has the job.
7	Hostile Land	You'll be flying this mission on the turf of some bad customers, like the Goths, Clockwerks, or the Dead.
8	Time Limit	There's a ticking clock on this mission, and things have to get done as fast as possible. There's no time for delays, and you need to launch now.
9	Travel	You have to fly a very long way to get to the mission, which will strain fuel and pilot endurance.
10	Morality	This mission is particularly heinous from an ethical point of view. Is the money good enough?
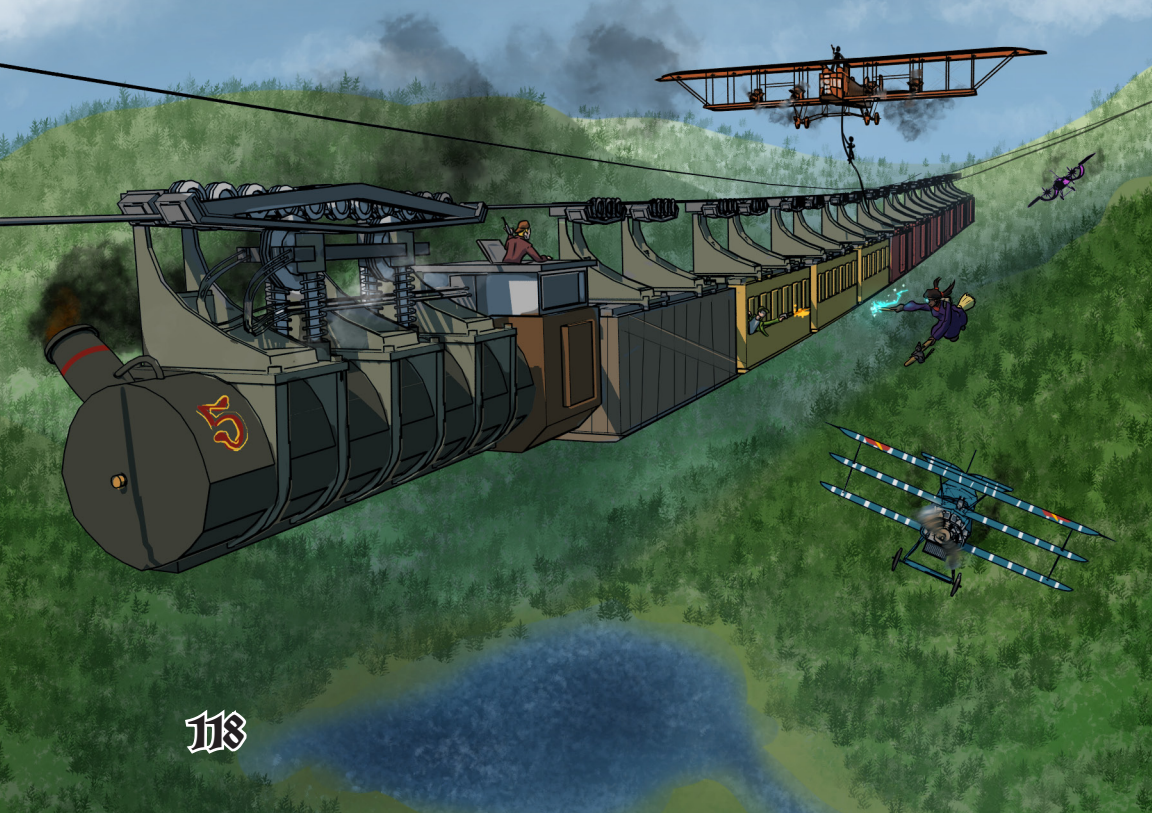
Mission Ideas

Here are some specific mission ideas you could use in a pinch.

- A wealthy older client wants you to hire their grandchild. Not to actually take them along, but to scare them so much they give up their dream of being part of a Flying Circus.
- A petty empire of a few towns has banned the production or importation of alcohol, so demand is sky-high. How many barrels of booze can you fit in a fighter, and can you get past their enforcers?
- A down on their luck travelling air show hires the pilots to revive their brand. The only town that will hire them is a dangerous place.
- An airship went down with a very important person who needs to be retrieved. You aren't alone, though, others want the VIP to ransom them back to the town. You have to beat them there.
- The Circus is hired by an airship company to find a mythical mountain pass that could shave hours off a long journey.
- The Goths have taken the young people. Get them back, at all costs.
  - Painful Twist: It's been long enough that some of the boys are already taking to the brainwashing, and they won't come quietly.
- A spat between the local fae and an industrial town has escalated to war. Back one side or the other, or broker peace.
- An old witch needs safe passage, but a dogged witch hunter of the Old World is still hot on her tail in his custom fighter plane.
- A brutal old general is travelling on his personal airship, and the town wants you to capture him so he can be brought to trial.
  - Painful Twist: Instead of the General, the plane is carrying their grandchild. The town starts talking about the sins of the father…
- You are hired to skywrite something, like a wedding proposal or a mean-spirited breakup message for a cheating lover. Or both!
- Something vital has gone down in the Briar Patch, a massive, twisted field of mined barrage balloons left from the Great War.
- A Sky-Line train is passing through with expensive cargo. Perform a great train robbery five hundred meters in the air!
- A dragon corners you… and offers you a job. Another Circus took their hatchling, and they give you anything to get it back.
- There's a deadly race through a canyon with a huge cash prize!
- Two aces have battled every night for months over a town, one a great witch and the other controlling a machine army. Stop the fighting.

Negotiation

The players go in and hear the client's offer. If they like the money they're being offered, they can just take the job right then and there, but often the job won't cover their expenses or be worth the risk. This is where negotiation is required.

NEGOTIATE A CONTRACT

When you push for a better deal, name a new price or a condition and <u>roll +Calm.</u> Take a -1 for each multiple of your Company Value in additional pay (rounding up), or for each request you make to adjust the job (additional penalties at GM discretion.)

On a 16+, the new price or conditions is acceptable to the client. On an 11-15, the client makes an offer. Choose one.
  - Meet the client halfway between your bid and their offer.
  - Client's offer, but they sweeten the pot with gear or expenses.
  - Your offer, but they want something valuable as collateral.

On a miss, it goes really badly. If the job is still on offer at all, it's at a drastically reduced wage. Take it or leave it.

One player handles the negotiation, face to face. Usually, there's no helping on this roll. Players don't have to negotiate, they can just take the job as offered. If they walk out on hearing the offer, they can pursue jobs and then come back. but if they negotiate a contract and then walk out, the job is gone. No taking it back.

Negotiation doesn't only have to be about getting more money. One could negotiate for additional security, more details, or some money up-front, for example. That said, a client will *never* pay more than half up front.

Piracy & Salvage

A desperate or unscrupulous group can turn to piracy and raiding to make ends meet, while a clever one might raid a dead city or pick clean a battlefield. You might capture a zeppelin, crack open an old warehouse of preserved planes, or redirect a shipment of goods.

This is always a three-step process of finding stuff, getting it home, and then selling it. The value of the salvage is rolled as a number of d10s + the Wealth of the place you are selling to, adding the Wealth to each d10 rather than overall, just like with job prices

You'll notice it's always a good idea to bring your goods (ill-gotten or otherwise) to a rich town to unload them. Conversely, buying massed goods from poorer towns will be cheaper.

Here's some guidelines for amounts of goods. For quantities of massed goods, imagine roughly what a medium sized zeppelin or cargo plane could carry. If you have more than that, add a few more dice to the amount.

- Large Quantity of Staple Goods..2d10þ
- Rare Technology or Blueprints..3d10þ
- Machine Tools & Generators 4d10þ
- Petrol, Castor & Mineral Oil, etc.......................................3d10þ
- Weapons & Munitions 3d10þ
- Whalebones & Oil, Dragonskin, etc 4d10þ

If the town already has a lot of what you're trying to sell them, take -1d10 for the shipment. If they have a sore need of the thing, take +1d10. You can Negotiate a Contract to haggle up the prices, just like with jobs.

Trade Company

All that stuff up there that you can sell, you can buy for the same dice roll worth of money. You can go to a place where goods are cheap or plentiful, buy a bunch, head somewhere rich, and unload it.

Sure, sounds less exciting than air mercenary work, but remember you'll may have to deal with bandits, monsters, unscrupulous traders, fae, and the various hazards of Himmilgard.

Reflection

Quiet Moments

As you wait for the mission to start, the night before, the morning hours leading up to it, while walking out to the plane, there is a tendency towards introspection. Once again, you have to go up into that wild blue yonder, face death, and come down to earth, one way or another.

You start thinking about how it might all catch up to you. How you might not make it home. Some pray, some talk, some laugh nervously and try to play it off, but they're all thinking about it: About what their life ought to look like if they make it, and what their legacy will be if they don't.

INTROSPECTION

While you wait for the mission to start, reflect on recent events. Consider the mistakes you made, the ways you were weak, and the things you are proud of. Promise yourself a change you'll make, if you survive.

You may share these thoughts, but you don't have to.

Then, if you aren't Stressed, select Advancements and Masteries.

Advancement

Every point of Stress you clear, by any means, gives you 1 XP. Outside of Move Exchanges, they are spent exclusively during Reflection to gain new moves. You can spend as much XP as you want, provided you aren't Stressed (that's 5 or more Stress, as a reminder). If you are, you'll just sit on those XP points until next round.

You don't have to spend your XP, you can always hang onto it.

Advancement	Cost
Take a new Personal Move from your playbook.	4 XP
Add +1 to your lowest stat.	8 XP
Add +1 to a Stat above 3. (Max +5)	8 XP
Add +1 to any other Stat.	4 XP

Special XP Options

If you've got all the Advancements you want right now, you can spend XP to change your character in other ways.

Intense Training   2XP

Describe how you studied or trained and mark 1 Mastery progress.

Rethink your Life   3XP

Describe an incident you could have prevented if you acted differently, and change your Attributes by taking -1 to one stat and +1 to another. This can't take you over the fixed Attribute limit of +5.

Rehab/Moderation   4XP

If you think you're ready, remove an Addiction or an Immunity to a Vice. The Vice is removed entirely from your Familiar Vices list: you'll need to reacquire it if you want to do it safely.

Determination   1XP

Describe how your character feels particularly strongly and why, and add +1 to a stat ongoing for this Routine. This can take you above the Attribute Limit. You can only do this once per Routine.

Masteries

While the regular progression of XP tracks characters becoming better and more complete people, the four Masteries track their skill as pilots.

- <u>Bushwack</u> specializes in sneaking up on foes and taking them down before they have a chance to be a danger to you. *Stats: Hard.*
- <u>Dogfighter</u> is focused on with turnfighting and attrition, using elaborate manoeuvres to wear down targets. *Stats: Hard.*
- <u>Slipstream</u> focuses on defensive fighting, dodging and weaving until your enemy slips up. *Stats: Keen and/or Daring.*
- <u>Sharpshooter</u> is focused on marksmanship, especially at long range. It works for those in the gunner seat as well. *Stats: Calm.*

Mastery Advances

Mark 1 Mastery Progress when you fly a mission, score a Victory, or get forced down. At 5, erase them and take a Mastery Move. Once you have 3 moves in a Mastery, you can start another Mastery.

Victories

Each Mastery has their own criteria for Victories: Use the combined standards of all your Masteries. A 'shoot down' is any instance where a plane hits the ground, suffers engine failure, or the pilot jumps. A 'probable' is when, last you saw of an enemy, they were so heavily damaged that they might not make it home. You can only get one Victory per target, and you can't share credit (except with the Slipstream mastery's "Luring a target" criteria), so work out disputes in-character.

Surrendering is rarely acknowledged in the air, as an aeroplane is a weapon, but the Dogfighter uniquely counts it as a Victory. A surrendered pilot is one who signals their surrender and then disengages or is captured.

Every 5 Victories, you gain 5XP as a lump sum.

Becoming an Ace

As pilots score victories, they build notoriety. At the following break points, you add +1 to the Company Value of your squadron (see page 35).
- When you become an Ace (5 Victories).
- When you become an Ace of Aces (25 Victories).
- When you shoot down a Legendary Ace (page 228).

Bushwack

Victories: Aircraft or balloons shot down.

Ambush Predator: (CORE) *When you attack an enemy who is unaware of your presence*, roll with Advantage. On an 11-15, you may choose to abort the attack and return to the clouds unseen.

Vanishing Act: *When you pull up after an attack,* roll +Keen. On a hit, your enemy loses track of you. On a 16+, activate Ambush Predator as you come back in.

Momentum: *When you are in a dive*, add +1 Damage per Hit and +1 AP to attacks.

Overdrive: *When you Open Fire with a rapid-fire weapon while travelling faster than your Max Speed*, count your range as one closer.

G-Tolerant: Count your G-Force as 1 lower for penalty to rolls.

⁂ This does not mean you can get a +1 at 0 G-Force!

Back To The Clouds: Reduce your Energy Loss by 1, to a minimum of 1.

Dogfighter Mastery

Victories: Aircraft shot down, pilots surrendered, or a probable kills.

Riding the Edge: (CORE) Your plane counts as having +5 Handling.

Stay Aggressive: *After you are shot at from behind*, you can spend Speed equal to your Turn Bleed to transition directly into a head-on attack.

Nerves of Steel: *When you hold your fire until the last moment in a head-on attack*, attack at Knife Range. You can reroll your attack and crit dice if your first results weren't good enough. If they don't go down or break off, collide.

Belly Scrape: *When you fly at Altitude 0*, gain an additional +5 Handling.

Switch Weave: You can Overwatch all the aircraft in a formation, not just one.

Grin & Bear It: *When you take fire*, it gives you +3 forward to take revenge.

⁂ Taking revenge in this context is attacking your attacker. It doesn't stack if you get shot at by the same person more than once.

Slipstream Mastery

Victories: Aircraft shot down, crashed, or lured to their destruction.

Tables have Turned: (CORE) In Dogfight! you can use Keen to turn the tables on your attacker (normally +Daring), and Daring to go on the offensive (normally +Hard). When you Draw a Bead, you can opt to take G-force equal to Speed factor rather than a Hard Move.

Dangerous Merge: *If you go head-on with a foe while trailing a pursuer,* roll +Daring. On a 16+, your foes collide. On an 11-16, they are both made vulnerable while recovering.

Falling Leaf: *When you tumble in the air,* descend up to 3 altitude bands without changing speeds or pointing your nose down.

Headache Spin: *When you throw yourself into a deliberate spin,* if you choose to make one last desperate move, take Advantage to that move.

Scissors Snip: *When you evade,* give Advantage Forward to whoever comes to deal with your opponent, if they do so promptly.

Wronski Feint: *When, as part of a Dogfight!, you dive to ground level to escape a plane on your six,* on a 16+, your pursuer ploughs into the ground.

Sharpshooter Mastery

Victories: Aircraft or balloons shot down, or probable kills.

Take Aim: (CORE) *When you Draw a Bead,* the Open Fire +Calm result can be taken for free, in addition to other results you qualify for.

Concentrated Shooting: *When you Draw a Bead,* take +1 results.

Spray & Pray: *When you attack a plane in a formation while holding the trigger down,* you hit as if at Extreme range against every other plane in the formation. Roll crit dice against each separately.

Tracer Dance: *When you fire to scare an opponent off,* spend 1 ammo. The target is forced to turn away, which can make them lose a target or put them in a vulnerable position.

Metal or Meat: *When you Draw a Bead to hit a Vital Part,* add +5 to the Crit roll.

Lead the Target: Ignore the deflection shot penalty.

Characters

Who Are You?

Flying Circus centres on Backgrounds, representing different origins that pilots might come from. Each pilot is a representative of a kind of community in the world of the game, and they come together to form a team that takes power from their different upbringings and worldviews.

Backgrounds synergize with the People list (page 28 and 268), together giving you an idea of where your character stands in the world. The identities of these backgrounds are not as concrete in the world as they are in the mechanics of the game, so typically one shouldn't identify characters in the narrative as Farmers or Soldiers. In any case, these are just their origins. They're pilots now, first and foremost.

Summaries

The versions of the Backgrounds presented in this book are truncated. The more narrative elements like character-building questions are contained on the downloadable sheets. If you don't have online access, you can technically run the game from this book, but it's much better to get the complete sheets.

The Farmers

The lynchpin of civilisation is the agricultural community, a valley packed with farmsteads and small hamlets who grow their own produce and run their own cottage industries. For all the pomp and wealth of the old empires, it was the wheat and mutton of the valleys which fuelled their factories and furnaces. Life in a farming valley is peaceful, idyllic, and intensely boring. You learned to fly from an early age to dust crops and watch over herds, and have left to find yourself part of a wider world.

Even though all the pilots are excellent fliers, the Farmers are particularly prodigious. Uniquely, they have many Personal Moves that benefit their flying in addition to the usual Mastery moves. The air belongs to them, even if they need to cede the advantage a bit elsewhere.

This is an excellent playbook for new players, because the Farmers are by far the most simple and straightforward Background, with little in the way of complicated mechanics or extra drama. Everyone can understand the hero's journey, a naive kid taking their first steps into a larger world.

Themes

The Farmer is the most straightforward of the Backgrounds. Their inspiration is obvious: They are a classical hero, leaving their small rural town to seek out glory and fortune. They have a lot of links to that hero's journey, including the option to discover a secret noble heritage!

Tying to *Flying Circus*' connection to the First World War, they are also the rural folks that made up the armies of Europe and America, not far removed from the stock of many real life pilots.

Finally, there are connections to a popular film franchise. They're pretty subtle. You might miss them.
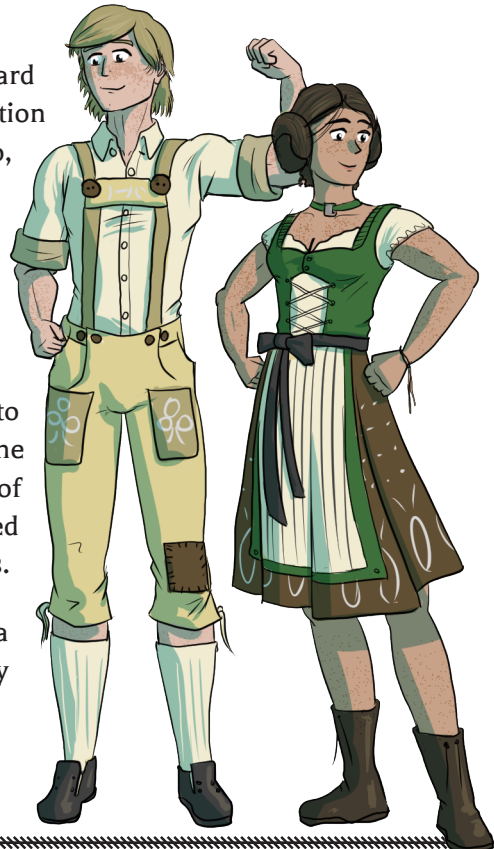
Central Moves

The Farmer's starting move is:

Naive: You cannot try any completely new and unfamiliar Vices unless a comrade with that Vice as Familiar guides you through it. Nobody can Help you on these rolls, and you must roll their Daring instead of yours for the Unfamiliar Vice roll.

> This combines with the Farmer starting with only a single Vice to give the Farmer difficulty in stemming the tide of Stress. In Freelancer Mode, they are simply always at Disadvantage instead, which NPCs can negate with Help if narratively appropriate.

Their Intimacy move is:

I Will Be With You, Always: *When you hold those you care for close,* they roll 4d10 and take the 2 highest when you Help them, ongoing as long as they Trust you.

If they're an NPC, anything you do for them or help them with lets you roll 4d10 as well.

If you choose to Break Trust with one of these people, take 5 Stress.

If you use this move in the air, when you Help, you only take a Hard Move if both extra die are 1s. A single 1 has no effect.

> This is one of the most powerful Intimacy Moves in the game, and it creates the incentive for the Farmer to stick close to the people they are affectionate with and to help them out as much as possible.
>
> It also uniquely restricts the Farmer, making it more difficult for them to break Trust. This can absolutely take the form of the Farmer putting their lovers on a pedestal, and it might get a little ugly, so talk that out.

Destiny Special Move

The Farmer has a unique Move, **Why Didn't You Tell Me?** If the narrative trigger comes up, the Farmer can choose to essentially remake themselves as the Scion instead. Keep your stats and moves, but you gain a new set of Scion starting items, the Core Move, three Personal Moves, and switch out your Stress triggers and Venting options.

Maybe change your family name. Throw a 'von' in there.

Personal Moves

A Farmer starts with three of the following Personal Moves.

Here Goes Nothing: Gain 1 Stress to use a Mastery Move you haven't taken yet from any of your unlocked Mastery Trees.

Let's Try Spinning: *When you beg your plane to hold together,* <u>roll any air combat move +Daring</u>. If any of your dice are a 1, your plane suffers a spin or mechanical failure.

One in a Million: Hold 1 each routine. When you Open Fire or drop a bomb, spend the hold to get a perfect hit on the individual, component, or exact location you desire.

> In specific language, this allows you to automatically score a Critical Hit, *and* specify which crew or component gets hit. It applies to only one attack, even if you make an attack rolling multiple dice. You can still roll those additional dice, though.
>
> Remember, this allows the shot to hit where you want, but it doesn't cause the shot to do any more damage than normal.
>
> With a bomb, the effects can be much more up-front. You can often choose to ignore the usual bombing rules: putting 25 kilograms of explosives exactly onto a munitions dump or through the wing of another plane will do the job without dice needing to be rolled.

Trust Your Instincts: You get a new Mastery move every 3 marks.

This Is Where The Fun Begins: *After a flight,* erase 1 Stress. If you didn't fight, remove another.

You Came in That Thing?: *After you've flown a plane three times,* you can roll on the Used chart and take the penalty. In exchange, select another of the penalties and apply its inverse. Restoring the plane to New doesn't remove the advantageous modifications.

You can do this twice on the same aeroplane. The bonuses only work for you and people you Trust.

This represents your character gradually stripping down every plane they own to turn it in a hot rod, or adding stuff until it becomes a monster. The advantages are the inverse of the Used chart penalties, so increasing Strain by 20% instead of decreasing it, for example.

As your plane becomes a mass of personalized touches, nobody else understands how it works unless you keep them constantly appraised.

It's Working!: *When you work on a plane,* roll +Daring.

On a 16+, choose 2. On an 11-15, choose 1.

- Permanently reduce Upkeep by 1.
- Repair all damaged components for free.
- Cut the cost of an upgrade in half.

On a miss, you break something with your plane.

Working on your plane is an engaged act. It takes hours and ought to occupy a significant amount of the pilot's time in order to get the benefits. The best way to represent the plane breaking is probably to roll on the Used Plane chart on page 109.

I Can Fix It!: *When you engage in percussive maintenance,* roll Patch Fix with +Daring. Add the following possible results.

- Double your Speed gain from the next Boost.
- Ignore the next Fuel Check move pushed.

Reset the RPM gauge to 0.

On a miss, the engine stops and won't restart.

The Soldiers

When the winds rose and the Great War came to its abrupt end, the armies of the old empires had their strings cut. Soldiers fighting far from home were forced to work together to survive. A generation later, a feudal order emerged in which old allegiances are but a memory, but traditions and heraldry are still guarded with honour. You learned to fly a sentry-plane, protecting your holdfast, keeping the local trade winds safe, and upholding the honour of your banner.

The Soldiers are, hands down, the most lethal Background in the game. By leaning into their moves and their excellent Hard stat, they are not just dangerous in the air, but adept at fighting on the ground, with moves that serve to soften the blow of ground exploration and combat moves.

The trick is that Soldiers have actual, mechanical difficulty engaging outside the violence. This makes the Soldier ideal for players enthusiastic about the air combat but unsure about the heavier roleplaying: the class will naturally ease them into it.

Themes

Flying Circus models the Old World on the Wilhelmine Period, a time of nationalistic and militaristic fervour where the symbols and trappings of the military were highly prized. The Soldiers act foremost as a sort of lingering symbol of that age.

The Soldiers are an exaggerated reflection of the reasons why people join (or desire to join) the military. To young people without purpose of direction, military structures have an appeal as a means to externalize the will to self-improvement, an attractive quality for people unsure of how to take the next step in their life.
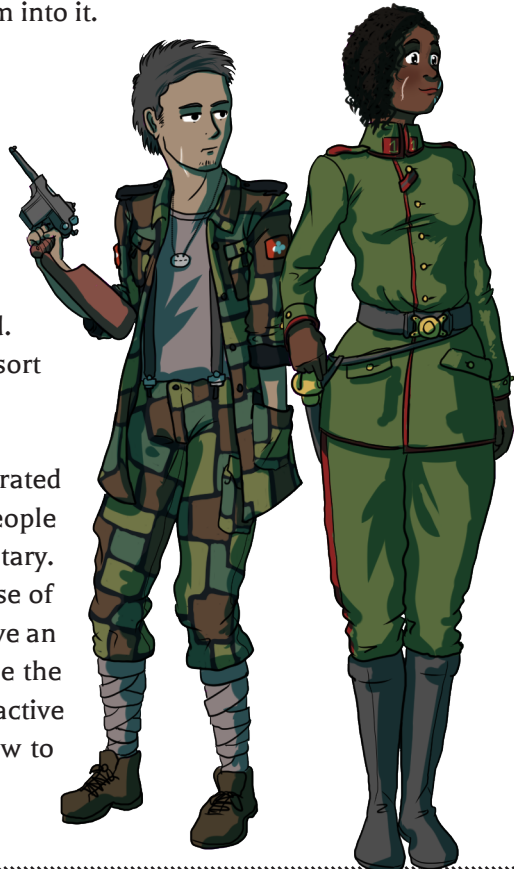
The reality is that while the military has the potential to mold you into a more driven person, it will do so towards the end of making you a killer, or at least part of a machinery of killing. The devaluing of human life and the dehumanization of the nebulous enemy are required to turn a young person into a soldier, who will kill and die for the interests of their leaders.

The Soldiers are people thus moulded. This could have been through harsh discipline, but it is equally likely to have been a drive to live up to the distant, heroic figures their elders have made of their lost comrades.

Remember, though, the Soldier is background, not a present. They have left that life behind them. What will they make of themselves now? Will they wage a private war against the world, or will they find peace?

Central Moves

The Soldier's core move is:

Stiff Upper Lip: Unless you are *Stressed*, attempts to Get Real with you automatically fail. You cannot initiate Get Real at all. The second time you Burn Out, cross out this move.

> This move puts the Soldier in a somewhat aloof position relative to their comrades, unable to make an emotional connection until they're hurting badly, and reliant on others to come to them. It'll break down eventually, but until then the Soldier will need to keep their feelings hidden and let their actions speak for them.

Their Intimacy move is:

In Shining Armour: *When you lie with your lover,* hold 1. When they are in danger, spend that hold to arrive at their side.

If you use this move in the air, when you spend the hold, you next Move is an automatic full hit, no dice required.

> Most Soldier moves cast the character as detached, paranoid, and often cruel. But *Flying Circus* being what it is, love conquers all. This is a Soldier's most idealistic move, allowing them to really, truly believe in themselves as a protector instead of just a killer.
>
> It really doesn't matter how implausible the arrival of the Soldier is: handwave it away. They always show up in the nick of time.

Personal Moves

A Soldier starts with three of the following Personal Moves.

Strategist: *When you lay out a plan of action,* take +1 forward to Engage and +1 ongoing to ground combat rolls this routine, until a comrade is wounded or events go drastically off script.

Marching Boots: Any group you're in moves +1 Trek when you Explore the Wild, and you automatically score at least a Partial Hit on Seize the Initiative.

> This move syncs well with Advanced Recon, to ensure the soldier is never caught flat-footed on the ground.

Steelheart: Even if you are Burnt Out, you can still fly. You are unaffected by the Stressed penalty as long as you are fighting.

Trigger Discipline: *When you draw a gun on somebody*, take +3 forward to Press the Issue. If you miss, pull the trigger.

Commanding Presence: *When you bark an order to a friend or foe in combat*, it gives +1 forward to PCs that follow. Against NPCs, Press the Issue with Hard. On a hit, they do it. On a partial, they do it, but they hesitate first.

> Obviously, you still need some degree of leverage to Press the Issue. Having somebody at gunpoint counts, but yelling an order at the guy who defeated you and is standing over you with a sword doesn't.

Advanced Recon: The group gets +1 to the Engage Roll and Seize the Initiative (stacks with multiple holders of this Move).

> This move's utility scales with the number of people who have it, so the Soldier ought to teach it everyone as soon as they can, as the group grows closer they all fight better. This pushes the Soldier to try to build and maintain Trust, even though it is mechanically difficult for them.

Style Study: *When you spar with a comrade,* both of you roll +Hard. If you both hit, hold 2. If one of you hit and one missed, the winner holds 1 and the loser holds 3. If you both miss, somebody gets hurt.

Spend these holds to use one of your opponent's Personal or Mastery Moves.

> This move can cast the Soldier as either an instructor or a student, depending on who they fight, and it's a great chance to get some banter in. No matter the move, all its effects cease applying after 1 routine. Who gets hurt on a double-miss is up to the players involved, as is the way you get hurt. Hurt feelings and broken Trust are better than Injury.

Last Mistake: *When you're suspicious of somebody and you keep an eye on them,* get 1 Stress and hold 1. If they try to hurt you or your friends, spend that hold to kill them on the spot.

> To be clear, you don't have to roll anything. You spend the hold, the person is dead, and you did it. Cut to your bloodied blade or smoking gun, their body hitting the floor or their plane spiralling to earth.
>
> This move does not isolate you from the consequences of the sudden violence you inflict. If a bounty hunter goes and draws on you in the bar, you can spend this hold to be faster on the draw, but you'll probably have to address frying him with your heat ray with the bartender.
>
> The hold can generally only be spent if you could inflict violence. If you don't like the lady at the bar, then have to fight her in the skies later, you'll need to at least get on her tail before you spend your hold.
>
> It also doesn't work if you just decide to off the guy on your own initiative, or pick a fight with they until they retaliate. They must be the aggressor.

The Fishers

Clinging to the cliffs that overlook the great Dark Sea, windbeaten coastal settlements make their living by fishing the depths from hot air balloon. Every time the balloons go out, families sit at the windowsill, finding comfort in the knowledge that, even if their loved ones are lost to the waves, the unknowable Gods below will save their souls. You learned to fly out above this awful sea, where losing a thermal or being cast adrift could mean certain death.

The Fishers are one of the more explicitly supernatural Backgrounds, whose powers are all the result of their pacts with the terrible creatures under the sea. Their moves are incredibly powerful, but they are creepy outsiders that might not fit in well, at least not at first.

The Fisher is one of those Backgrounds closely connected to one of the game's Peoples, in this case the *Fischervolk* (Page 272).

Themes

Mechanically, the primary themes of the Fishers are centred around trust. The Fishers are quick to put their trust in their comrades, in their lovers, in fate, and most of all, in their Gods. They are fatalistic both in the classical and the morbid sense, content to go with the flow even unto death. After all, they have faith: they know it'll be alright.

On a more meta level, the Fishers are *the queer reclamation of the monstrous.* It is a common trope to code a character or group as untrustworthy or villainous by associating them with queerness or sexual deviancy, often intertwined with racist, ableist, or classist elements. One way some queer people fight back is to defiantly, proudly identify with the monsters.
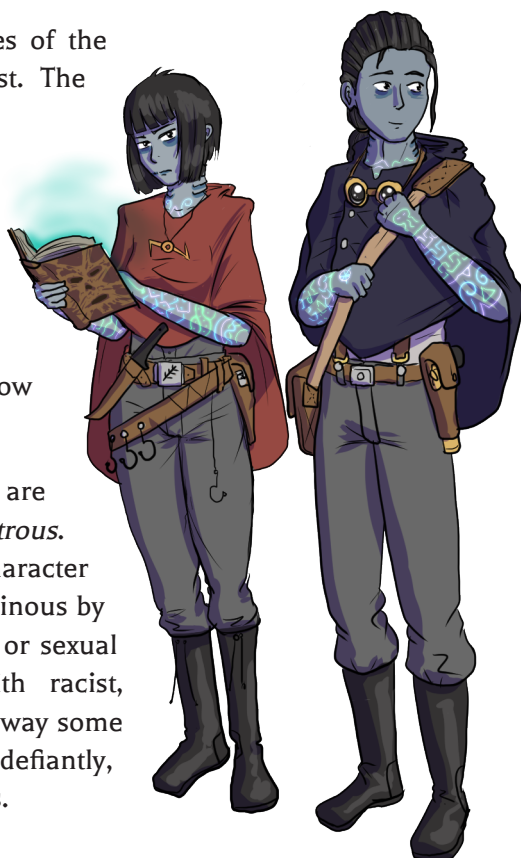
In the works of H.P. Lovecraft, the horror often rests on metaphorical (or sometimes literal) miscegenation, mutation, sexual deviancy, and foreign religion, *The Shadow over Innsmouth* being the archetypical example which the Fishers subvert. Yes, they are gilled, grey-skinned degenerates that have debased their blood by mixing with unspeakable monsters from under the waves that they worship in a sexually charged cult. What of it?

This Background plays with cults, blood, and sacrifice, and there are hooks to delve into themes of deviant sexuality: Many moves have potential interpretations in kink. Those aspects may make you uncomfortable, and that's okay, you can leave them out of your game. The point is that none of it makes them villainous. They're just different. Queer, if you will.

Central Moves

The Fisher's core move is:

Creepy: *When inlanders and apostates witnesses your faith's practices or are confronted by your alienness*, they must choose to Break Trust or take 1 Stress. NPC characters will be disturbed, offended, or overly curious. If a PC learns any Fisher moves, they negate this effect, but gain Creepy.

> This move incentivizes secrecy and evangelicalism in equal measure. Gaining Creepy doesn't have to represent induction, just an understanding. Inlanders are any non-fischervolk, while apostates are fischervolk who don't practice the faith.

Your Intimacy move is:

Suggestion: *When you spend your time close with another,* if you Trust one another, one person can lead the others in a trance, highlighting one of their stats. That character takes +2 to that stat, and -1 to another of their choice, until the leader ends it with a word or signal.

When you use this move in the air, choose 1: ignore the penalty, take a +3 instead of a +2, highlight two stats.

> This move is intended to represent a sort of post-hypnotic suggestion and behavioural modification, leaning into the cult imagery of brainwashing in sinister fictional religions and then extrapolating that into consensual erotic hypnosis. It's also a good chance to play your character differently.

> This move can't stack: if one stat is highlighted, it overrides the last.

Personal Moves

A Fisher starts with three of the following Personal Moves.

Whispered Answers: *When you sleep*, <u>roll 2d10+Calm</u>. On a 16+, the GM answers 2. On a 11-15, the GM answers 1. Take +3 forward when you act on the answers.

- Where am I supposed to go next?
- What should I be afraid of?
- What is a secret I should not know?
- How can I serve my dark masters?

On a miss, the player asks one and should expect the worst answer.

> This move fires with regularity, so it shows the passive connection the Fisher has to the supernatural, the idea being that the Fishers are given advice and direction in their dreams. It shouldn't be rolled *every night,* but once a routine should suffice.

Deep Ones: *When you call out to your patrons*, they give +1 forward on your next roll.

> A miss on this roll is a Stress trigger, and also a good source for supernatural Hard Moves.

Soul-Bound: *When you paint a rune in blood on an aircraft*, it gains your Calm in Handling. You take Stress when the plane runs out of Toughness, and Injury if the engine dies..

Ideomotor Response: Any plane you own effectively has a programmable autopilot. It does not have to be switched on and off; it "knows" when you are behind the controls.

> This move eliminates the need to roll Empty Seat. The GM should be more generous with the autopilot here than with the mechanical sort; it can probably accept spoken instructions, for example.

Written in Ink: *When you get a tattoo to mark an major milestone*, spend 3 XP, describe the tattoo and where it's inked, and link it to a Fisher move. Whenever you use that Move, gain 1 XP (max 1 time per Routine per Move).

> This Tattoo serves to encourage the Fisher to pick signature moves that are important to them and always come back to them, a subtle encouragement to keep the supernatural close at hand.

Blessing: *When you dab fresh blood on an item* roll +Calm. On a 16+, take both. On an 11-15, choose 1. Effects last 1 Routine.

- Take +1 Ongoing with this item. (+5 Handling for a plane)
- The item cannot break. (3 Coverage 2 Armour on the Plane.)

On a miss, make a bigger sacrifice or the machine is damaged.

What "A bigger sacrifice" means is up to the GM. The lazy answer is a human sacrifice. More compelling is to give up something material the player cherishes. The best answer is something *immaterial*, like your ability to laugh or your Trust in somebody.

Lashed to the Mast: *When you tie yourself into your aircraft*, hold 2. Spend that hold to ignore incoming Injury or reroll any move. Take Disadvantage to Bail Out or Go Down.

Gifts from the Abyss: Your connection to the Deep Ones is physically changing you. Name the physically obvious mutation you have received and describe how it frightens or disgusts the unfaithful. It can be hidden, but not perfectly, and just seeing it will trigger Creepy. All XP advances now cost 1 less XP (minimum 1).

The Survivors

At the End, when there was nothing left to lose, terrible weapons were unleashed against the industrial heart of the Old World. Millions died when the black smoke crept into shelters or chewed through seals and masks. The lucky ones stayed dead. A rare few individuals survived, clinging to life amongst the ghosts of the Old, and the demons that came after. You learned to fly to escape.

The Survivors are good at one thing: Survival. Living in bunkers or at the tops of towers, eating preserved food and scavenging for air filters, the Survivors have had every person taken from them, their sense of comfort and safety ground out year after year. They developed strategies to cope, but now that they've escaped, these habits hurt more than they help.

The Survivor has straightforward personal moves built around making it out of impossible situations alive and with as much of their stuff as they can. They are physically resilient to a nearly (or perhaps actually) supernatural degree, and so are their planes. Hopefully, that will keep them alive long enough to start piecing together a life.

Themes

To be direct: The Survivor is a metaphor for what it feels like to be a transgender person escaping an unwelcoming or abusive situation. It's just that their toxic environment is a literal one.

As is tragically common with these situations, escape is gradual. One learns strategies to survive that, while helpful at the time, make life difficult in the aftermath. The Survivor's core mechanics show a process of recovery from these maladaptive behaviours.

Over the course of a campaign, a Survivor will slowly acclimatize to relative safety and develop a new sense of identity. As their core moves are more complicated and involved (both mechanically and emotionally), their personal moves by comparison are relatively simple.

Central Moves

The Survivor's core move is:

Masked: *While you are wearing your mask*, you are at Disadvantage to Get Real or Press the Issue. When you reveal a detail about the person under the mask, take 1 Stress. At 6 details, remove your mask in front of a comrade, and trade this move for Comfort Object.

> The Survivor cannot simply remove their mask whenever they want, having grown reliant on it over the years. This mask will act as both Gas Protection and a Filter Mask (page 179), but doesn't give penalties or ever wear out: they're used to it by now.
>
> The hints are better shown than said: they could be things like a glimpse of a bare hand, their voice heard clearly, or the sight of their hair before the mask is put back on.

Comfort Object: *When you are not wearing your mask*, hold 1 when you enter a social situation, when you Press the Issue, and when you Get Real. If you put your mask back on, lose all your holds. At the end of the routine, holds are converted 1-1 to Progress and Stress.

At 8 Progress, cross out your starting moves and use the enhanced versions of all your Personal moves.

> Putting on your mask to go fly doesn't count. It's turning to your mask as a comfort object, a shield against the world, that erases your holds.

Your Intimacy Moves vary depending on your Starting Moves.

Together: *When try to be intimate with others...*

- If you only have Masked, it doesn't happen.
- If you have Comfort Object, gain 1 Comfort Object hold.
- If you've crossed both out, the participants all tell a secret about themselves and hold 1. These holds can be spent to reroll a move.

If you use the final move in the air, everyone gains 2 holds.

> With the first version of the move, 'it doesn't happen' means your character can't enter these intimate situations. If their partners are PCs, their Intimacy Moves don't happen either. The second version of the move doesn't much benefit any of you, but it will at least activate the Intimacy Moves of your partners.

Personal Moves

A Survivor starts with three of the following Personal Moves.

Cornered Animal: *When you look for an exit,* <u>roll +Keen.</u> On a 16+, hold 1 for the scene: spend it to bail. 11-15, take +2 Keen forward. Miss, no way out, but take +2 Hard forward.

> When that hold gets spent, the Survivor is just gone, escaping from the danger instantly. There's nothing that can stop them, but they can't influence things any further in that scene.

Tough it Out: You never pass out from Injury.

Scavenger: *When you search a ruin or downed plane*, name what you hope to find and <u>roll +Keen</u>. On a 16+, it's there. On an 11-15, you find something that might work for the same purpose, with some effort.

> The thing you look for has to have at least some practical utility (though money counts) and can't be a specific instance of something. It also has to, you know, conceivably be located inside the place you are searching, being able to fit and making some sense to be there.

Holding Together: Hold one each routine. Spend to negate incoming damage that would destroy a component or injure you.

> This negates all the damage from a single instance of damage occurring. So it will stop all the damage from one roll of incoming fire, for example.

Paranoid Sense: *When you guess a bad surprise is coming,* take 1 Stress. if you're right, take Advantage forward to counter it.

Gone Feral: *When you brawl vicious,* everyone in the fight (you included) takes 1 Injury.

Cool Off: *When you find a place to hide and cool off,* take -2 Keen and +2 to all other stats. This lasts until you miss a roll.

> Many abused people are familiar with the feeling that a single mistake means it's all hopeless now. As the Survivor profiles all have high Keen, this is a pretty good trade, with the main downside for many Survivors simply being that you can't get the bonus back during combat.

Make Do: You personally cost 0 Upkeep.

The Skyborn   ...created with Aishwarya "Ashley" Moni

They say that centuries ago, the Skyborn came from across the sea in massive balloons and just kept sailing for the love of it. This romantic idea downplays the distrust they are treated with, which has kept them from settling in any one place. Though the rise of the steam engine devastated their traditional trade, the time has come to reclaim the skies. You grew up climbing rigging, swinging between masts, laughing in the face of danger and learning to fly to defend your home from those below.

The Skyborn are a background about living on the edge, in multiple senses of the term. A lifetime climbing rigging and swinging between airships have given them a deftness and boldness beyond anyone else, which they need to survive a world frequently hostile to them.

Mechanically, the Skyborn works best by always pushing the limit. Their core move is pretty heavy, so the rest is fun pulp that lets them make light of otherwise lethal situations. Check page 173 for more information on the Skyborn as a culture.

Themes

The Skyborn serve dual purpose as an indirect analog to nomadic people in Germany at the turn of the century, most notably the Romani, and to the experiences of immigrants up to and including the modern day. It is about being a cultural outsider trying to fit in.

This is a world without roads, so any nomadic people will necessarily have to fly. The Skyborn's daredevil aspect is rooted here: their balloons are like Age of Sail ships, with a spiderweb of rigging, a swaying deck, and everpresent danger from falls, hence the cavalier attitude towards personal risk.

In line with *Flying Circus*' anachronistic and fantasy elements, the Skyborn are a blend of the Romani's historical position in many European societies and cultural details from modern India. For instance, their names are Sanskrit-derived, their strict ship's hierarchy implies a caste system, and their sheet implies a third gender along the lines of the hijira.

As a note, the Germanic airship names are based in the idea that some Skyborn crews don't rename used airships, hoping to seem more trustworthy to the locals or avoid standing out in prewar bureaucracy.

Central Moves

The Skyborn's core move is:

Nomad: *While in groundpounder towns*, you take I Stress when you...

- Introduce yourself to others.
- Press the Issue +Calm.
- Spend more than I Routine in a town.
- Pay I or more thaler for something.

If you are Stressed during Introspection, you can choose to cross out a Skyborn move you have not taken yet to mark one of these triggers. When you do, describe how you change (name, presentation, gender expression, actions) to blend in. The trigger now takes effect *when in Skyborn communities* instead.

You can cross out 3 moves max, and crossed out moves can only be learned in a Move Exchange with other Skyborn. If you learn one of those moves, remove a trigger entirely.

Skyborn characters are a visible minority that were raised in a culture foreign to the people on the ground. This move creates a messy arc where the Skyborn character chooses to make compromises in order to fit in as best they can, and in the process becoming noticeably more distant to their home culture. They later might have a chance to reclaim their heritage, so erasing triggers outright represents characters learning to code switch between different communities.

To be absolutely clear: this moves is a way of representing the discomfort and lack of safety that comes from interacting with a society as visible minority. The move is structured the way it is so that the players at the table never, *ever* need to actually play out any act of discrimination.

Your Intimacy Move is:

Aloft: *When you get intimate with somebody on the ground,* they can teach you a move as per a Move Exchange.

If you use this move in the air, you can instead teach them a move in the same way, and it costs only 2 XP.

For this move, and all other Move Exchanges, you can't teach somebody a move if you struck it from your playbook, unless you've subsequently relearned it. The XP costs still apply: this is basically a way of getting a Move Exchange without having to roll to Get Real.

Background Moves

Like other backgrounds, start with three of the following.

Swashbuckle: *When you use a melee weapon nonlethally,* attack +Daring. On a hit, disarm them, trip them up, or make a fool of them. On a critical hit, all of the above.

The definition of nonlethal here is pretty broad, but this basically allows the Skyborn to turn what is normally a horrifying life and death struggle in close quarters into a fun G-rated movie swordfight.

Quips optional, but engcouraged.

Leap of Faith: Each Routine, hold 1. *When you fall or jump into open air*, spend that hold to have something, anything, catch you.

The GM decides what exactly catches you, but even if that thing is dangerous, the landing itself is always safe and harmless.

What's Up Danger: *When you do something flashier than you need to,* take -3 forward. If you get a hit, choose one: Onlookers are stunned, impressed, or dismayed (your choice), or everyone is looking at you instead of something else.

We Have History: *When you arrive in a town,* either establish two facts about it, one of which is bad news for travellers, or three facts, one of which is bad for you specifically.

This allows the player a degree of narrative control over new places, in exchange for always having to come up with complications. The implication of bad news for the player in particular is that they've visited before and left on bad terms, but other interpretations are legit.
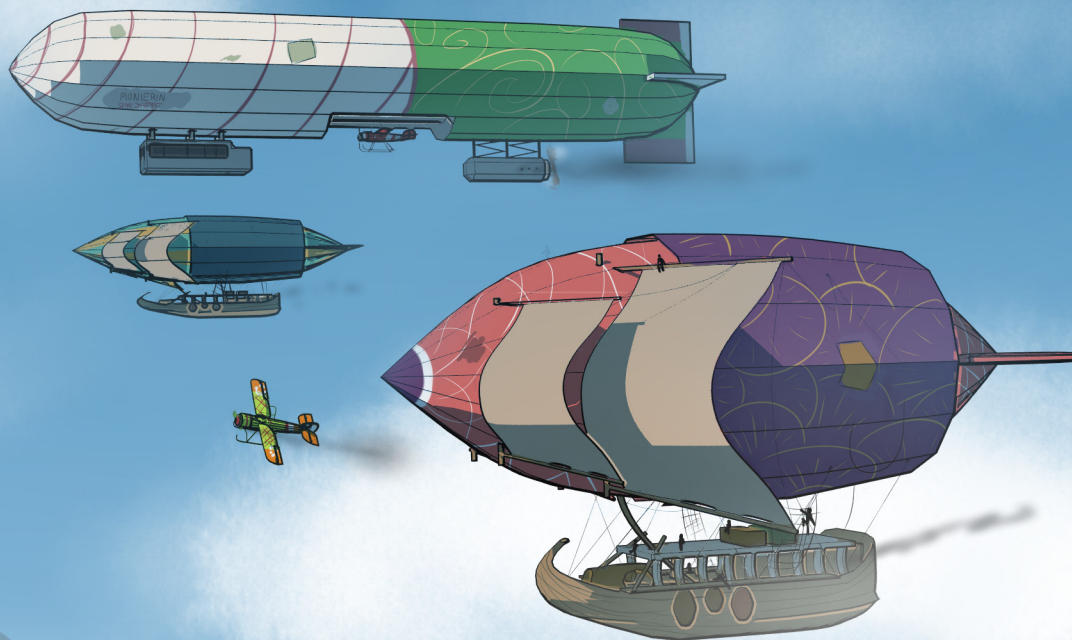
Free as a Bird: You have training to use a wingsuit. A wingsuit is a glider with 1 Energy Loss, 1 Turn Bleed, 10 Authority, 120 Handling, and 0 Stability. You are only hit on a critical, but all hits strike you, the only vital component.

> If you try to use a wingsuit without this move, you fall from the sky. You can land in the wingsuit without a parachute or anything, unlike real life, because these wingsuits are kinda magical.

Up the Rigging: *When you are barefoot,* you automatically score a full hit to Wingwalk. Roll anyway: if you score a 16+, take Advantage forward.

Overstayed your Welcome: *When you make a sudden escape,* roll +Daring. On a 16+, you're out of there and you take everything and everyone valuable with you. On an 11-15, leave something valuable behind.

The Believers

The foothills were always the last frontiers, perilously close to the high mountains or the wastelands far below. Those who didn't fit in with the Old World retreated here, safe in remoteness to preach radical ideas and live how they wished. Life on the edge was harsh, but these marginal communities thrived outside the grip of imperial control. You learned to fly your settlement's single battered plane, to trade for essential supplies and drive off beasts wandering too close to home.

The Believers are self-serious and determined fanatics who devote themselves entirely to some cause or another. Life and death are of little concern: their movement or faith must always come first.

Believers are self-motivated characters who are always working with a purpose. If you have a strong drive at the core of your character concept, they might work well as a Believer.

Themes

The Believer is a about a mindset that thrives on radicalism, not about radicalism itself or the validity of any particular set of beliefs. It is about the way that the sense of purpose found in radicalism of any kind can create a sort of dependence, where the nature and utility of the beliefs matter less than expressing them loudly, insistently, and often performatively.

The Believer could either be religious, representing a cult or a fundamentalist strain of one of the setting's religions, or a political radical devoted to an extreme or fringe ideology. Be mindful of other players in the construction of this ideology: a Believer can still be unsettling in their fervour even if their beliefs are fairly indisputably righteous.

The specific imagery of the Believer are drawn from a mix of fundamentalist Protestantism (Germany being the homeland of the Reformation) and revolutionary communists of the early 20th century, who often stockpiled weapons and established training camps for the coming uprising, but it can be repurposed for any radical belief.

Of note is that a potential piece of starting baggage is an armband signifying a political cause. Armbands like these used to be common in many nations, worn by a variety of political parties across the political spectrum. Eventually, the use of armbands by the Nazi Party eclipsed all other uses, and they fell out of favour in Europe and North America.

Central Moves

The Believer's core move is:

Idealist: Create two Convictions like those below to form an ideology.

- "Everyone should share my faith."
- "Things should be fair, no matter what."
- "The law is the most important thing."
- "Abolish all hierarchy."
- "Nobility is the source of all order."
- "Be prepared for when it gets worse."
- "Might makes right."
- "Don't tolerate anything not human."
- "Selfishness is good."
- "Magic is evil."

Whenever you suffer hardship or Break Trust for a Conviction, mark 1 Sacrifice. Each routine, set a target number of Sacrifices: it can be any number, but take Stress for the difference if it is lower than last time. When you meet your target of Sacrifices, mark that much XP. Until you do, you cannot use Vices. Start with a target of 2.

The Believer is kind of a joyless jerk. They can't relax until they've met their arbitrary quota of suffering, and trying to ease up on themselves can be hard for them. What counts as a Sacrifice is up to the player and GM, but risking or sacrificing money, Injury, or Stress counts. Needless to say, don't actually live your life like this, it's no fun.

Instead of Venting, when Believers hit 10 Stress, they must change one or both of Convictions. They then count has having achieved their Sacrifices for the Routine, and get double Stress loss from Vices.

Your Intimacy move is:

Make your Choice: *When you let somebody in,* choose if you value them or your ideals more. If you value them, allow them to each pick a new Conviction to replace one of yours. If you value your ideals, Break Trust with them.

You must make the same choice for all partners.

If you use this move in the air, if you trust them, your partners gain Idealist, with the belief they gave you as their Conviction.

> The Believer's oddest tendency is that they are evangelical. However, because the actual beliefs are less important than their self-identity as a radical, people close to them can sway them.
>
> If they take Idealist, your partners starts with their Sacrifice target set to 0, because they probably aren't self-hating fanatics like you are. They can choose to turn down the move entirely if they wish.

Background Moves

Like other backgrounds, they also start with three of the following.

Evangelical: *When confronted about your actions by a comrade, tell them why it had to be that way.* If they agree, exchange Trust. If they don't, take +1 forward against them.

Lie Detector: *When you call out a lie,* the GM tells the truth. If it <u>was</u> true, take 1 Stress.

> If you call out your comrades for lying, nothing happens. They know you too well to give in to your mind games.

Conversion: During a Move Exchange, you can additionally offer the other player to Idealist with a Conviction of your choice at no XP cost. If they refuse, the exchange is cancelled.

> If the character takes Idealist, they start with a Sacrifice target of 1, temporarily convinced of the wisdom of Believer's cause and fired up to do something about it, but not already so committed that it'll be difficult to moderate themselves.

Undying Faith: *When you fly without a parachute,* +1 ongoing to your worst stat.

Fanatic: *When you miss a move and then try the exact same thing again,* take +1 forward.

Songbird: *When you sing a hymn or marching song,* describe what your song is about. Get +1 ongoing until you miss and the song falters, giving Disadvantage forward.

Everyone with this Move can sing together, and every singer increases the bonus by +1.

> The characters don't actually need to be able to hear each other to sing together, the important part is the feeling that they are all in sync.
>
> This move is inspired by a minor character in *Flyboys*, who sings 'Onward Christian Soldiers' during dogfights. This contrast of 19th century mindset and 20th century technology was the initial inspiration for the Believer, though 'L'Internationale' would also work.

Revolutionary: *When you stand before a crowd and speak against authority,* roll +Keen. On an 11-15, pick 1. On a 16+, pick 2. On a 20+, take all 3.

- Your revolution sweeps the current order from power completely.
- The revolution's goals and methods are guided by your ideals.
- The revolution is restrained: innocent casualties are minimal.

The Scions

As empires came to prominence, the old nobility waned. Their gleaming mountain castles, built atop mines and vast caverns, fell into disrepair, their children marrying industrialists and petrol barons to stay afloat. Eventually, the government appropriated the buried keeps as hidden factories for the war effort. When the end came, these shelters were occupied only by minor nobles, their staff, and a wealth of machines. You learned to fly the underground tunnels in a brand-new aircraft.

The Scions are the children of the powerful, inheriting by birthright (or otherwise) power beyond the grasp of most. How they use this power is up to them, but having power almost invariably drives a lust for more.

Scions are an intoxicating fantasy, using their name and their money as a bludgeon to get their way. It's fiction, that's fine! If you want to play a character that can cut a check to make a problem go away, here you are.

Themes

The Scion is about privilege and power, and what obligations come with it. It's also about how meeting those obligations are not enough: the possession of unjust power over others is fundamentally an abuse.

The Scion is effectively capable of bankrolling the party in hard times, but they do so essentially through theft. It is purposefully much easier and more profitable to exploit instead of uplift.

You can play the Scion straight as sneering nobility who bribe, conquer, and steal, or you can set out to do your best for your people and provide for them, but in either case, your Baggage exposes the inherent flaw of nobility: People's lives end up depending on the family drama of a bunch of rich jerks.
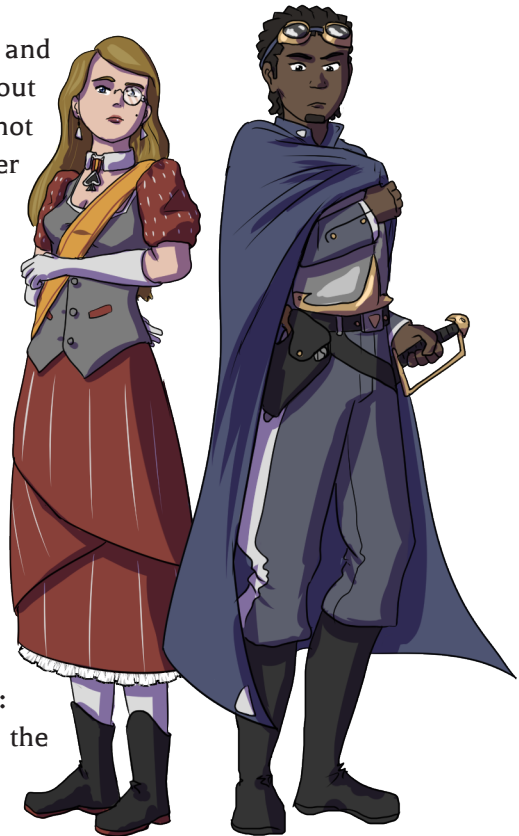
The Estate

As the Scion, you have an Estate, a town and its associated people and industry you are nominally the ruler of. It is a Town in every sense and starts at Wealth I. Every routine, roll 2d10+Wealth. On a 16+ it gains +2 Wealth, on a miss it loses I Wealth. (Max. 5)

At any time, you can tap the resources of the Estate, reducing its Wealth by I to gain 10þ.

When you visit your Estate, you can give up 15þ, equivalent goods, or do a pro bono job to increase its Wealth by I, max. once per Routine. If the Estate hits -3 Wealth, they revolt.

When you give other classes your Moves, they use your Estate's Wealth stat.

Central Moves

The Scion's core move is:

The Finer Things: Every Routine you must spend an additional Thaler on personal upkeep. If you don't, take 2 Stress. The second time you Break, cross this move out.

> Pretty straightforward. The Scion is used to living the high life. They don't do a great job roughing it, though they can get used to it eventually.

Your Intimacy move is...

Entrusted: *When you hold those you care for close,* figure out among your partners who takes charge. If it's you, add +1 to a Stat for the rest of the routine. If it's one of them, clear 2 Stress immediately.

If you use this move in the air, all of you get the benefits, though you should still figure it out.

> Everything about the Scion is about power dynamics, so of course this move is too. Nobody on the team is the Scion's equal, at least not in their eyes, so there's always going to be *something* going on here.
>
> As usually, you don't have to go into any detail at all. Might be fun, though.

Background Moves

Like other backgrounds, they also start with three of the following.

Don't You Know Who I Am: *When you use your title and bluster to get what you want,* Press the Issue + your personal Combat Value.

> This move won't really be too useful early on, as your Combat Value is just 1, but as you shoot down planes and become a bigger name, you can start to basically bully people with your reputation.

Gold Standard: When you take from your Estate, take 15þ instead of 10þ.

I'm Too Good For This: When you miss a move, any move, reduce your Estate Wealth by 1 to get a full success instead.

> A lot of the time, this won't make sense directly, but it doesn't have to. A good way to think about it is that in this grim moment, the Scion is saved by something they spent a bunch of money on, and the peasants picked up the bill in the background.

Family Ties: *When you land in a new town*, roll flat. On a hit, you have a family connection to the ruler or somebody important here. On a 16+, they actually like you.

Glorious History: The power of your family name adds +1 to your personal Combat Value. This move can only be learned by other characters if they are an Ace already.

> This move synchronizes very well with Don't You Know Who I Am, and spreading it around your company can quickly raise your revenue by giving you better negotiating power.

Old Tales: *When you tell a story of your family history, true or not,* hold 1. *When you follow or defy the lesson of the story*, spend the hold for Advantage.

> Telling stories over drinks is a good way to do this. Maybe make up an aunt or uncle with a colourful history. You can't use the same story twice, and you can only have 1 hold at a time.

Entitled: *When you call on your home to furnish you with something,* roll Get Stuff +Estate Wealth. Either pay for it, or reduce their Wealth by 2 to take it for free.

> Whatever it is, it'll need to get to you from your Estate, and that might take a while as you send a letter or telegram or whatever and they fly it out to you. Though you can trust it'll follow you to wherever you go, for simplicity's sake.

Annexation: *When you incorporate a new town into your Estate,* add +2 Wealth. *If they join willingly*, add +4.

> What 'incorporate' means depends heavily on circumstance, but generally the idea is that they are now contributing to the economy of the Estate and have been linked into the political system. This isn't just a thing people will idly agree to, and it's more than a simple trade agreement: you have to take over the town.
>
> That doesn't mean this needs to be a violent conquest, though. You might be able to get the people or the leadership to agree in exchange for something, though if you don't pay up, expect revolts. People in Himmilgard value their sovereignty, so be it by negotiation or force, you need to do real work to make this happen.

The Workers

The Old World might be gone, but many of its technological wonders persist, and to keep them going, those towns that can still support industry work double-hard. Many people, be they refugees from the old cities or poor folks from across the world, come to these places in hopes of steady work. They'll find it, more often then not, but that labour is frequently backbreaking and the compensation paltry. Compared to that, who wouldn't want to take to the skies?

The Workers are adults in a cast of youths, who have already achieved many of the markers of adulthood that the other pilots are still pursuing. They are here not for adventure or self-discovery, but instead they have a responsibility to those who depend upon them.

Workers are supremely good at managing the stress side of the game, and helping others with it. You get to be a mentor for all the other players.

Themes

It probably hasn't escaped your notice by now that most of the playbooks feature characters who are, typically, young adults, without much to ground them. The Workers contrast this: They are already adults with adult responsibilities, and what everyone else does for fun and self-discovery, they do because they need the money, pure and simple.

The Worker was, at one time, more like the other characters, before the responsibilities of life under capitalism suppressed their individual and cultural identity. A potent journey for such a character is to cite origins in the same playbook as another player character, which allows the Worker a chance to reconnect with old identity.

While the Worker's responsibilities give them an out for stress so long as the finances are holding together, the potential is there for the character to use their flying career as a sort of midlife crisis and engage in the same sort of hedonistic debauchery as the younger characters. Ultimately, the Worker is often not that much older than the other pilots, merely forced to be a great deal more mature.

In other words, this playbook is Team Dad. They might be a literal dad. And depending on the dynamics of your group... they may also be daddy.

Central Moves

The Worker's core move is:

Breadwinner: Instead of personal upkeep, you have two Dependents. Write their names, and mark 1 on one and 2 on the other. Each Routine, during Expenses, choose to pay 0, 1, or 2 Thaler for each Dependent. If you pay 0, erase one mark. If you pay 2, mark their track and describe what special thing you do for them to make their lives easier.

A Dependent at 2 Marks removes 1 Stress per routine. A Dependent losing a Mark gives 1 Stress, and at 0 Marks they cause 2 Stress per routine ongoing.

> The Worker isn't just in it for themselves, they have people counting on them. Paying for the Dependents is going to require negotiating with the rest of the team for the money. This will create a natural tension with the impulsive fools of the rest of the team who don't have anything to lose.

Your Intimacy move is:

Share the Burden: *When you are intimate with comrades,* the Stress of all the characters participating can be freely redistributed between them. If there are any NPC participants, 1 Stress is also removed from each PC.

If you use this move in the air, 1 additional Stress is removed from each character.

> The results of the redistribution must be agreed on by all parties, or it simply doesn't happen. This is not *removing* Stress, except for the extra one in the air version, so no Experience Points are gained from redistribution, only from Stress removed because of NPCs.

Background Moves

The Worker starts with 3 Personal Moves and one of:
- 2 more Worker Personal Moves
- 1 Student Personal Move
- 2 Personal Moves from another playbook.

Additionally, all XP costs for the Worker are doubled. In Move Exchanges, it costs more for them to learn Moves, but not for the other participant.

Worker moves are all quite powerful and will lead to a much less dysfunctional team, so it is in the interest of the Worker to be a mentor to their comrades as best they can.

Catharsis: *When you Vent,* get rid of 3 Stress instead of 2.

Get it Done: Each Routine, hold 3. Spend that hold to score a partial hit on any roll, without rolling first.

> This Move refreshes during the Introspection phase. You don't ever roll the dice when you use these holds, so you can't spend Speed to improve them or anything like that. Holds do not carry over between routines, so you can't stack up an infinite number of them. Nice try, though.

No Sick Days: You can still take Advancements when you are Stressed (but not if you are Burnt Out).

Hard Drinking: Negate 1 Failure from the End of Night move.

Old Reliable: After 3 Routines in the same plane, without it being modified or upgraded, the plane gains +8 Toughness and +3 Reliability. This is once per plane, and the bonus is removed if the plane is modified.

> The plane must be flown in each Routine to gain this benefit, though the routines don't have to be consecutive. Applying the Farmer move *You Came In That Thing?* will not count as a modification.

No Drama: The first time each Routine that somebody Vents with you as the victim, take no Stress, and they lose an additional Stress.

> Basically, the Worker has been there before, and understands why people lash out. They can deal with it in a calm and rational manner.

> This makes them a rare and special breed of pilot.

Open Mind: When you perform a Move Exchange, both sides can learn as many moves as they have XP for from one another, instead of just 1. Other playbook moves cost 1 less XP to learn, and this character can teach any move they've learned.

> The XP cost reduction applies only to moves the Worker is learning from others, not moves others learn from the Worker. The reduced XP cost applies after the double XP price for Worker advances.

> The Worker can still only specifically teach the moves they've learned. Also, the extra moves you get from another playbook at character creation are teachable, but that doesn't give you access to all the moves of that Background to teach others: you have to learn them first.

Domestic Bliss: While you have 0 Stress, take +1 ongoing to all rolls outside of air combat.

> The restriction against Air Combat is very specific. The Worker still gets bonuses in ground combat, and in air moves that don't take place during active combat.

The Students

The great seats of learning of the Old World were grand universities, where the next generation of the intellectual elite were educated. Once cloistered and isolated religious academies, they gradually evolved to serve the demands of the industrial revolution. After the fall of the world, they continued much as they always had, ruled by their deans and professors as private fiefdoms and confronting the rigours of the new world with grad student labour. You learned to fly as part of your education.

Students are a mechanically unusual background. Their background in a sterile academia has given them a potent skillset, but left them without a solid grasp of a place in the world. They define themselves by quantified knowledge, held as an exclusive resource, at odds with the way other backgrounds are strengthened by the experiences of their upbringings.

Students gameplay revolves around their skills, somewhat detached from the actual stat rolled in the move. They have a potent toolbox, and they'll use it even if there's no call for those tools.

Themes

The Student is defined by two things. The first is their skillset, obviously, but the second is privilege. The Student is at least somewhat isolated from hardship in their school, and have been able to dedicate many years of their life to their education instead of to day to day survival. This makes them a little like the players in some ways, coming to the apocalypse for the experience instead of from necessity.

The Student is an exaggeration of the circumstances of many college students and graduates in the modern world, particularly in America. They carry crippling student debt, have an advanced education the job market doesn't value, lack real-world experience, and are still luckier than most.
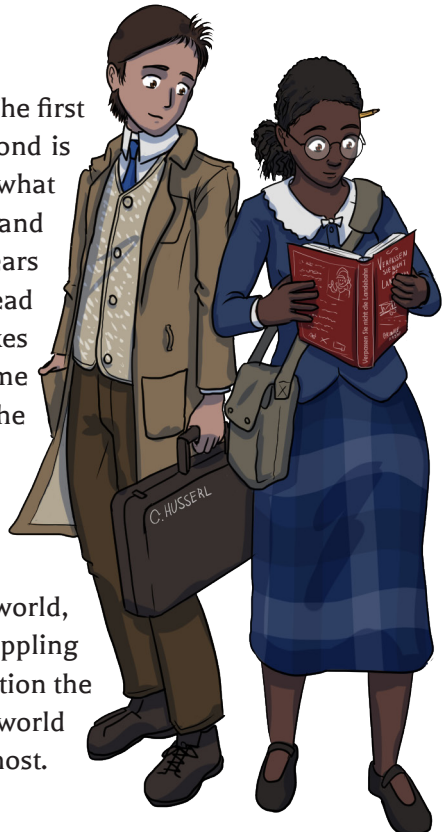
In terms of fictional archetypes, the Student plays on several pulp archetypes. They can be a mad scientist (though as likely to be mad political science as mad engineering or physics), or the know-it-all sidekick who always has exposition for the scene. They're also good analogs to Miyazaki's bespectacled aircraft engineers Tombo and Jiro Horikoshi, or perhaps Lady Eboshi's gunsmiths, with the potential to be similarly creative inventors of potentially dangerous creations.

Though engineering is perhaps the obvious and mechanically optimal path, Students that specialize in other fields can turn a campaign on their head. The Skill system is loosely defined for a reason, and you can get a lot out of even the niche picks. An Arts & Literature student can create masterpieces, a Politics & Law student can write airtight contracts, and a Clinical Psychology student can justify using their skills on almost any social roll. The Student benefits greatly from a creative mind.

Skill System

The Student has a special component of their character in the form of Skill Points. When a Skill would be applicable to a roll, you can add a bonus equal to your points in the skill. It costs 3XP to add 1 to any Skill.

Physical Education	⚪⚪⚪	Arts & Literature	⚪⚪⚪
Clinical Psychology	⚪⚪⚪	Engineering	⚪⚪⚪
Politics & Law	⚪⚪⚪	History & Mythology	⚪⚪⚪
Biology & Medicine	⚪⚪⚪	Economics & Business	⚪⚪⚪

The Skill system is why the Student has slightly lower than average Attributes, compensating with sizable bonuses. The system is intended to be used loosely and permissively, with the Student generally able to use any skill they can justify, even if the justification is somewhat tenuous. Mental gymnastics to try and justify a skill's utility in increasingly unlikely situations is essentially the point of the system, as the Student filters the world through their narrow specializations.

That said, the Skill system is still ultimately arbitrated by the GM, and it's good policy to make skill justification a simple process, with a quick explanation followed by immediate approval or rejection. Don't argue about it, just accept the call and move on. Call it a learning experience.

The Student's core move is:

Thesis: *Once per routine, if you give up on something the rest of the team is doing to work on your Dissertation,* mark 1 Stress and tally 1 for Dissertation Progress.

When you present your thesis, <u>roll 2d10+Progress</u>. On a 16+, you may choose to retire to academia as your Destiny. Your comrades can all use your Skills for rolls, providing they can contact you. Otherwise, erase all your Dissertation progress.

The Student isn't just gallivanting around the countryside for fun. Well, they are, but they're also researching for their thesis, which they're writing as they adventure. Making the Thesis is totally optional, but it provides a unique endpoint to the character.

Generally, you should assume contacting the Student is easy, via telegraphs, letters, or radios. It can also represent the Student leveraging their academic resources to help the players from a distance.

Your Intimacy move is:

Curiosity: *When you put aside your work for somebody*, each of you asks another a personal question. You do not need to answer, or answer honestly, but each question answered honestly gives everyone 1XP. Nobody can be asked more than one question.

If you use this move in the air, anyone who is honest gets +1 XP.

Personal Moves

A Student only starts with one Personal Move.

Tinkerer: *When you create something (a contract, a map, a weapon, an engine) or fix something (a machine, a law, a person),* state how it should work and <u>roll +Calm</u>. On a hit, it works. 16+, choose 1: accept a limitation or complication from the GM, or pay extra to get it to work right. On an 11-15, take both.

> This move is extremely flexible, and requires the Student to work with the GM to find limitations. If it requires machinery or labour, you need to acquire or pay for them up front: it can create, but not out of nothing.

Know It All: *When you offer an explanation,* speak it and <u>roll +Keen</u>. On a 16+, it's true. On a 11-15, you're mostly right: pick another player to tell the rest of the story. The team takes +2 forward if they use this information. On a miss, you're very wrong.

> Know it All allows the Student a lot of room to define the world around them, and allows the player to feel empowered and knowledgeable about the world. Though this might disrupt some plans of the GM, that's okay, it's better to let them have their moment and 'yes, and' their contributions.

Anthropology: *When you ask about where somebody came from*, <u>roll +Hard</u>. On a 16+, you can spend XP to take one of their moves as though there was a Move Exchange. They do not spend XP, get a Move, or get to veto your choice, but they gain 2XP if they Break Trust with you.

> Western academia has a long and awful history of appropriating knowledge of other cultures and using it for their own ends without respect for the people the knowledge came from or the way they might want that knowledge disseminated or used.
>
> This move emulates this form of cultural appropriation, and it's a way to make a more confrontational Student who represent the worst of their traditions. Remember: you don't have to take this move, and groups can veto it.

The Witches

The old world of empires and machines was rarely kind to women. It controlled their lives, denied their dreams, and took their children to feed its war machine. Those who did not or could not fit these societies' narrow definitions of womanhood fared especially badly. Unsurprisingly, there were those who escaped it, and on the outskirts of the so-called civilized world, they rediscovered a birthright long denied to them.

The Witches hail from reclusive covens where the like-minded have gathered to explore mythical power. They are one of the most mechanically unique classes, having access to a special freeform system to cast magical spells. The Witch can opt to ignore many of the technical elements and just get by on magic: they can forgo their plane for an enchanted broomstick, or stay in the observer seat and focus on casting spells!

The free-form magic system the Witch uses is well suited to creative and imaginative players, having few restrictions beyond what you can dream up. The Witch is also adept at navigating the Wild, being able to parlay on a more even playing field and make demands of the Fae.

Themes

The Witches have their roots in recurring ideas of mystical femininity, especially modern Dianic Wicca, which attempts to reclaim mythology that portrays women as powerful and sacred, in contrast to the historical Christian narrative of women as unclean, subservient, and secondary.

Witches also draw dark inspiration from feminist & lesbian seperationism, political movements from the 60s and 70s which believed that patriarchy cannot be overcome, and women must instead create their own societies away from, free from, men, often with accompanying political lesbianism.

Dianic Wicca often centres and values archetypally feminine traits and skills, so this playbook does too. Doing so does lean in to some of the essentialist and exclusive ideas, but this is intended. It is up to players how they navigate that space: Magic and gender are both pretty messy.

To be clear: anyone of any gender can be a Witch. The mystical feminine does not belong exclusively to cis women. While only 'Woman" is present in the Expectations, the invitation to defy those expectations remain: brave and interesting Witches come from claiming that space with your pen.

Though the Witch centres neo-pagan mythology, other cultures could be flavour tweaks. For example, you could play a Skyborn witch rooted in astrology, or a Rishonim witch inspired by the history of Jewish mysticism.

Central Moves

The Witch's core move is tied to the magic system on the next page.

Bonded: *When you invest yourself in a person, place, or thing*, come to a consensus with the player most responsible for it about the Nature of that thing, and take I Stress. You may now use it as a Focus. If a Focus is destroyed or lost, take another Stress.

> If the Focus is a player character, an NPC close to them, or their stuff, ask the player what the Nature should be. Otherwise, work with the GM to determine it's nature, using the guide on the last page.

> Bonded is one of the few Core Moves that can be shared with other characters, though the Teacher move.

Your Intimacy Move is:

Of Blood: *When you allow others to be intimate with you,* they become a Focus of Blood for you. If they have Magic, you become a Blood Focus for them. This is in addition to any Nature they might already have as a Focus.

If you use this move in the air, the next time you use them as a Focus they are immune to the Injury they might take in the process.

> This is not a Move other players should enter lightly, because it trades power. Neither character can opt out of mechanically, but remember that players can still use their safety tools if they feel they need to.

Magic

Magic in Flying Circus is a special Move with a framework. The core idea is that everything and everyone in the world has one of six Natures, as follows. These Natures have mystical attributes and magical effects.

Earth	Water
Grounded, unchanging, resolute.	*Soft, gentle, kind, life-giving.*
• Make it one with the earth. • Stop something's movement. • Hide something from sight.	• Soothe hurt or pain. • Restore life or movement. • Induce sympathy.
Fire	Air
Destruction, rebirth, anger, hatred.	*Flighty, spontaneous, unbound.*
• Inflict direct physical damage. • Consume something with rage. • Enhance destructive power.	• Observe something distant. • Move something freely. • Decieve and play tricks.
Iron	Blood
The products of man's industry.	*Tied to you closely.*
• Burn, freeze, or break. • Corrupt and infect. • Sever from magic.	• Heal something broken. • Grant power or insight. • Mirror pain, sense, or sensation.

When you bond with something or target something with a spell, you learn it's Nature. Here's some guidelines for that.

- Focuses must be distinct people or objects with value to somebody.
- PCs should choose a Nature, but can change it at Introspection.
- Things of or created by industry are always Iron. Men who have forsaken their humanity for industry and war are usually Iron too.
- Iron cannot be used as a Focus by default.
- Only the caster, immediate family, and lovers are Blood. This Nature can always be used, alongside the general Nature they possess.

CAST A SPELL

When you cast a spell, hold your Focus, choose a Target, describe a spell based on an effect from the Focus' Nature, and roll +Wild.

On a hit, the spell works. On an 11-15, the GM also chooses 1 Effect from the Target's Nature to apply to you, beneficially or maliciously.

When you cast with Blood, you take 1 Injury on a full success, 2 Injury on a partial, and 3 Injury on a miss. You may ask the GM to take something else, but it will always be worse.

When you cast as a ritual, it costs a great deal of time and materials, but any hit counts as a full success, and 11 or less counts as a partial hit.

When the Witch casts their spell, they should lead in by describing exactly what they want the spell to do, show the actions (a moment of calm, a snap of the fingers, a wave of a wand, etc) that will evoke that effect, and then explain how the chosen effect from the Nature of their chosen Focus ought to lead to that outcome. This can include the elemental nature of the focus itself, like controlling or creating water or fire directly.

The GM, however, determines the exact details of how the spell works out, though they should be sympathetic to caster's intentions even on a miss. Beneficial effects are generally temporary or contained. The result of a miss ought to be more creative than death, injury, or losing a thing, and must always be proportional to the spell being attempted.

If the spell is very minor, don't bother with this move. You don't need to roll to snap sparks into the air, create bubbles, grow a tiny flower, etc.

Background Moves

Like other backgrounds, they also start with three of the following.

Reach Out: You do not need to be physically touching your Focus. You only need to know where it is.

Teacher: You can teach other characters how to use Magic as part of a Move Exchange, giving them -1 Wild and a Focus of an Nature matching themselves. You can also help them create Bonds to a Focus: you take the Stress, they get the Focus.

> The character who is taught how to use Magic does not get the Bond move, so they are unable to create their own Bonds themselves. That means they will still be reliant on you to create Bonds for them. As you are helping them, the two of you must do this together, which can also be an Intimate moment, Getting Real, or a Move Exchange.
>
> This Focus belongs to the character it is created for, so if it is damaged or destroyed, they take that Stress, not the Witch.

As the Crow Flies: Sacrifice a focus of Air to imbue an item with the power of flight. It becomes a plane with a max speed of 5+Wild, a Thrust of 2, a Handling of 90 + 10 x Daring, 10 Authority, 2 Turn Bleed, and 2 Energy Loss. The 'engine' doesn't have RPM or fuel. You are only hit on a critical, but all hits strike you, the only vital component.

> In essence, you can use this move to create a flying broomstick, though you don't have to use a besom. You can use any object you want and can justify using: generally speaking the Witch should be able to sit on it, but that's not a hard rule. However, you can't use a plane that is still functional, or a wingsuit that's complete: they already have the power of flight! A broken plane, however, is still totally fair game.
>
> The resulting flying object can never take damage in dogfights and has infinite Strain for most purposes. It also doesn't have and can't have weapons: if you make a flying machine gun, it ceases to be a gun and just becomes a Thing That Flies.

Will of Iron: You can create and use an Iron Focus, but casting a spell with it will cause it to stop being a Focus, as well as possibly warp, corrupt, or destroy it.

Technophobe: *When you throw away or destroy a valuable piece of technology*, gain +3 Forward to your next spell cast.

> Valuable here means "Worth at least 1 Thaler", though sentimental value to the Witch can also count.

Wild Thing: *When you seduce someone with flattery*, Turn on the Charm +Wild. On a hit, ask them a question about themselves: they must answer truthfully.

> This is one of those moves with high potential to be uncomfortable at the table. A veto on using it against other PCs is a good policy if anyone is uncomfortable with it.

Faerie Speak: *When you show proper respect to the Fae*, you can Press the Issue or Turn on the Charm rather than having to Parlay with the Strange.

Out of Mind: *When you shut off your engine or hide your face*, you will pass unseen by anyone who hasn't already spotted you.

> This is not an invisibility cloak: you will be noticed if you do noticeable things like attack people, knock stuff over, or speak. It just lets you slip past folks, as though you were below their notice.

Equipment

So Much Stuff

Pilots generally run pretty light because they are usually required to take everything they own along with them. In a small, cramped aircraft cockpit, anything that takes up room must be vital.

Generally, aircraft equipment has specific profiles, while ground equipment is more narrative, with the exception of weapons and armour. Just use your best judgement on what equipment should be able to do and what advantages (like, for example, Advantage) it should lend to the user.

When you select or buy equipment, what profile they use is not necessary made obvious, and you might want to use a different statline than the ones presented. Creating new profiles for weapons and armour to fit changing circumstances of a campaign is perfectly accepted.

This chapter covers ground equipment in the form of small arms, melee weapons, and miscellaneous gear, then moves on to weapons and special equipment mounted to aeroplanes.

Equipment Tags

Most weapons have 'tags', words that sum up special features or rules.

- <u>One-Handed</u> means you can carry another weapon as well.
- <u>Holstered</u> means you can store the weapon while you do something else. An unholstered weapon is always very visible and threatening.
- <u>Reload X</u> means after that many uses, you must reload the weapon. Reloading is not a move, just a narrative action that takes up time.
- <u>Manual</u> means the user must do something between each shot, like working a bolt. Again, a narrative action, not a mechanical move.
- <u>Rapid Fire</u> means you can use the Rapid Fire action for Open Fire. For personal weapons, when you Rapid Fire use the alternate Hits in brackets, and then you must <u>Reload</u>.
- <u>Unreliable</u> means the weapon is likely to jam or break. It has no direct mechanical effect other than to inspire hard moves.
- <u>Burst</u> means the weapon can hit multiple targets close together at once. Roll a separate set of Hits against each affected target.
- <u>Shell-firing</u> means the weapon can use special ammunition (p. X)
- <u>Awkward X</u> means the weapon is low velocity or inaccurate, taking an Open Fire penalty equal to the value against non-balloon aircraft.
- <u>Open-Bolt</u> means this weapon cannot be fitted with a synchronizer gear: the action too unpredictable or slow to work.

Light Arms

Most pilots take to carrying some kind of weapon with them everywhere they go. It's just a good idea for self-defence, especially in towns where the rule of law either doesn't really exist or won't protect outsiders. Generally speaking, pistols are favoured because they can be worn in the cockpit.
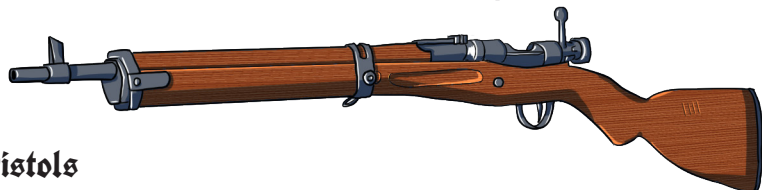
Pistols

Revolver   Scrip

Common, cheap, and reliable, many pilots carry revolvers not only for self-defense, but in case their plane catches fire.

Hits	I	Damage	I	AP	0	Range	Knife
One Handed, Holstered							

Self Loading Pistol   Iþ

The weapon of choice of most pilots, these weapons are compact and can put out a lot of lead for their size.

Hits	2	Damage	I	AP	0	Range	Knife
One Handed, Holstered							

Machine Pistol   Iþ

Rare weapons of desperation, machine-pistols are terrifying, but blow through their limited magazines too quickly to be very practical.

Hits	3	Damage	I	AP	0	Range	Knife
One Handed, Holstered, Reload, Unreliable							

Flare Gun   Scrip

Almost every pilot carries a flare gun for signalling in the air, but in very desperate circumstances they can be employed as a weapon.

Hits	I	Damage	0	AP	0	Range	Knife
One Handed, Holstered, Reload Regular attacks blind everyone within 5m of the flare (10m at night). On a Crit, it hits dead on, doing 2 damage, AP0, incendiary.							

Longarms

Rifle/Carbine   Scrip
Bolt or lever-action rifles left over from the war. Pilots often saw off their stocks and cut down their barrels for ease of use in cramped aeroplanes.

Hits	I	Damage	2	AP	2	Range	Extreme
Manual							

Self-Loading Rifle   3þ
Observers favour these rifles for their balance of power and rate of fire.

Hits	2	Damage	2	AP	I	Range	Long

Sub Machine-Gun   3þ
Firing pistol rounds at high rates, SMGs were used by elite para-infantry.

Hits	3 (4)	Damage	I	AP	O	Range	Close
Rapid-Fire, Reload, Unreliable							

Light Machine Gun   2þ
Identical to the ones used on aircraft, packing a lot of firepower.

Hits	3 (4)	Damage	2	AP	I	Range	Long
Rapid-Fire, Reload							

Hunting Shotgun   Scrip
For hunting small game and keeping people off your farm, these will do.

Hits	I	Damage	Id5	AP	O	Range	Knife
Reload							

Anti-Armour Rifle   4þ
To kill large creatures, parked planes, armoured soldiers, and tanks.

Hits	I	Damage	6	AP	2	Range	Extreme
Manual, Reload							

Musket   Scrip
In the desperately poor corners of Himmilgard, people must sometimes make do with muzzleloading weapons and black powder charges.

Hits	I	Damage	3	AP	O	Range	Close
Reload, Unreliable							

Melee & Ancient Weapons

Knife   Scrip

First rule of knife fights: everyone gets cut.

Hits	3	Damage	I	AP	0	Range	Melee
One Handed, Holstered							

Sword/Axe   Scrip

An elegant weapon of a more civilized time.

Hits	2	Damage	3	AP	I	Range	Melee
One Handed, Holstered							

Hammer   Scrip

Pilot smash! The best weapon for cracking armoured foes.

Hits	I	Damage	3	AP	2	Range	Melee
One Handed							

Polearm   Scrip

Spears, halberds, and bayonets: the weapons of the desperate and poor.

Hits	I	Damage	3	AP	I	Range	Melee

Bows/Crossbows   Scrip

Used by the poorest towns and, more dangerously, by the fae.

Hits	I	Damage	I	AP	0	Range	Close
Manual, Reload. In the hands of Fae, does either 2 Hits, or 3 Dam/API.							

Explosives

Hand Grenade   Scrip

They made millions of these things for the War, and they keep turning up. Hopefully, not around you.

Hits	5	Damage	I	AP	0	Range	Knife
Burst, One-Handed, Holstered							

Dynamite Charge   Scrip

A danger to everyone, even the user. Especially the user.

Hits	3	Damage	3	AP	I	Range	Knife
Burst, Unreliable							

Personal Armour

Pilots that can afford it often wear armour, both in and out of the cockpit. Because armour can take so many forms, it is dynamically created.

Just like aircraft armour, personal armour has Coverage and Thickness. Coverage is a value from 10+ to 2+, while Thickness is quality of the armour: if a weapon has an AP equal or higher than the Thickness, the attack goes through anyway.

When an armoured character is hit (either on the ground, or a Critical Hit in the air) by a weapon that armour is thick enough to stop, roll an *Armour Save* on a d10 for each Hit. If you roll equal or above your Coverage, no damage is taken.
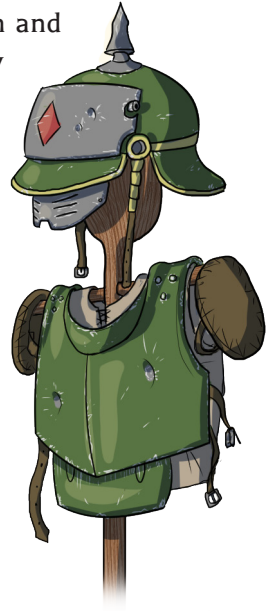
Coverage

Add together the value of each piece below. Your Coverage is 11 minus that value.
- Helmet: 2 Coverage. Also gives +1 Crash Safety.
- Vest: 3 Coverage. x2 Cost.
- Grieves & Cuisse: 2 Coverage.
- Vambrace & Paldrons: 2 Coverage

Every non-helmet armour piece reduces your Escape stat in a plane by 1.

Thickness

The thickness of a piece of armour, and the cost, is determined by the material used to make the armour.
- 1 Thickness for leather, silk, and thin steel. 1 Thaler per piece.
- 2 Armour for thick steel. 2 Thaler per piece.
- 3 Armour for Dragonskin and similar. 10 Thaler per piece.

If you use mixed thickness, create multiple armour saves for each AP level. IE: If you have a steel helmet and a cloth vest, you have a 6+ save, Thickness 1, and a 9+ save, Thickness 2. Only roll 1 save per attack!

Miscellaneous Gear

Parachute   3þ
Made of silk and string, a good parachute can save your life in a pinch, providing you can afford it. A lot of pilots can't.
Needed to Bail Out. One use, unless under controlled conditions.

Flare Gun   Scrip
A stubby pistol that fires a special shotgun shell with a flare inside.
Can be used to signal in a variety of colours. Flares are visible up to 40 kilometres away in clear weather. Attack rules on page 174.

Skyborn Wingsuit   3þ
A beautiful multi-part cloak made from the feathers of Grand Raptors.
Allows for personal flight when used with the Free as a Bird. Otherwise, allows for a slightly prettier crater when you reach the ground.

Medical Kit   1þ
A steel, wood, or leather case containing common medical tools, simple medication, sterile bandages, surgeon's tools, and morphium vials.
Allows unconscious people to be revived. Can be used up to reduce the Injury Penalty on a character by 2 (max 1 if you're tending to yourself).

Gas Protection   1þ
Surplus wartime gas masks, wax-sealed clothing, and refurbished filters.
Protects the user from the effects of poison gas. If the user takes Injury the protection is compromised. Ongoing Disadvantage for fine manipulation.

Polarized Lenses   2þ
Goggles, glasses, or pocket lenses that filter out very bright lights.
+1 to Eyeball during the day. Protects your eyes by heat rays or flares.

Filter Mask   1þ
Flight masks and treated scarves whose filters catch and ward off castor fumes, which infamously causes persistent diarrhoea and nausea.
-1 Flight Stress from tractor rotary-engine planes. Lasts three missions.

Binoculars/Telescope   2þ
Nice to have if you want to look at something a kilometre below you.
+2 to Air Patrol when your target is something on the ground.

Hired Help

You don't always have to hire people on as employees, you can always hire contractors. All prices are per-routine.

Unskilled Labour   Scrip

Anywhere you go, there's people looking for work. Unskilled labour can be brought along to do things like help salvage a site, but they'll be jumpy and need minding and protection.

Cargo Carriers   5þ

A cargo plane or airship that can carry two disassembled planes or a load of goods will run pretty expensive, so having one of your own is a good idea. This also covers the pilot and crew.

Freelance Pilots   4þ

A freelance pilot, flying whatever plane they have available, can be hired for a single routine. These pilots are usually professional, but they won't be nearly as loyal to the team.

## Temporary Employees   Variable

Guards, Observers, Bombardiers, and Navigators can be hired on a short-term basis for twice their normal per-routine cost.

Aircraft Weapons

Here are a list of weapons one might find on aircraft. Each has an abbreviated form which is used for their listing on aircraft profiles, making it easier to pack in all the information.

Machine Guns
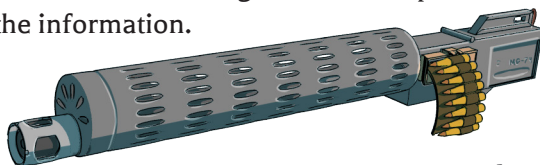
Submachine Gun (SMG)   2þ

This covers small weapons firing pistol calibres, mounted to fire from aircraft. They are often found in clusters in turrets.

Hits	4	Dam	I	AP	0	Ammo	20
Rapid Fire, Reload 2, Jam 0/I, Open-Bolt							

Machine-Gun (MG)   2þ

This covers closed-bolt, gas-operated machine-gun firing bullets around 8mm in diameter, the most common sort on aircraft.

Hits	4	Dam	2	AP	I	Ammo	10
Rapid Fire, Jam I/2							

Light Machine-Gun (LMG)   2þ

Lighter, open-bolt machine-guns firing from limited ammunition sources, like drum, stick, or pan magazines, belt spools, or rigid metal clips.

Hits	4	Dam	2	AP	I	Ammo	8
Rapid Fire, Reload 2, Jam I/2, Open-Bolt							

Balloon Gun (BMG)   2þ

These are regular medium machine-guns converted to fire larger calibre, low-velocity shells, about IImm, big enough to load speciality ammunition.

Hits	4	Dam	4	AP	0	Ammo	6
Rapid Fire, Shell-Firing, Jam 2/3							

Heavy Machine-Gun (HMG)   2þ

Firing a bullet closer to I3mm, which is twice as heavy as standard rifle rounds, with a larger propellant charge to compensate.

Hits	4	Dam	4	AP	2	Ammo	5
Rapid Fire, Shell Firing, Jam 2/3							

Cannons

Precision Rifle (PR) 2þ

A long-barreled rifle on a stabilizing platform, loading and firing a single large-bore shell at a time with incredible accuracy.

Hits	I	Dam	5	AP	2	Ammo	8

Manual, Shell Firing, Reload I. Jam 0.

Requires shooter to Draw a Bead. Take +I Results when you do.

Must be fired alone. Ignores range bands: it hits once on an II+.

Light Cannon (LRC) 4þ

Representing low velocity 20mm cannons, mounted to aircraft for the purposes of ground attack or destroying airships.

Hits	2	Dam	8	AP	2	Ammo	4

Shell-firing, Rapid-Fire, Reload 2, Open-Bolt, Awkward -3, Jam 2/4

Heavy Cannon (HC) 6þ

Representing the likes of the 37mm aircraft gun, this weapon does immense damage, providing it hits, which is a big if with single shots.

Hits	I	Dam	I6	AP	2	Ammo	3

Shell-firing, Manual, Reload I, Open-Bolt, Awkward -3, Jam 0

Recoilless Cannon/Flak Cannon (RC) 5þ

A massive breach-loaded cannon (around 75mm) with a baffling to eliminate recoil. Also represents ground-based anti-air artillery guns.

Hits	I	Dam	30	AP	3	Ammo	2

Manual, Shell Firing, Reload I, Open-Bolt, Jam 0, Awkward -5.

Harpoon Launcher (HL) 3þ

Used by Goths, Whalers, and pirates to reel in planes and board airships.

Reload I, 4 Damage, API, 2 Ammo. Close range. Open-Bolt.

Ignores range bands: it hits once on an I6+. Attacker takes Advantage forward to get closer. Escaping the harpoon pushes the Spin move.

Harpoon lines used as ziplines give Advantage to Wingwalk.

Unusual Weapons

Wing Blade   5þ

A reinforced steel blade attached to the leading edge of a wing.

Does I hit at Knife range only. For damage, roll 1d10 per Speed Factor, and multiply the result by ten. A miss might result in a collision.

Rockets (Air-to-Air)   -

Rockets are designed for ground targets and balloons, but in a pinch...

Hits	I per Rocket	Dam	15 per Mass	AP	2 + Mass

Shell-Firing, Awkward 5. Use special ammo according to rocket type. Instead of range charts, count as firing I less per range band.

Clockwerk Missile   5þ Each

Rare and arcane devices, they rattle in their crates, waiting to be released.

Takes 2 Mass of Ordinance. When fired, roll 1d20 + 80. If the result is higher than target's Handling, hits for 2d10 hits, 2 Damage, API. Against PCs, attack can be dodged with Evade Collision move.

Lightning Arcs   8þ

Used as deterrents against wildlife, they also work on planes.

Uses 3 Charge to deal 1d10 damage to any aircraft within Close range.

Fliegerflammenwerfer   5þ

It werfs flammen while you flieger.

Hits	8	Dam	I	AP	O	Ammo	Uses Fuel

Rapid Fire, Incendiary, uses Fuel as ammo, max range Knife. Crits start fires but don't destroy parts. Open-Bolt.

Scatterguns

Scatterguns randomize the amount of hits they do. Rather than roll Open Fire, you roll 3 Shot Dice at Knife range, 2 at Close Range, and I at Long Range. You do an equal number of Hits and Damage to the Shot dice results, and roll Crit dice like normal. Ignores mounting location.

Scattergun (SG)   2þ

Basically an oversized shotgun, cycled with a foot pedal.

Shot Dice	d5	AP	O	Ammo	8

Manual, Open-Bolt.

Punt Gun (PG)   2þ

A scaled up version of the scattergun, this weapon is based on huge hunting guns. They are almost like canister-firing cannons.

Shot Dice	d10	AP	0	Ammo	5
Manual, Open-Bolt.					

Weapon Conversion

Machine-guns, scatterguns, and cannons can be reskinned into other, weirder categories. Personal weapons could also be reskinned, but you'll need to come up with your own stats.

Mechanical Action   +50% Cost

Rather than recoil or gas tapping, the engine cycles these weapons.

Gain rapid-fire, +1 Hits, and synchronized (even if it couldn't).
Will automatically rapid fire if the engine is in Overspeed.
Weapon cannot jam. Rapid-Firing Scatterguns roll +1 Shot Dice.

Gast Principle   +100% Cost

Essentially two interlinked guns designed so that when one fires, it works the action of the other, allowing both to fire extremely rapidly.

Double rate of fire and half the ammo capacity of a single weapon.

Heat Ray Conversion   +100% Cost

A rare prewar weapon that resembles a camera, it fires an invisible beam of light, accompanied by a flash of very visible, very blinding light.

Incendiary shots, Uses Charges as ammo, equal to (Hits*Damage/4), Manual/Reload still applies. Rapid Fire uses half again as much Charge. Take -2 forward to Eyeball after firing. Removes Awkward tag.

Gyrojets   +50% Cost

The bullets of these weapons are actually tiny rockets!

-1 Damage, but the weapon gets +1 Damage and +1 AP for each Range Band (actual, not adjusted by attacks) past Knife.

Pneumatic Weapon   +0% Cost

Fires needles or blades with air compressed by the engine!

Double ammo capacity. Weapon 'jams' after rapid fire as the compressor refills. AP or Wirecutter rounds only (free, your choice).

Advanced Rules

Getting in Depth

With the rules so far, you can play a campaign following fighter pilots through a variety of missions. These advanced rules expand on those ideas and introduce new ones. This chapter covers:

- Ground Fire.
- Weather and Terrain.
- Bombing and Rockets.
- Advanced Aircraft Components.
- Unusual Aircraft.
- Airships.
- Large Battles.
- Single PC Mode.
- Speciality Ammunition.
- Simple Aircraft Modification.
- Destiny Advancement & Retirement.
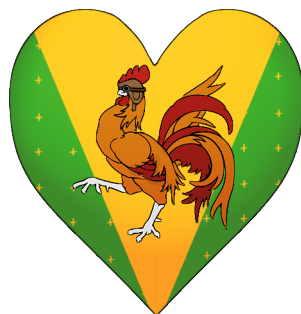
You don't *need* to engage with these in the regular cycles of play, but they'll make your experience deeper and allow new adventures, longer and more complex campaigns, and specialized missions.

Ground Fire

Sometimes, players will come under attack from anti-aircraft guns. Anti-aircraft guns might be a rusty machine-gun on a pole in the town square or a battery of high-powered artillery cannons pounding explosive shells kilometres into the air, but either way it can be dangerous!

We divided anti-aircraft gunnery into two types: *Direct Fire* and *Flak.*

Direct Fire

When we're talking about a single light and mobile gun at relatively close range, like the aforementioned machine-gun on a pole or a rapid-fire pom pom gun, we're talking about Direct Fire. In these cases, the gun is just treated like a turreted weapon on a plane: it can push the Take Fire move, and these shots are rolled like any other. Unless the target is flying directly at the gun, such as to attack it, it will always be a Deflection Shot.

Flak

Derived from *Flieger*a*bwehrK*anone (literally "Flyer Defence Cannon"), Flak is the term used in the system for all forms of less discriminate anti-aircraft fire. Flak is a common hazard for bombers especially.

WEATHER FLAK

When you are bracketed by flak, roll 2 d20s and add +Calm to each.

For an 11-15, take 3 Damage. For a miss, 6 Damage. On a natural 1, either take a Crit, or take 1 Hit of Damage from the flak weapon, GM's choice.

If you climb while weathering flak, take +1 for every 2 Altitude you climb.

In very heavy flak, roll +1d20, and take 1 Stress.

If you manoeuvre drastically to avoid flak, you don't roll, but you will lose your Stay on Target clock, miss your attack, or break formation.

Most flak cannons are guns that shoot exploding shells, whose fuses are cut so that they explode at the altitude the target is travelling, spraying shrapnel all around. This move works well for those kind of anti-aircraft batteries, long-ranged machine guns and repeating cannons, or even a barrage of rifle fire, if you're flying low and slow enough.

Weather

Early aircraft are finicky devices even in ideal weather, quite vulnerable to wind and turbulence, so typically pilots try to only fly in favourable conditions. These rules are for less favourable conditions.

Mix and match these effects as you need, remembering that the more you have, the more there is to keep track of. Write them down if you need to.

Wind

The regular rules assume a fairly still day with unexceptional wind. Beyond a simple breeze, wind will start to inflict penalties to aircraft Stability. These will range from -1 (for a strong breeze) to -5 (for a hurricane). -3 is the sweet spot for dangerous but not impossible weather. In exchange, reduce all Stall speeds by the same amount: some particularly light aircraft could actually fly backwards into a headwind!

In addition to the mechanical effects, the GM should remember to keep the wind in their back pocket as a source of moves. Wind can induce a spin, cause balloons to drift, or allow a fighter to fly at a standstill!

Clouds

You won't always be flying on perfectly clear days, so there will be clouds. We divide clouds into two types: *Terrain Clouds* and *Blanket Clouds*. At the start of the mission, the GM should announce if there are clouds, and if so, the altitude range for terrain clouds and blanket clouds.

Terrain clouds are the clumpy fluffy clouds. They tend to cover an area of about 5 altitude bands between 10 and 20 altitude. These can simply be invoked by players as an Eyeball question: "Am I near a cloud?" Entering a cloud when being chased will give you Advantage to escape.

Blanket clouds are simply a sheet covering the entire combat space within an altitude band. If you enter the band, you're in the clouds, and the only question you can ever ask to Eyeball is "What's near me?". You're also blind to what's on the other side of the sheet.

Blanket clouds can form at any altitude (even the ground, as fog). They'll either be very thin (1-3 Altitude bands), or towering cumulonimbus starting at about 5 Altitude and spanning between 20 and 100 altitude bands tall. There may be multiple blanket clouds in play.

Precipitation

Flying in the rain inflicts a -2 to Air Patrol, and if your cockpit is open-topped, take +1 flight stress. Where there is precipitation, there are either thick, dark blanket clouds, or something deeply weird happening.

Night

The main problem with fighting at night is that it's a lot harder to find your opponent and a lot easier to lose track of them. You are at Disadvantage to your Air Patrol rolls at night, and scoring a miss or partial hit in a Dogfight always results in you losing track of your opponent.

Temperature

In extreme heat, engines take a -2 Reliability penalty unless they have been specifically modified to deal with the temperature. In extreme cold, batteries hold half their charges. In both cases, in the Wild, a missed roll may result in Stress or Injury from heat exhaustion, dehydration, hypothermia, and +1 flight stress unless the plane has adaptations.

Bombing

The company may find themselves needing to bomb ground targets, ranging from large monsters or armoured vehicles to moving trains, marching armies, hostile towns, enemy hangers, or anti-air guns.

When bombing, profiles with a 2-8 segment clock and several stats will be created as needed for targets. Attacks will mark the clock, and when it is full, the target is destroyed.

Hardness is the difficulty of damaging the target.

- Unprotected people: 6+.
- Wooden buildings: 8+
- Stone or brick buildings: 11+
- Hardened defences or monsters: 13+
- Tiny rodents and weak point: 16+

Goth Castle
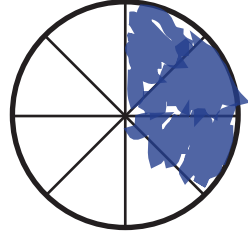
Hardness: 13+
Soak 1
Weak to AP
Strong to Fire

The target may be weak to, or strong against, certain Ordnance: weakness gives a +5 to the bomb dice, while a strength inflicts a -5 penalty. The most obvious question is how flammable the target is. A large robot is strong against fire, a thatched hut is weak to it. Being spread out will reduce the effectiveness of AP bombs. In all cases, it's up to the GM.

Soak reduces damage per-bomb, making it immune to smaller devices. Soak is only for very tough targets like castles or bunkers.

Bombs Away!

When you drop Ordnance on a ground target, expend your chosen Ordnance. For each bomb dropped, <u>roll 1d20, +Calm, -Altitude.</u>

For every result equal or greater to the target's Hardness, advance the clock equal to the Mass of the bomb, minus the target's Soak. On a 20+, advance the clock double that.

When you fire rockets at ground targets, <u>roll 1d20, +Hard, - x2 Altitude.</u>

When you bomb at night, double the Altitude penalty.

Dive Bomb

When you dive on a target and drop bombs, enter a steep Dive, add +1 to your Bombs Away roll for each Altitude you descend, then Pull Up.

Generally speaking, there's two ways to bomb something you need exploded. You can either take a bunch of very small bombs and hope that enough of them hit to do the target in, or you can take a few very large ones and do everything you can to hit, hopefully flatten the target in one go.

Misses generally don't result in anything except horrifying collateral damage around the target. However, when dropping from very low altitude (0 for Mass 1 bombs, and up to 2-5 for larger ones), shrapnel flying up can damage the bomber, so if the user rolls particularly poorly this is a good Hard Move.

As an option for particularly long drops or hectic combat, the GM can roll the bomb dice and advance the clock in secret. To assess the damage, the players will have to make a second pass over the target and Eyeball in order to see the clock.
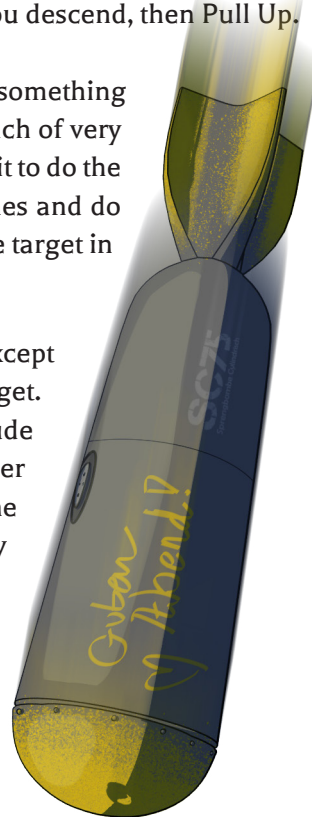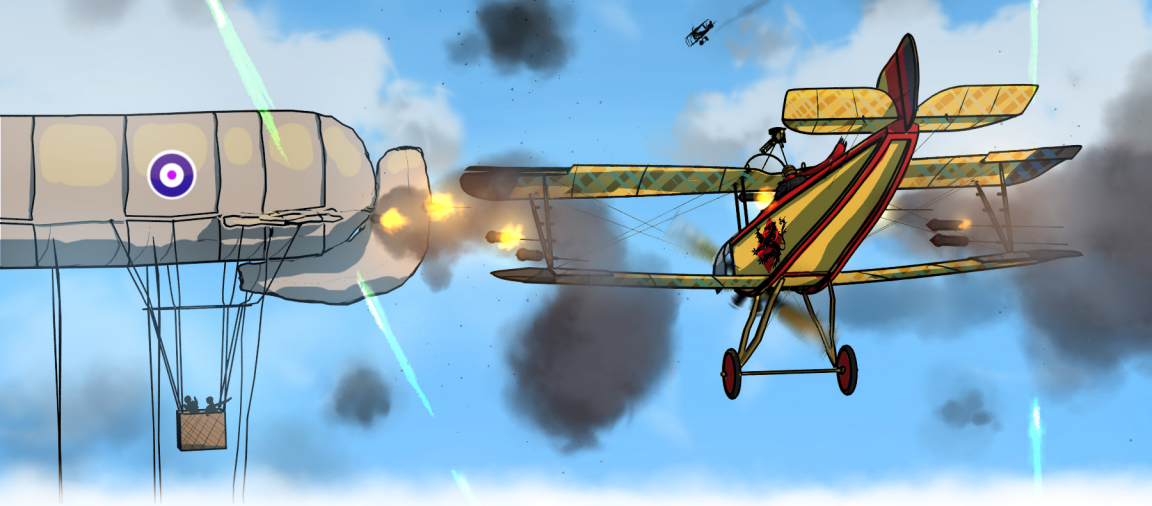
Strafing

Shooting up ground targets is highly abstracted. Roll Open Fire and deal damage: impose a shift right if the enemy is in cover or concealment.

- Against squishies, you get one for every Hit. Half that for gun crews.
- Artillery pieces ignore attacks under AP2, and have 20 Hit Points.
- Vehicles have vital parts and crew, and have 20-40 hit points. A tank or armoured train ignores anything less than AP2.

Bombsights

A bombsight simply reduces the Altitude Penalty when you bomb equal to its Quality. It doesn't actually add a bonus: if you Bombsight is Quality 10, you roll the same bonus at 2 Altitude or 10 Altitude.

Air to Air Ordinance

While rockets firing at ground targets uses the Bombing rules, rockets can also be fired at aircraft using the Rocket weapon profile on page 180. Dropping a bomb from one plane to another uses the following move, but if it comes up in your game, I'll be impressed.

AIR BOMB

When you bomb a plane, <u>roll 1d20, +Daring, -Altitude Difference, -Speed Factor</u>. On a 20+, you hit. Any hit destroys the enemy plane.

Improvised Attacks

The first air-to-air combat didn't involve machine-guns or rockets, they consisted of throwing stuff out your cockpit. Once a mission, a pilot can throw something (grenade, air to air dart, brick) as an Air Bomb attack, though a hit will only do 1d10 damage.

Ordnance Types

The different types of Ordnance available are really very arbitrary. You can make up your own and just decide how they affect targets as needed.

Special Ordnance Types

Rare guided bombs that can steer themselves into the target. In all cases, guided weapons eliminate the Altitude penalty, because being farther from the target gives more time to adjust.

Some bombs use airbrakes or chutes to slow their descent, or timers before they go off, to protect the user from being caught in the blast radius.

Default Ordnance

These weapons are always on hand, and free with your maintenance.

- *High Explosive* (HE) are the default kind of bomb. They consist of a thin shell filled with an explosive material.
- *Armour Piercing* (AP) have a hard tip that penetrates armour before exploding. Parachute versions might be shaped charges.
- *Concrete bombs* don't have an explosives at all. They are just a solid block that smashes a target. Almost everything is Strong vs. these bombs, but they are safer for the users.
- *Darts* are large bundles of solid steel projectiles unleashed all at once, which are very effective against masses of people or animals.
- *Incendiary* bombs contain a charge that burns intensely, either small thermite charges, phosphorous, petrol bombs, or napalm. They are very effective against organic targets and the Fae, and are safe to drop at even at very low altitude.

Rare Ordnance

Rare Ordnance will need to tracked down, and usually cost 1þ per plane.

- *Poison Gas* are hollow canisters filled with deadly agents. Such weapons will be devastating on any inhabited target, but their use even against animals is a considered morally atrocious.
- *Area Denial* bombs make a space impassable or a runway unusable. Usually this will be a scatter of land mines, but it could also be caltrops, or pheromones which attract dangerous animals.
- *Leaflets* carry messages for the people you drop them on.
- *Cargo pods* contain goods for those below.

Advanced Aircraft Systems

Some aircraft are more complicated than the basic features listed in the rulebook. Aircraft with special features will typically have them listed in their profiles, but here's some of the high-level stuff.

Multi-Engine Aircraft

For the most part, multi-engine aircraft operate the same way single-engine aircraft do. However, there is a specific edge case which can cause interesting situations: the plane losing one or more of its engines, while still running on others.

When a plane loses an engine, they lose 1 Boost and have their Max Speed reduced by 20%. This is generous to create dramatic tension. If the aircraft reaches 0 Boost, it starts to slowly sink out of the sky: you'll Go Down, but have plenty of narrative time before it does.

Drop Tanks

A Drop Tank is a disposable fuel tank mounted externally to the aircraft, much in the same way a bomb would be. It is treated as one as well: a plane will need to ditch both its tanks and its bombs before it can use the "No Bombs" statline. A plane will take fuel from the drop tanks first, so write down how much fuel the plane could hold without them, and if you drop your tanks before they are empty, reduce your fuel to that amount.

Rare Radiator Fluids

By default, radiators are filled with water, but if you can find sources, you can fill it with other fluids to increase engine efficiency. You need to buy the liquid again if the radiator gets damaged. If the liquid is marked with a *, you need a special hardened radiator for them (2 thaler to upgrade.)

Liquid	Effects	Cost
Salt Water*	+1 Reliability (Free for Fishers)	1
Mineral Oil*	Absorbs 1 Miss to Cool Down. Flammable.	1
Castor Oil	Same as Mineral Oil, +2 Stress if leaking.	-
Glycol	+2 Reliability	2
Freon	+1 Reliability. Caps RPM to 3.	3
Ammonia	As per Freon, but causes 2 Injury when leaking.	2

Electrical Systems

Some advanced aircraft have electrical systems which power a variety of special gizmos. Generators create Charges, batteries store Charges, and devices use up Charges when they are used.

- Oxygen Masks use a Charge any time you act above 40 Altitude. They allow you to ignore Altitude penalties to pilots.
- Electric weapons like Heat Rays use Charges when they fire.
- Electric engines and lifters are detailed on page 193.
- Radio Transmitters use a Charge when you speak into them. They allow you to speak to anyone with a Radio Reciever.
- Heaters and air conditioners use a Charge whenever you act and they are one. They allow crew to ignore environmental penalties from extreme conditions.
- Intercoms, searchlights, navigation lights, radio recievers, and fans never use charges, but require an electrical system.

If you are generating that many Charges across your electrical generation systems (like alternators and windmills) then they just work. If you're using more, you pull the excess from your batteries. If you don't have the spare power capacity, it doesn't work!

When you Cool Down, your electrical generators add their Charge Generation to the stored Charges in your Batteries.

Autopilots

Autopilots began being used within a decade of the aeroplane's invention, and some available in *Flying Circus* are rather fantastical.

- A Gyroscopic Autopilot simply gives +4 to Empty Seat rolls.
- An Altitude-Holding Autopilot means you never roll Empty Seat.
- A Programmable Autopilot can be given a single simple order and follow it out as you go do something else. It can climb, dive, make turns, fly to locations, and generally do anything but Dogfight!, fire weapons, drop bombs, react to threats, or make landings.
- A Rattegehirn Electric Autopilot does the flying for you, being fully automated. Players don't usually use these, they're for robo-planes!

Autogyro

An autogyro uses an unpowered rotor as a wing, with a conventional propeller providing thrust. It might look like a helicopter, but it flies completely differently. Despite some counter-intuitive principles they are very safe and easy to fly, and make good trainers and first aircraft.

An Autogyro cannot stall. When it falls under its stall speed, it automatically trades Altitude for Speed 1-1 until it is no longer stalling. If it runs out of altitude in this process, it does so gently.

However, if the autogyro dives past its Max Speed or sustains any negative Gs, after the action is completed it will unload the rotor. That is to say, the rotor won't be generating lift! Treat this as a more traditional Stall you need to recover from.

Helicopters

The Helicopter mounts a set of rotors to an axial powered by an engine, thus combining the mechanisms for generating Thrust and Lift. Or at least that's what they say. Real pilots know helicopters fly by being so ugly the ground rejects them.

A helicopter has no stall speed, being capable of vertical take-off and landing. It can dive conventionally, or descend up to 5 Altitude bands in one Maneuver without gaining speed. It climbs conventionally as well. As you can never have negative speed, when you climb from a standstill you simply Boost and then use that speed. Due to auto-rotation, there are no special rules for helicopter crashes.

If a helicopter ever travels faster than 37 Speed, it immediately suffers a Stall which must be recovered from. Even if you score a 16+, you must reduce your speed to 37 or less. (This is called a *Retreating Wing Stall*.)

Seaplanes & Floatplanes

Generally, you can presume most towns have lakes, reservoirs, and other places for seaplanes to touch down in. However, seaplanes are also fully capable of landing on and taking off from soft, low-friction surfaces like grassy fields, sand dunes, and mud. It's only rocky ground and paved airfields that'll be a problem: if you land on those, Go Down.

Jet Engines

Pulsejets & Ramjets use passive compression mechanisms to draw in air. Thus, they are the opposite of regular engines: they double their Boost when you Boost above your Dropoff speed.

Both Turbojets and Rockets provide constant thrust at all speeds, so ignore the Dropoff stat completely. Rockets are special in that, any time you make any kind of action, you must also Boost. You don't have a choice: if you say what you do, then you also Boost.

Solid State Lifters & Engines

Solid State lifters use an exposed high-voltage surfaces to create a channel of ionized gas in order to pull air through. These exist in the real world, mostly as experiments and fake anti-gravity devices.

A solid state lifter can trade 1 Charge for 1 Altitude, or freely lower itself up to 10 Altitude without gaining speed. The lifter also uses up 1 Charge any time you mark RPM, and falls if you have no power.

An Solid State Engine is a Turbojet, just using Charges instead of Fuel.

Gyrodynes & Tiltrotors

A hybrid helicopter and aircraft, Gyrodynes uses a propeller to get off the ground, where it then flies like a normal plane. A Tiltrotor, on the other hand, uses engines on rotating mounts that can perform the functions of either. These ares the best of both worlds from a piloting perspective, flying exactly like a normal plane but with no Stall Speed. However, they are always heavy and complex from an engineering perspective.

Ornithopters

An ornithopter mimics the flight of a bird's wings. They are complex but potentially very effective, especially at low speeds. The engine powers the flapping of the wings instead of or in addition to a propeller.

Ornithopters function as a normal aircraft, but they usually have extremely high Handling stats and good energy retention. In the event that the engine stops, double your Stall Speed and half your Handling and Authority in addition to the normal effects of being unable to use your engine to recoup speed.

Airships

Airships, lighter than air vessels that fly using buoyancy instead of principles of lift and thrust, are common in Himmilgard. They can be cargo carriers, flying bases, targets of piracy, dangerous weapons, and mobile towns, depending on the design and circumstances.

Stats

Player Airships have the following stats: Max Speed, Dropoff, Boost, Handling, Visibility, Fuel, Toughness, and Lift. It also has weapon stats if applicable, and RPM and Wear gauges for each engine. It may also have armour. All stats that you recognize work the same as they do for planes.

Airships cost half the upkeep of regular aeroplanes, as their engines aren't worked as hard. They require a pilot and a mechanic to fly.

Gasbags & Climbing

Airships fly by using bags of lighter-than-air gas, floating in the air the way a ship does on water. They climb and dive like a submarine, by filling ballonets with heavier air from the surroundings, or using compressors.

Airships do not have a stall speed. A airship can ascend or descend one altitude band at a time during combat, neither gaining or losing speed, and during the approach to combat they can ascend or descend up to 1/10th their Lift. A airship's maximum altitude is equal to their Lift.
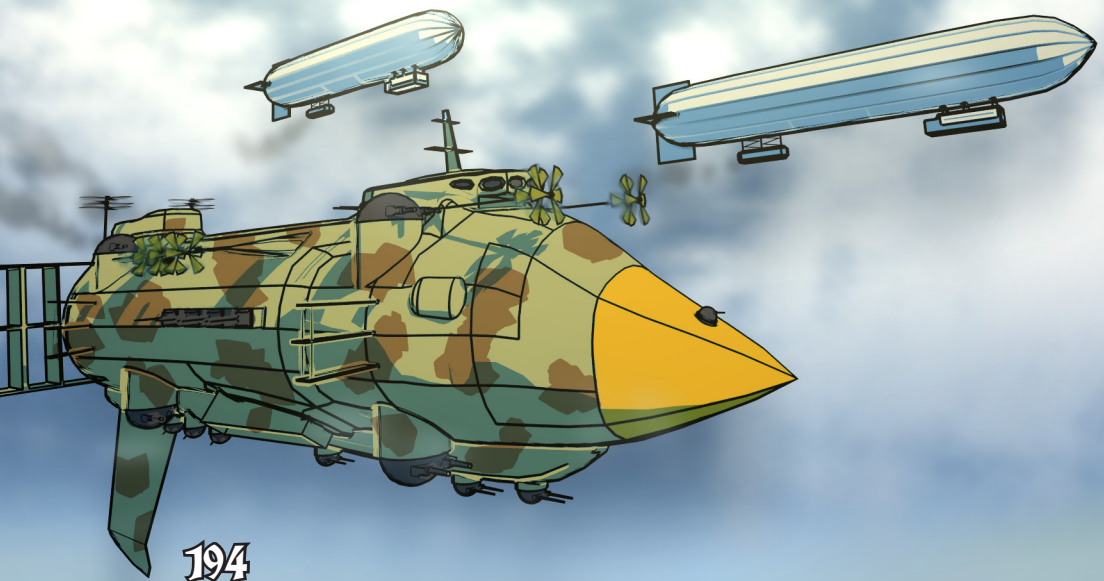
Combat & Damage

An airship can Dogfight, but can only initiate the move against other Airships. Against planes, it's handling is always infinitely low, so the attacking aircraft always gets a 5+ to Dogfight a airship, though most of the time they should be able to just line up and attack it unless there are extra factors involved. A airship cannot spend Speed while Dogfighting, and cannot Stall, though it may Spin in high winds.

Airships have no Strain, and can never pull G-forces. Instead, once their Toughness runs out, you attack their Lift. If Lift hits 0, the airship is no longer buoyant and it begins to sink from the sky. The more damage it takes past this point, the faster it falls.

When a airship is attacked, the attacker may opt to attack a specific vital part of the airship, such as a crew member, a turret, or an engine, without Drawing a Bead. They will only do half damage, as more shots are wasted on empty air or shallow strafing, but if there is a crit, it will hit that part.

Otherwise, do not roll crit dice against airships. They are too big a target and when you simply point the trigger and pull, the likelihood of hitting anything important is too low to track.

Airship vital part lists are the fuel tanks, engines, each weapon system, and the controls. Airship cargo can also be a viable target, if there's something in there you'd like to take out.

Crew should be targeted by the section of the airship they are in. You can specifically target the man on the machine-gun turret up on the top of the zeppelin, but you should attack the entire crew gondola rather than singling out the captain.

Gas	Special
Hot Air	If the burner is knocked out, begins sinking slowly.
Helium	-
Hydrogen	Incendiary weapons do x3 damage.
Luftane	Incendiary weapons do x2 damage. Leaking Luftane is an acidic poison gas (Page 252) causing Stress and Injury.

Large Battles

Managing large battles can be difficult for GMs, both on the ground and in the air, so the Large Battle framework can be used for this. This helps give the fight more mechanical weight and makes it easier to keep track of what's happening outside of the player's direct vision.

The secret of this framework is that you bust it out basically whenever there's too many NPCs in a battle scene for you to deal with, and you get to decide when that is as the GM.

When the battle's lining up, count up the combatants so we have a rough estimate of numerical advantage. The factor by which the larger side is bigger becomes the Outnumbering Factor, which is a stat we're going to make up on the fly.

Use 25% of the smaller group as a benchmark for the difference between the two groups to determine how big an advantage the larger party has. So if the smaller group has 10 guys and the bigger group has 15, that's a +50% advantage, or an outnumbering factor of 2. Don't use a calculator for this, just feel it out.

If the players are the ones with the bigger group, the outnumbering factor is in their favour, so add it as +2 (or whatever). If they're the ones outnumbered, it's a -2 (or whatever) instead. Limit the outnumbering factor to + or - 5. Past that point, more people just get in the way.

Next up, we're going to track the morale of our combatants. If the group is barely organized, doesn't want to be here, or doesn't really have training, they'll get a 3 segment clock. If they're trained fighters, they'll get a 4 section clock. If they're real hardcore, they'll get an 6 section clock.
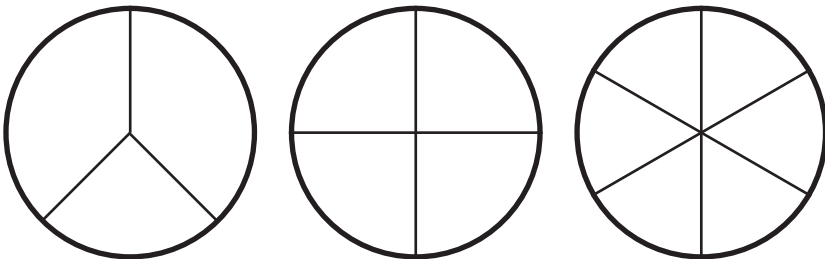
When that clock hits zero, the NPCs in the scene are done fighting as an organized group. That's when you get surrenders, people running away, people preemptively bailing out of perfectly intact planes, that kind of thing. The PCs aren't bound by this; they can keep fighting on even if their guys run away. Likewise, this chart only affects the grunt enemies; their aces or big war machines might ignore it if that makes sense in the scene.

Every time you see a logical break in that action, you're going to ask one of the players (whoever does the planning for the team is a good bet) to roll the Battle move. A good idea is to go around the table, let everyone have a chance to do something awesome, then get them to roll.

Battle

When battle rages, <u>roll 2d10 + Outnumbering Factor</u>. Add +1 for every kill scored by a PC since the last roll, or if an important objective was completed. Then, mark both Morale Clocks.

On a 16+, the PCs choose 2, and the GM chooses 1 for their foes. On an 11-15, both sides choose 1. On a miss, the GM chooses 2.
- Force the enemy away from their goal. (Freeze their battle clock)
- Seize your goal (Advance your side's battle clock)
- Mark the enemy morale clock.
- Inflict additional damage to the other side.

When you inflict damage on the other side, be the hand of fate and snatch some NPCs out of the fight, or, if you are feeling less cruel, simply roll some generic weapon hits against them.

Then, you come back on the battle scene and describe how the flow of the fight has changed around the PCs in response to these answers. Ask what they do next.

Fighting over Objectives

If you want to have a really big, multi-step mission, you 'll want multiple steps towards achieving your objective, be it escorting bombers on a mission or flying down a narrow trench to hit a small weak point.

You lay out an objective clock, and when players choose to make progress towards that objective, you mark off that part of the clock.

So, you're attacking a giant floating battleship, slowing approaching the base of a group of freedom fighters and threatening them with a massive cannon. You might create an objective clock like this.

Eliminate AA Guns

*Bomb the
Weak Point*

*Establish
Air Superiority*

*Run down a
Narrow Canyon*
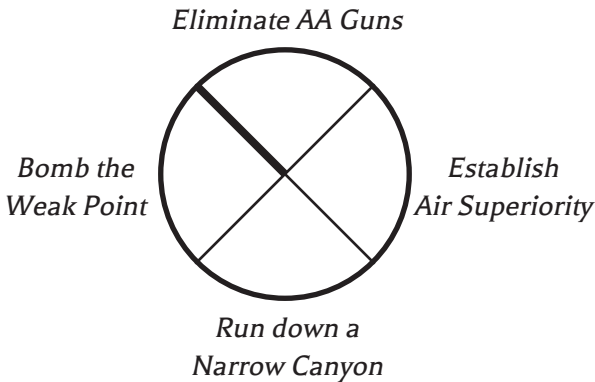
If there's no other factors, the chart is just the chart, but if the enemy is trying to do something more than just defend themselves, you can create a second objective clock for the enemy that acts as time pressure, as the cannon slowly comes into position. Maybe like...

Clearing the Clouds

*Stand
By....*

*Getting into
Range*

Loading the Weapon
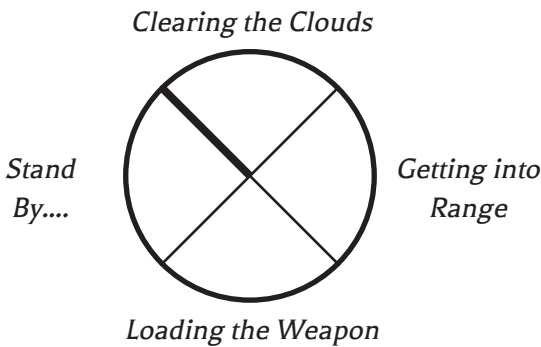
So now our heroes and must finish their clock and blow up the machine before the enemy finishes theirs and destroys the base. How dramatic!

Take the Eliminated AA Guns objective. You don't say how many guns their are: There's just some on the surface, some on the towers. You let the players make a few attacks, then you roll the battle move. If they advance the battle clock, you say "Okay, cool, you knocked out all the guns."

Conversely, if you force the PCs away from their goal, you can move the clock back and give them a setback. Maybe they established air superiority earlier, but now they've lost it. Some objectives can be on a rachet, though: Once the ground guns are knocked out, they're knocked out.

Sometimes, players might advance or bypass the clock without using the Battle move. Maybe somebody tries to dive bomb the weak point, feeling it out instead of using the bombsight. That's great! Throw everything you've got at them to make it interesting, but give it to them if they pull it off.

On defence, the players will be trying to keep the clock clear instead of advance it. Maybe the players are trying to keep enemy panzerstampfen out of their town. You mark out their fallback lines on the clock; their first trenches, their bunkers, their hanger. When the battle goes poorly, they lose them one by one. When they are winning, they retake them.

Freelancer Mode

Changing scales a moment, sometimes you'll want to play a campaign with just a single PC. We call this Freelancer Mode. Not much needs to change, but the NPC pilot employees are more important. GMs should treat them more like PCs: give them a Background, let the PC have Trust with them, and track their Stress. They shouldn't take over the game, but they should be developed enough for social drama.

Speciality Ammunition

As the Great War (both in our universe and in *Flying Circus*) went on, it soon became clear that for some applications, regular ammunition (what we call 'ball' ammunition) wasn't sufficient. Aircraft are tough and were getting tougher, and balloons in particular could laugh off dozens of plain old jacketed lead rounds without consequence.

Thus, it started to become necessary to experiment with new types of ammunition. At first, these were not practical for regular use, but with time speciality ammunition became more common.

These are Advanced Rules for a reason: you have to do some mucking about with your weapon damage to get it to work. Don't introduce these ammunition types until everyone is on board.

Ammunition Subscriptions

In essence, speciality ammunition provides modifiers to your attack, and can be mixed and matched for different effects.

Firstly, speciality ammunition is uncommon, especially small-scale ammunition, and they are purchased as a 'subscription' on a per-aircraft basis. So you'd pay up front to have access to all the relevant ammunition types, then you'd pay continuous upkeep, but you can choose a loadout before you fly. This represents the costs of either having the ammunition flown out to you, or constantly scrounging up a new supply.

The up-front cost is I thaler, +2 for each of the following.
- If the weapon is not shell-firing.
- To get access to rare rounds.
- To get access to multi-purpose rounds.

Past that point, the subscription costs I thaler per routine, per type of weapon you apply it to. So planes with multiple weapon types can get expensive, very quickly. Machine guns and LMGs counts the same kind of weapon, though!

If you go into Cost Overrun, you must drop your speciality ammunition subscription first. No paying for bonuses if you can't keep the lights on!

Building Speciality Belts

So let's picture the ammunition you fire from your plane as part of an ammunition belt, a section with as many Hits as the weapon's stat. So for a balloon gun mounted on a pusher plane that does 4 Hits, it might look like this example to the right.
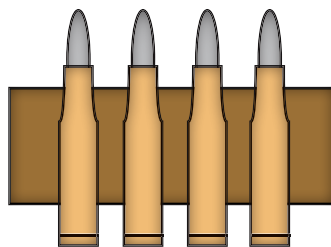
A balloon gun does 2 damage per hit, with 0 AP. This is simple and straightforward: whatever hits the weapon does, multiply by 2, and that's the amount of damage.

So let's say the player gets a subscription to some basic speciality ammunition: that's the purpose of the balloon gun, after all. The simple way to get use out of it is to just change every round in the belt.
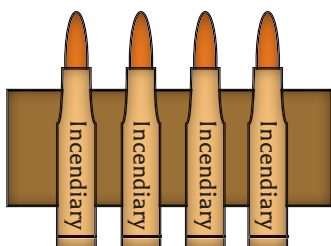
So now we have a belt of all Incendiary ammunition, as we can see to the left. The effect of this is really simple: now, when the weapon hits things, it'll catch stuff on fire. Otherwise, it uses the same profile as usual, with no real changes. If it were explosive, you'd just double all the damage. If it were AP, you'd just add +1 AP to the attacks.

This is a mixed belt. The HE and AP round effects are now a percentage: the weapon does +25% more damage, and would reduce target armour by 25% if it pierced, but the HE round cancels the AP effects. Dum-Dum and Incendiary now have a 25% chance of taking effect instead of a 100% chance. That's a 9 or 10 on a d10, remembering that we round down the odds.
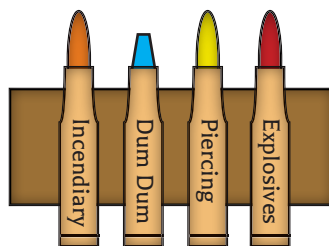
All that is complicated, so figure out what exactly your mixed belt does when you create it and write it down. Different guns can have different belts, but all the guns within the same Weapon System have to fire the same belts. Otherwise the math breaks down, and nobody wants that.

Multi-Purpose Rounds

A multi-purpose round combines the bonuses of two kinds of ammunition into one. This allows you to have a belt that is, effectively, both 100% Incendiary and 100% Armour Piercing, for example.

Manually Loaded Weapon

If your weapon has the Manual and Reload 1 tags, it means your character is reloading the weapon between each shot. You can thus choose what kind of ammunition is fed into the gun each time you fire it, and the bonus takes effect for that next shot. You don't need to pick your loadout before you go up, so long as you have a subscription to the ammunition.

Ammunition Types

Common ammunition types are available most anyway, while the rare kinds are more expensive and probably need to be shipped in from the outside. There's nothing stopping you from coming up with your own.

Common Types
- *High Explosive* (HE) does 200% damage, but -1 AP. In a mixed belt, the extra damage is instead the percentage of HE in the belt.
- *Armour Piercing* (AP) adds +1 AP to the weapon. In a mixed belt, if the AP rounds pierce, the effective Coverage of enemy armour is reduced by the percentage of AP rounds making up the belt.
- *Dum-Dum* (DD) rounds will hit 2 Vital Parts if it crits. With mixed belts, roll 1d10 against their percentage of the belt to see if you get the second hit. Against large animals, it does triple damage (with percentage scaling as with HE)
- *Incendiary* (I) weapons will cause flammable parts to burn on a crit, be it fuel, oil, canvas, wood, or hydrogen. Does triple damage against hydrogen airships. As with Dum-Dums, mixed belts have a percentage chance of taking effect using 1d10.

Rare Types
- *Wirecutter* deals triple damage against wood-framed aircraft.
- *Endothermic* reduces the handling of aircraft equal to damage (or percent thereof with mixed belts).
- *Electromagnetic* disables all electric devices on the aircraft if it hits at all. Roll 1d10 percentage with mixed belts.

Simple Aircraft Modding

If you want to get into aircraft modding and don't want to break out the *Engineering Guide*, here's some simple field modifications.

Ergonomics

The most common modifications that pilots make to aircraft by far is changing things about how their cockpit is laid out.

- Collimated Gunsight: +1 to Open Fire, -1 Visibility. Costs 3þ
- Telescopic Sight: +2 to attack after Draw a Bead, -1 Visibility. 3þ
- Padding: +1 Crash Safety, 1þ
- Harness: +2 Crash Safety, -1 Bail Out. 1þ
- Fast Release System: +2 to Bail Out. 1þ

Weapons

You can replace any weapon with a comparable one without much trouble. Here's the categories for swaps. Costs 1þ for labour, plus weapon.

- Light Machine Gun, Scattergun, Precision Rifle. 2þ
- Machine Gun, Balloon Gun, Mechanical Gun. 3þ
- Scatter Cannon, Light Cannon, Heat Ray. 6þ

Alternately, you can add up to 2 weapons from the first category above, paying 2þ plus weapon costs. Each weapon reduces your top speed by 1.

Tune Ups

It costs 2þ to tune up, giving you +1 Max Speed, -1 Reliability, and -1 Fuel Capacity. You can keep tuning up your engine as many times as you want, and every other tune-up gives you +1 Boost as well.

Bomb Capacity

Aircraft can be modified to carry up to 1/5th their Max Strain in bomb or rocket masses for 1þ. This adds With Bombs stats, including for Max Speed. Every 5 mass of bombs (rounding down) causes -2 Max Speed, -1 Handling, and +1 Stall Speed while the bombs are attached.

Radio

A two-way radio will add -2 Handling, +1 Stall Speed, and -1 Max Speed. Either it's battery powered (8 Charges, 1 Charge per use, double penalties), or it's powered by a windmill, only working while the plane is moving.

Destiny

Once you meet the requirements in the story, you can take on a Destiny. Embracing your destiny is one of the ways to remove your character from the game, and it does so in a way that leaves a real and lasting impact on the world. Destiny is final, though, and requires a sense of finality.

Each Destiny has requirements, and effects if you choose to fulfil them. These requirements are loose and open to interpretation.

The Epic Hero
Requirement: Be the death of a terrible evil, at terrible cost to yourself.
The legend of the Epic Hero will spread quickly and be remembered, and as their companions, you'll find all your Infamy and related Moves wiped clean, take 5 Fame, and you'll never pay for your drinks ever again. Once a routine, invoke the Hero's name to Press the Issue and take Advantage.

The Symbol of the Cause
Requirement: Take up a cause and lead it to a great and lasting victory.
The cause championed by the character succeeds, and the campaign has a timeskip to when the changes they fought for have taken root. Each routine the Circus adds 1 Hold. Trade that Hold for 5 thaler of materials, labour, or other help the Cause will provide, if asked. If the character survives, they are part of the cause full-time now.

The Rightful Ruler
Requirement: Prove yourself worthy of leading a community.
The character retires to rule over a community, be it a town, alliance, nation, etc. The player describes how their realm prospers (or not), adding or changing a town on the map to their specifications. The Ruler's comrades will always be welcome, and when staying in the community their personal upkeep, and that of their planes, are waived.

The Nature Spirit
Requirement: Save the Wild from destruction, and become part of it.
The natural world recognizes the worth of this character and their companions. The character leaves to be closer to nature, and so long as they do not themselves cause real harm or insult, beasts will aid the party and the Fae will welcome them without Parlay.

Retirement

There are no old pilots, or so the saying goes. That doesn't mean that all pilots die young, though a shocking number of them do, but mercenary pilot is not a lifelong career. Your body and mind simply can't handle it.

If Destiny is the glorious end to a career, then Retirement is the peaceful one. A character who retires might not be remembered forever, they might not have made the world shake at their passing, but they made it. Sometimes, that's enough.

How a character does in their retirement depends heavily on how much they've learned from their experiences. It costs 15 thaler to retire to a safe and happy life. That cost is reduced by -3 for each of the following you experienced in your career.

- If you learned at least 6 of your Personal Moves.
- If you learned a Move from another playbook with a Move Exchange.
- If you're retiring with a Confidant.
- If you Got Real to rebuild Trust with somebody.
- If you didn't take a job due to moral objections.
- If you took a job without pay, because the cause was good.
- If you rebuilt Trust by admitting you made a mistake.
- If you lost a comrade, and adjusted to the world with them gone.
- If you had an Addiction, but got it under control

Give your character an epilogue. Describe how they make their way with the lessons they've learned. Describe what mistakes they still make. If you couldn't afford to retire fully, give an insight into the hardships this caused. In a kinder new world, where is your pilot in fifteen years?

Gamemaster

Running the Game

If you're reading this book end to end because you actually want to play a game of *Flying Circus*, odds are, you're the Gamemaster, and this is the part where you learn how to do that.

See, in *Powered by the Apocalypse* games, the Gamemaster isn't just running the game. There word isn't quite God and they aren't just make it up as they go. There are rules and structure involved in this part of the game too. The GM is a player, and are constrained in similar ways, so you might have to adjust some expectations.

So basically, whatever your previous experience is with GMing games, put that to the side for a moment. By following the rules and guidelines here, you'll give your players a consistent and positive experience, and more importantly, you'll make things easier for yourself.

The point of this kind of roleplaying game is that the rules constrain a story so everyone knows where to go next. If you're using those same rules, it'll help you the same way.

GM Basics

Flying Circus, like other *Powered by the Apocalypse* games, doesn't really bind the GM with too many concrete restrictions. Rules for the GM are more about giving direction than creating limits.

You Are Everyone Else

Everyone that isn't a PC pilot (or a Confidant assigned a PC player) is your character. We call them Non-Player Characters, or NPCs, but that's not very accurate, because as a GM, you are a player, and these are your characters. Whatever, it's the convention of the medium.

You have to play all these folks and make them all unique. Ideally, you want the players to care about what happens to some of them so you can use those hooks to ~~make them feel pain~~ keep them invested in the events of the game. This goes beyond just human characters, though. Monsters, political factions, and even landscapes are *Yours* the way that PC pilots are *Theirs*. Drive 'em like you stole 'em, because the players are probably doing the same with their pilots.

You (Almost) Never Roll Dice

This is bigger than just random number generators, but the basic idea here is that you don't have to engage with the rules the players do. You're a narrator, operating outside those laws. You just say what happens, and it's true. The GM rules are about *what to say*.

All those moves that came up earlier? Yeah, you never touch those yourself. The NPC characters under your control don't make moves. Your bandit planes don't Dogfight!, you just describe how they close in behind the player's aircraft. Your militia guardsman never rolls Brawl to arrest a drunken pilot: you just describe the handcuffs coming out and the baton being drawn.

The only time you ever roll dice officially under the rules is to randomly generate missions for the players. An acceptable time to roll dice, if it is your preference and your players allow it, is to roll Open Fire and Small Arms against players instead of them doing it themselves. You can also just throw dice as a decision making system on the spot, if you want. Otherwise, don't roll. Just say what happens.

Stay on Task

As the GM, you are given a series of directional cues, called Agenda, Principles, and Moves. These give you guidance for the way you run your game, keeping the tone consistent and ensuring you have the tools to always press onward. It is important you take advantage of these tools.

To be clear: What you are doing is not quite fully freeform, and conceptualizing it that way is throwing out half the game. Your primary restriction comes from the instruction to always look back to your Agenda, Principles, and Moves to know what to do next. Keeping that in mind will make your game better, forgetting it will take things off track.

You are also bound by the expectation of the game's structure. There's a distinct rhythm to this game, the cycle of air and ground combat, and the carefully tuned systems break down if you leave it. You can take that structure pretty far afield, but the game will stop working if you leave it entirely. The two parts give the whole context.

Finally, you are bound by the previous narration and the player's suspension of disbelief. It might not be written down in the rules, but put effort into making what happens feel consistent. Keep notes so you don't contradict yourself too badly, and even when the moves say you *can*, don't break the established rules of the fiction. That'll just upset your players.

Agenda

The Agenda is your mission statement as a GM, and is the basic principles you need to keep coming back to. Every Powered by the Apocalypse game has a different Agenda for its GM to fit the themes of the game, and this one is no different.

In short: your job is to serve this Agenda. It is not to tell a story you already wrote, it's not to lead the characters through a series of level-appropriate combat encounters, it's to come back to the Agenda and make it manifest in the narrative.

Your Agenda is...
- Put the players in thrilling danger.
- Mix glory and tragedy in equal measure.
- Play to find out what happens next.
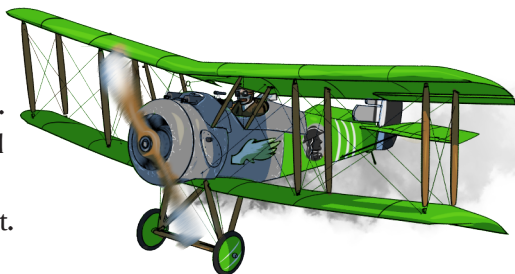
Put the Characters in Thrilling Danger

The number one reason most people are going to be coming to this game is because they think aeroplanes are cool as hell and they want to experience what it's like being a World War One flying ace, or something like it. They want adventure, excitement, explosions, daring fights at ten thousand feet, they want the game to throw them at some new and dangerous situation at two hundred kilometres an hour.

Your number one priority is to always centre the player characters. They are the centre of your attention, the centre of the universe, and everything around them facilitates them getting into the coolest kind of trouble you can come up with. No flight is ever boring, no mission is ever routine. If something isn't trying to kill the players, it needs to be either drawing them into danger or helping them escape it by the skin of their teeth.

There is always a new mission, a different direction, new places, higher stakes, a job to do, money to be made and spent, a fight to have, somebody hot to seduce, a dragon to be rescued and a princess to be slain. The game's cycle will naturally give your players downtime and breathing room, so your job is to just keep throwing stuff at them. You want them to feel like the larger than life images we have of the flying aces of the past.
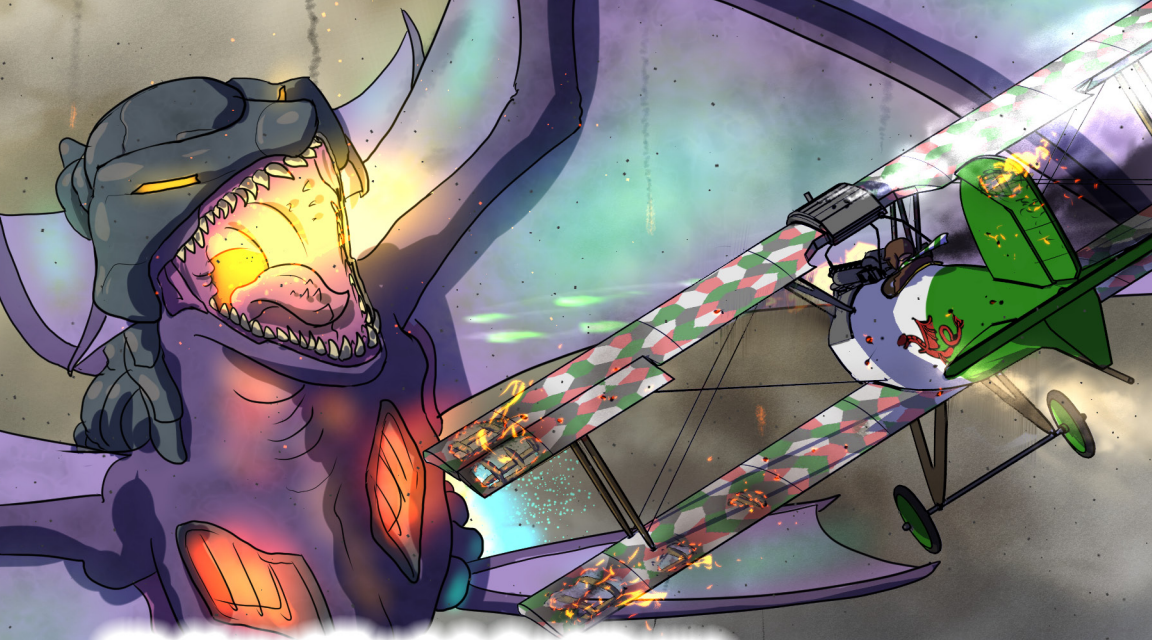
Mix Glory and Tragedy in Equal Measure

Flying Circus exists at the intersection of two ideas. The first is that there really was an undeniable glory and excitement to the lives of the pioneers of air warfare. Read any of their memoirs and it shines through crystal clear, a love of flight, the thrill of battle, the triumph of victory. These pilots threw themselves into the air again and again not just because it was a duty, but because to them it was a glorious purpose undertaken alongside close friends. Even the enemy was noble and afforded respect.

The second is that, for all that, what is transpiring here, and what transpired then, is tragic in an equally undeniable way. A generation of brave and brilliant young men, some barely older than what we would consider children, spiralled to the ground in broken aeroplanes in a pointless war. Pilots had life expectancies measured in weeks, and every one that survived was left haunted by lost comrades and countless brushes with death. The world of *Flying Circus* is no easier on these pilots and those around them, people scarred by violent conflict and its aftermath.

This agenda must underline everything that is true about the world you present in the game. There is always glory, there is always tragedy, and they are two sides of the same coin. When you must present any new information about a person, place, or thing, always ask how it is one, the other, or both. Every item salvaged was once a treasured possession, every grizzled veteran was a bright-eyed cadet, every peaceful town earned it with blood. The lives of your pilots will be no different.

Play to Find Out What Happens Next

Flying Circus is not a game about grand quests and heroic destinies. There are no dark lords, just ambitious men. The superweapon you stop today makes room for the one dug up tomorrow. Characters are not born fated heroes and they might or might not find their own way there. The stories that *Flying Circus* tells are the stories of pilots, not as a single grand narrative but as a series of vignettes, like pulp adventure serials.

Think of it this way: this game creates the kind of wild tales these pilots might one day tell, either their wide-eyed grandchildren or the sceptical patrons at the bar. That time I shot down three planes in one day, that time I hung off the side of an observation balloon, that time that I saw a dragon, I swear! The arc that unfolds is how it changes the characters, not necessarily how it changes the world. That's an option, but it's not what is most important to us at the table.

So I know we already went over this, but seriously, if you have a prewritten story, throw it away right now. This isn't about you. You aren't the author or even the narrator, you're the greek chorus to the story of heroes and their window into a wild world. You are as ignorant of the events to come as the players are: you are playing to find out what happens next.

Principles

With your Agenda laid out, we move on to Principles. The Principles are, basically, your best practices. If you keep them in mind and fall back to them to guide your actions, things will keep working out.

Your principles are...
- Make players love the world.
- Talk to the characters, not the players.
- Speak your moves through fiction.
- Litter the world with hooks, and use the interesting ones.
- Treat humans as humans, even the nameless ones.
- Figure out what everyone wants.
- Ask provocative questions and build on the answers.
- Say "Yes, and..." or "No, But..."
- Wash your hands of cruel decisions.

Let's go through these now and examine what these principles mean.

Make players love the world: The world around the players, even when it is harsh, should always have an undeniable charm. A good rule of thumb is that the world may not be ideal, but it is idyllic. Landscapes are always beautiful, even in a haunting way, places are always cozy, even if you don't fit in, and people always have something sympathetic about them, even if its buried. This is a world worth fighting for.

Talk to the characters, not the players: This one is pretty simple. When momentum is up and the story is rolling, talk directly to the characters. Say "There's a plane right behind you!", and assume the player know that you're talking to their pilot Max, and not, you know, them.

Speak your moves through fiction: When you use your GM moves, don't tell players what move you are using, but instead use the give a context and direction for the narrative you are saying. Don't say "Okay, I'm going to throw a mechanical breakdown at you now" but instead describe the breakdown occurring, the sound it makes, the effects it has, and let them figure out what to do from there.

Litter the world with hooks, and use the interesting ones: One of the best tools you can have for making the world feel real while keeping it completely malleable is to essentially throw detail at the wall and, in the aftermath, see what sticks. Just constantly establish possible story hooks and see what interests the players. Mention a cave on the mountain above town, a suspicious person watching the crew, the sound of engines taking off just as the players land, bombard them with constant potential Chekov's Guns. If they investigate it or if you figure out a way to use it later as the narrative justification for a move or job, it mattered. Otherwise, you still managed to make the world feel textured and complex.

Treat humans as humans, even the nameless ones: Players will be on the move a lot, and probably won't stop to ask everyone's name. Much of the time, they won't be able to know who they are fighting, separated by the howl of engines and several hundred meters distance. So instead, you need to find a way to make sure that whenever the players are interacting with people, some part of their essential humanity shines through. Every plane is decorated and personalized, every guard has a home to return to, every villager has somebody who loves them.

Figure out what everyone wants: Key to that last principle is this one. Every time a character enters a scene and begins interacting with the players, you need to ask yourself what they want and what they are willing to do to get it. Why, specifically, are they here? Why are they, specifically, here? Why are they here, specifically?

Ask provocative questions and build on the answers: One of the best ways you can get people involved in the storytelling is to not just tell them what happens, but ask them questions in turn. Make these questions pointed, maybe even leading, such that they draw out answers that can affect the world. Start with simple questions about the world, like "What colour is that scarf of yours?" and then upgrade them to questions about meaning. "Why does that scarf matter to you?". This kind of pointed question is great because it posits right then and there that the scarf matters, that it is *a part of the world to be loved* and most players will gladly roll with that and incorporate those details.

Ask what things sound like, how things feel, what characters are feeling and why they did what they did. Use those answers to inform new directions and to *litter the world with hooks*. You can even use this kind of question-asking to *wash your hands of cruel decisions*.

Say "Yes, and…" or "No, But…": This is really simple. In the same way that you should sometimes ask questions, sometimes players will tell you what happens, or ask if something can happen a certain way. Internalize these responses: say "Yes" and then build on their idea, or, if you absolutely have to (and sometimes you do), say "No" but then throw them a bone. In either case, it shows you are listening and you care.

Wash your hands of cruel decisions: Part of the reason we play RPGs is that rules let us discard responsibility. It wasn't your friend that screwed you over, it was the dice, it was the rules, it's just the way it is. The rules are the cold hand of fate, and you can invoke that hand if you need it.

Sometimes, just say "Either you shoot him down now, or the bomb drops", "Either you help, or she bleeds out", "I'm going to roll a d20, and on an 11+ he gets shot." You make it look like you didn't make the choice, the players did, the rules did, the dice did. It was just the cold hand of fate.

GM Moves

Players have moves, but whatever. You have moves too, and they matter way more. Whenever there is a pause in the conversation, whenever people aren't sure what to do next, you pick one of those moves and you make that be the next thing that happens in the story. When somebody misses a roll on one of their moves, you pick one of yours and make it happen. Show it unfolding, paint them a picture, then look up at the player and say "What do you do?"

Choose moves that make sense inside the fiction. That doesn't mean you need to choose the most obvious move, but oftentimes the most obvious move will be the most satisfying anyway. Just makes sure everyone understands how what came before lead to what's happening now.

Hard Moves, Soft Moves

Now, normally, when you make a move, what you're doing is softballing it a bit. You're setting it up and giving people time to react to it, using it as a hook and a looming threat instead of braining them upside the head with it. We call that a *soft move*, appropriately.

The idea behind the soft move is that you haven't hurt the characters yet, you're just showing hurt on the way. You're telling them something is in the process of going wrong and asking them how they stop it or fix it before it gets really bad, and most of the time this is all you need.

But when players miss a roll, or let that brewing danger fester a while, that's when you hit them with the a *hard move*. A hard move is the big mean brother of the regular move, the sort that gives no warnings and takes no prisoners. It doesn't have to be cruel, but it probably will be.

So, in short, a soft move is something that can be stopped, prevented, avoided, ducked, dodged, there's still time. A hard move has already gone wrong, already hurt, and there's no fixing it now. There's no undoing what is done, there's only moving forward.

To put it as crudely as possible, it is a measure of how long you keep talking for. In a soft move, you say "She raises the gun..." and linger there. In a hard move, you finish the sentence: "... and shoots you in the chest."

Move Lists

The moves here are broken up into different chunks for the different sections of the game. Limit yourself to those moves, and the moves for any threats in the scene. That'll narrow things down a bit.

The Air

There are two sets of hard moves for the air: stuff that can happen to the characters and their aircraft, and stuff their enemies do.

Their Plane
- Forecast problems with sounds and sensations.
- Steal their energy from them.
- Push a move or mechanical consequence.
- Spray something into the cockpit.
- Turn them around and confuse them.
- Threaten a collision or shower them with debris.

For this list particularly, the first move acts as a soft move for all the others. Having something go wrong for no reason, while realistic, isn't fun!

When you forecast problems with sound and sensation, you are setting up for any one of these future problems. Offer the player enough hints that they know what to look for, if its the engine, the frame, a weapon, and so forth. Remember: when players fail to address something and let it fester, that's an invitation for a hard move.

> *"Your RPM gauge starts bouncing and shaking awful, and the noise of the engine is more hellish than usual. What do you do?"*

When you steal their energy from them, you reach onto their instrument panel and you pluck numbers off, either lowing their altitude or reducing their speed with stalls, bad turns, or turbulence. *Wash your hands of cruel decisions* by rolling a dice (a 1d5 or maybe d10) to determine how much. Losing speed works particularly well for Dogfight! misses.

> *"You turn to get onto his tail, but you overcorrect too hard in the turbulence and you feel the wind slipping out from under the wings. By the time you have lift again, you're two hundred meters lower than you were. What do you do?"*

When you push a move or mechanical consequence, pick one that'll hurt and makes sense: if they've been running at low speed, put them into a stall or spin. If they've been running the engine hard, make them check their fuel or force them to cool down. It could also be inflicting Structure damage, jamming guns, or knocking out a vital part.

> *"You dodge and pull the stick a little too hard, skidding against the air. You realize you've gone too steep, and you're entering a stall. What do you do?"*

> *"As you line up on the target, you cock your gun to make sure it'll fire, and the charging handle won't budge. There's a jam before you even have a chance to fire. What do you do?"*

When you spray something into the cockpit, something goes wrong and one of the many liquids a plane carries ends up soaking the pilot. You can use this to injury them, to blind them and force them to spend time cleaning themselves up, or just to inflict Stress.

> *"The rattling in the engine grows louder, and as you look down at your gauges something bursts behind the instrument panel. A stream of hot oil sprays across your goggles, obscuring your vision. What do you do?"*

When you turn them around and confuse them, you take away what little information they have. Maybe they flew through a cloud and banked without realizing, or they got dizzy and lost track of things. This either pushes Eyeball or forces them to disengage.

> *"As you come out of the turn, you do your best to get your bearings and you realize you have no idea where you are. You don't see any planes or tracers, just nothing but blue sky. What do you do?"*

When you threaten a collision or shower them with debris, you either prompt Evade Danger, push Collision, or just throw 2d10 Damage at them. This can be running into the tail of your target, being hit with pieces, or being caught in bomb shrapnel from a low drop.

> *"Your shots tear some real strips out of them, and suddenly their upper wing deck comes lose and flies toward you! What do you do?"*

Their Enemies
- Drop in behind them.
- Offer bait to draw them in.
- Move the fight dangerously low.
- Twist out from under their guns.
- Fill the air with bullets.
- Return fire with tailguns or personal weapons.
- Chase them doggedly.
- Outrun them and leave them behind.
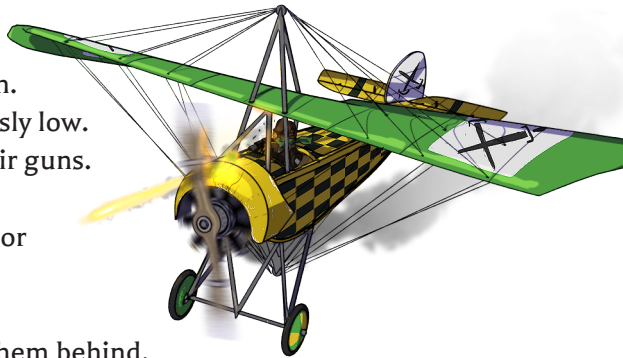
When you drop in behind them, that's pretty straightforward. You take an enemy plane they were either fighting or not paying attention to and you plant it on their tail. If it's a hard move, just go straight to them pushing Take Fire and riddling the PC's plane with lead. Easy.

> *"Your glance up in your mirror and you see a red biplane there that wasn't before, getting real close and lining up. What do you do?"*

> *"You start realizing a little too late that she's turning tighter than you, and before you can escape she's right behind you and her scatterguns are shooting. Roll attack dice... okay, what do you do?"*

When you offer bait to draw them in, you reveal that the target they've been chasing is actually a lure and you show them what they are now up against. Soft version, you just play your hand and set up the forces they have arrayed against them. Hard move, you then have those forces take a chunk out of them for their hubris.

> *"You chase him around in some weaving turns for a while before you start to realize how far away from your friends you are. That's when his buddy, a big blue triplane, comes out of the clouds for you. What do you do?"*

> *"You following them and put a few shots in the air, and you're catching up, but just as you start lining up to take them out, the sky starts exploding around you. They lead you into the range of their flak guns, so roll Weather Flak for me. Alright, what do you do?"*

When you move the fight dangerously low, the aircraft dives towards the earth and forces the player to make a choice to either follow (sacrificing a lot of altitude doing so) or let them escape. For a hard move, if the aircraft is capable of it, they can make a dive the player can't follow.

> *"As you come around, they roll over inverted into a dive. They're heading about four hundred meters down. What do you do?"*

> *"They go into a vertical dive that would burst your engine and tear off your wings if you tried it. What do you do?"*

When you twist out from under their guns, you have an enemy aircraft attempt to escape. This is pretty straightforward and can represent the defending NPC aircraft engaging the player in a turn fight, basically asking them to roll Dogfight or let them get away in the soft move version. As a hard move, they simply escape and must be tracked down again.

> *"They bank hard and start turning away. What do you do?"*

> *"As you come in to attack, she turns in her seat and fires a flare straight at you! It bounces off your propeller, but by the time your vision is clear, she's vanished. What do you do?"*

When you fill the air with bullets, you push Take Fire. If the player has been flying smart or defensive, you make it deflection fire, but otherwise roll it straight. If you're doing it hard, throw some of the effects from Draw a Bead in there, firing from up close or targeting a specific component.

> *"You hear the rattle of the machine gun, and then red tracers stitch all around you. Roll Take Fire... alright, cool. What do you do?"*

> *"She's right behind you and staring down her scope, roll Take Fire. She's aiming for your gunner, and if she Crits she'll hit him."*

Likewise, *when you return fire with tailguns and personal weapons,* you roll the same but with turrets, pistols, handheld darts, whatever they got. This one can be used soft a lot more easily: you tell the player they are being shot at and the tracers are getting close, what do you do?

> *"As you pass by, the guns start shooting at you. You're moving too fast right now, but the smokey lines form the tracers are getting closer and closer. What do you do?"*

When you chase them doggedly, you keep up the pressure and intensify, such as by having the enemy player get to a closer range or in position to make a perfect shot with a powerful weapon. You don't pull the trigger yet, but you make it clear it'll hurt extra when you do.

> *"No matter how much you turn, they're right behind you the whole time, and getting so close they fill up your mirror. What do you do?"*

When you outrun them and leave them behind, you have a faster plane start to slip out of the grasp of a slower one. This is a good place to push the Chase! move or else let them slip away in a frantic dive and disappear (only to reappear and threaten them later, of course!)

> *"You're staying on him, but he's getting farther and farther away. Your engine just isn't as powerful as his, he's at long range now. What do you do?"*

Ground Action Moves

When players are in a ground battle of some kind or wandering the forest, you don't really need much in the way of moves because the consequences are mostly built into their moves and the Threats instead.

The only thing you need to do, if they aren't sure what happens, is to either get them more lost (remove 1 Trek), threaten to seperate them, attack them, or throw a Threat like the Fae or a Creature at them. In combat, cut off their escape, attack them, and have them need to reload at a bad time.

Town Moves

Again, players will be mostly self-motivated in towns, but you'll be called on more frequently to make interesting things happen. Generally speaking, your job on the ground is less to create threats and more to spur them to action, so a good move is a small problem that threatens to become a big one.

Town Moves
- Make them pay for it.
- Bring in local authority.
- Have the goodwill of the town run out.
- Have the goodwill of their employees run out.
- Have the goodwill of a Confidant run out.
- Dare them to do something stupid.
- Show the consequences of their actions.

When you make them pay for it, you put the most simple obstacle possible in the way of something they wanted: make them pay money for it. This is a very soft move that is most useful in how it reminds players that a lot of the townsfolk only put up with them because they've got cash. That can be a nasty shock all on its own sometimes.

> *"You got searching for the information, and you hear that Herr Sendler has it, but he's sort of a greedy bastard and wants four thaler for the information. What do you do?"*

> *"You take him on a tour of the town as part of your Quality Time, it's real nice, but you start noticing you're the one paying for everything. It's just a scrip, whatever, but its getting obvious. What do you do?"*

When you bring in local authority, you remind the players they aren't above the law by, well, bringing in the law. A squad of militiamen arriving with batons or rifles to glare at people or arrest one of the players will instantly throw the game in a new direction.

> *"You're about to slug him again when somebody catches your arm. You turn around and it's two members of the town watch. One of them's got a rifle and the other's got cuffs, and they want you to come with them. What do you do?"*

When you have the goodwill of the town run out, you mark the town's Patience clock and show a shift in attitude. It doesn't have to have much effect on how moves play out, but it's a good springboard to *asking them to pay for it* and *bringing in local authority.*

> *"Alright, so, after the fight, you notice everyone treats you different now. Nobody smiles, and parents pull their kids off the street when you walk by. Real cold shoulder treatment. What do you do?"*

When you have the goodwill of their employees run out, you mark the Labour clock. When it runs out, either have them present their demands, or you skip that first part and go straight to the people quitting in a huff.

> *"Yeah, looks like the mechanics ain't happy about the last couple of jobs, because Sylvia and Martin just cornered you with their big wrenches and told you that either you pay all the mechanics a half-thaler more per week, or they're signing up with Checkmate instead. What do you do?"*

> *"Well, you assemble the team in the morning, and Ludwig is just gone. Rose said he got fed up and quit last night, says he's gonna go work for Checkmate. What do you do?"*

When you have the goodwill of a Confidant run out, you put a pilot's relationship with their confidant in jeopardy in some way. The soft version of this is some kind of ultimatum from the Confidant to stop violating their standards or just generally treat them better, and the hard version is that they leave and are gone, simple as that.

If you really want to stir the pot, have the Confidant express interest in and/or leave one pilot for another. Just be careful with that: generally speaking this game tries to treat relationships somewhat idealistically, so this works best with a lot of foreshadowing and when employed against truly scummy pilots.

> *"Turns out Helene heard about you and Julian hooking up last mission. She comes up to you crying and yelling and sobbing, it's a real mess, but she wants to know how she can ever trust you again. What do you do about that?"*

When you dare them to do something stupid, you quite simply present them with something tempting and see if they'll do it or not. Have somebody insult them in a bar, tempt them with somebody hot, have somebody say the words "I bet you you couldn't _____".

> *"The Red Talon pilot doesn't like hearing that. He immediately stands up from the chair and, for some drunken reason, pulls his shirt off. 'you and me, bro, right now, let's fight!' he announces. What do you do?"*

Finally, and most powerfully, when you *show them the consequences of their actions,* you show them how their selfish, short-sighted, or malicious behaviour has genuinely hurt somebody. Aim for the heartstrings. When they rob a town, break up a strike, shoot somebody, show them the human cost, look them dead in the eye, and dare them to say it was worth it.

> *"You ask him what happened, and he says the town's been dead broke and on the edge of starvation after their trade balloon got hit. He says some bunch of bandits pretty much snatched the food out of his kid's mouth. Huh, I wonder who that was that was? Anyway, what do you do?"*

Threat Moves

So in addition to all that, you've got the Threats you can throw at the player starting in the next chapter. Most of them have moves too, but they're either really specific or really general, so you don't really need examples, you can probably work it out from context by now.

Best Practices

Alright, you've got all that other stuff sorted, all the basic rules governing you, but let's talk some other things you might do to deliver a good experience.

First off, make notes as you go. Writing stuff down is awful a lot of time when you're just trying to keep the game running fast and smooth, but its a good idea. Write down all the hooks you litter the world with and all the weird minutiae characters come up with. If somebody says they have a brother, write that down so you have that information if you need it.

Prep some simple threats you can repurpose if you need them. A squadron of mercs can be allies, enemies, or set dressing depending on the situation that unfolds. It's not planning a story, it's just being prepared for anything.

Make them earn their kills. Don't let them be destroyed on the first crit unless the moment is perfect, and have them retreat when they're losing.

Just ramble on about detail sometimes. It's part of making people love the world, to just kinda go off on a weird tangent about the cozy spot near the fireplace or the food somebody is serving. *Especially* the food, this is based on Ghibli movies, remember? There's a long history of delicious German cuisine, so try to make everyone at the table hungry!

Make sure you keep switching between perspective a lot, and give everyone a chance to shine. Do something to one character, then laser-focus on another right away to force teamwork. Ask people what they're up to while other people do serious stuff.

Take breaks. Remember to drink water, and equally important, remember to pee. Make sure people at the table know that they can get up to take those breaks if they need it, and give people the clear to if they're going to be out of the shot for a little bit.

Threats

The Baddies

For you to be heroes, there needs to be villains. And even if you don't really have an interest in heroics, amoral mercenary pilots still need somebody to shoot down. This chapter is about those folks.

We say "villains" and "baddies" but really, many of the Threats can be somewhat morally neutral, or even be the "good guys" in an encounter with a morally dubious player group. Protagonist-centric morality is just sort of part of the mindset of being a combat pilot for hire.

Then again, some of these things are pure evil, no two ways about it. Clockwerks are demons bound to steel, Leviathans are killing machines, and the Goths are the worst that people can be. The purpose of this game isn't to make players feel bad about their totally rad aeroplane fights, so it's okay to pit them against the worst of the worst.

In any case, threats are the action, but they aren't really the story. Most of the time you'll only encounter them once or twice before you move on to some new adventure and new enemy. That's good, keeps the variety up.

Creating Threats

When a new threat enters the game, grab a sheet of scrap paper and jot down a couple quick notes. What are they called, how do you recognize them, who is in charge, and what do they want? You don't have to tell the players any of that stuff yet, but you'll have it when you need it.

From this point, the threat operates in line with that basic goal and whatever sketch of a personality you came up with for their leader. The Red Talons are lead by Heinrich Kober and he's cruel and mercenary, and they want to force towns to pay them protection money. If they appear on-screen or if somebody talks about them, its to show them shaking somebody down or being mean. That's simple and can be followed easily, which keeps everyone on the same page.

The interesting stuff happens when either their objective changes, or their leadership changes. What happens when the towns fight off the Red Talons and leave them without income? What happens when Heinrich falls out of his plane and his kinder brother Manfred replaces him? Changing the goal or personality of a Threat can change a campaign.

Just remember to make humans human and give as much personality as you can. Describe each plane and how it has been decorated, give the pilot a name when it comes up, and keep them consistent as best you can by writing notes. Rivalries will emerge naturally from there.

Campaign Threats

As is usually the case in Flying Circus, stuff that's off-screen doesn't really matter and doesn't need to be tracked by anyone, including the GM. You can retroactively justify whatever direction they need to have taken if you come up with a mission later than they could slot into.

However, if players take particular interest in a threat and centre them, it pays to do the same and give them a longer-term plan. The best way to do this is literally to create a plan for them with multiple concrete steps, and then every routine, they achieve the next step in the plan. That information filters back to the players drip by drip until the players decide, you know, it's time to go do something about them, and then whatever the next step in their plan is... well, there you go, there's the mission for them to do.

Threats in the Air

Obviously, most of the time that players encounter a threat, it will be in the air. To track this, either print a bunch of these cards or record the same information on scrap paper.

ᴼᴾ€ Plane	WEAPON	HITS	DAMAGE
	LMG	4/3/2/1	8/6/4/2

Goth c.10 Scout

TOP SPEED	HANDLING			
17	91			

PILOT   CREW

NOTES
turn fighter
has a red stripe
aggressive pilot

GUNS   FUEL

STRUCTURE	STALL
36	6

ENGINE

Top speed and stall speed give useful ranges, Handling is used to determine Agility bonus in Dogfight when compared to player aircraft, and Structure is rough idea of the Toughness and Max Strain.

The dots are for vital part damage. The three dots under Handling represent control penalties: give a +1 to the attacking player for each. When attacks hit the engine, put one dot for light weapons and 2 for heavier weapons.

The weapon section just keeps the stats handy. Straightforward!

Keep notes about appearance, tactics, or pilot in the box. You can also jot down factors like the plane's last known altitude and rough speed estimate, if you don't think you can keep track of it.

Instead of assigning the various human threats specific aircraft, just select an aircraft profile from the end of this book or one of the aircraft catalogues. Worst comes to worse, use the emergency planes on the GM reference sheet or jot down some random numbers in the moment.

Threats on the Ground

Threats on the ground are much more simple. If they are human, two injury will probably knock them down, three will kill them, and use a weapon profile from page 172 to arm them. That's as easy as it gets.

For threats which are more complicated, their profiles for weapons, armour, abilities, and the amount of Injury they can withstand (HP) are recorded on their respective pages and can be dealt with there.

Generally, though, remember this isn't a game about fighting on the ground. It should be rare and terrifying, and the main goal of pilots caught in a land battle should be to run away and get to their aeroplanes.

That said, if the players stand their ground and do serious damage, remember to not have human enemies just throw their lives away. One way or another, end battles on the ground quickly either with the players put in an untenable situation or the enemy retreating.

Ace Pilots

Most Threat pilots are just regular pilots, competent and perhaps somewhat experienced but not outstanding the way the players are. They are still a threat, no two ways about it, but one-on-one, the players are much better than almost any NPC pilot they face.

To even the field a little, you can introduce Ace Pilots to the enemy squadron. An Ace uses the same air profile card as regular pilots, but you'll want to put some notes on the back, because Aces have special rules that make them better than average.

First thing's first: the Ace pilot has +5 Handling for their aircraft. Secondly, you'll want to select one or more special moves or features from the opposite page: one or two should be sufficient for most Aces, but a *Legendary Ace* feared throughout the skies might have three or more!

Any Threat can have an Ace pilot, and generally they should be obvious to the players through colour scheme, plane selection, or similar. Hidden aces are a good twist, but menace is positive too.

Even non-human foes can have aces, like particularly large and grumpy monsters. No foe should be completely homogenous: While they might not have discernible personalities, all pilots have come to fear the dreaded Clockwerk construct known only as Graf Tick-Tock.

- **Elite:** An additional +5 Handling.
- **Dogged:** A partial success on Dogfight isn't enough to escape from this Ace when they are on the attack.
- **Slippery:** This Ace always escapes after being attacked, even if you rolled a 16+ on Dogfight to attack them.
- **Born Lucky:** Ignore the first Crit scored against this Ace.
- **Power Dive:** This Ace can perform dives beyond their plane's abilities.
- **Ace Custom:** This Ace's aircraft is always faster than the players, always allowing them the option to speed away and disengage.
- **Stunt Flying:** An additional +10 Handling when flying at 1 or 0 Altitude.
- **Ironclad:** The Ace takes half as much damage as usual.
- **Magic-User:** This Ace has the ability to use magic, along the lines of the Witch or Fisher. Select an element for them to cast by. As a Hard Move, the ace can cast a spell using that element.
- **Immortal:** Killing this Ace isn't enough, they always come back for another mission. The details are up to the GM.
- **Marksman:** This Ace always chooses what they hit when they Crit.
- **Killer:** As a soft move, this Ace can kill an NPC pilot on the player's side. There's no chance of saving them, they just do it.
- **Phantom:** In between attacks, the Ace vanishes from sight and must be found again with Eyeball.
- **Blackthumb:** This ace can use a move to repair a broken part on their plane, often involving them wingwalking out to fix it.

Bandits

Probably the most common villains for a campaign's first encounter are going to be Bandits, so getting them right is important.

In Himmilgard, bandits tend to be small teams with one or more combat planes who take advantage of undefended villages or isolated travellers via robbery and shakedowns.

The usual racket is to threaten a town either directly (*"Pay us or we'll bomb you!"*) or indirectly (*"Pay us or we'll shoot down anyone who takes off from your town!"*), collecting money on a regular basis. Bandits will also try to force down travellers by intercepting and threatening them until they land in territory they control, and then either forcing them to pay a toll (often in the form of an exorbitant "refuelling cost") or simply taking the plane and killing, exiling, or ransoming the pilot and passengers.

There's a fine line to walk. Most bandits understand that the safest and most lucrative way to operate is as a nuisance, and the less violence they actually do, the better. Successful bandit groups never fire anything but warning shots, use threats of violence instead of actual violence, and leave their victims more inconvenienced than hurt, which allows them to operate in the long term. Bandits that shoot people, steal aircraft, and bomb towns for fun tend to either run out of victims or eventually piss somebody off who can shoot back. Either way, it's a bad move.

Banditry is and remains a serious problem because Himmilgard has planes and poverty in equal measure. The discovery of a forgotten old airbase, a militia not getting paid, or a Circus retiring and selling off their planes can plague a region with bandits for years. That said, it is becoming a rarer and rarer thing each year. Gone are the days of rampaging bandit armies made up of deserters.

Remember that bandits are not monsters that spawn out in the wilderness. They are people not unlike the pilots of the player's Circus, often desperate and doing what they can. Furthermore, bandits rarely just live out in the woods somewhere: they usually operate out of a town, which often subsidizes them to rob the neighbours or travellers for the extra external capital. These bandit groups can even pull double duty as a town militia.

Running a Bandit Group

The most basic job a Flying Circus might take is "There's some bandits annoying us. We will give you these many monies to make them stop." This is honestly a fine first session.

That said, adding more complexity right off the bat isn't bad either. What's likely going to happen when the bandits realize they've closed in on heavily armed planes is that they'll run. Do you shoot them in the back? What do you do when you find out they're working for a nearby town?

Bandits don't even have to fly. Their racket could be done nearly as easily with anti-aircraft guns, though that's not as fun or dynamic.

Describing Bandits

Bandits typically don't like drawing attention to themselves, and tend to fly fairly cheap, reliable aircraft with subdued paint jobs. They want to be threatening, but only up close. Browns, greys, and soft colours are common, and they usually go without insignia.

Bandit pilots either go for maximum anonymity, or create flamboyant alternate personas they can take off when the job is done. Sometimes bandits personas even outlives individual bandits!

Bandits can sometimes be treated as potential allies against greater threats. Late in a campaign they can even fairly harmless comic relief, like the air pirates in *Castle in the Sky* or *Porco Rosso*. They might be thieves and outlaws, but they live here too!

Bandit Moves

- Approach and threaten with signals and warning shots.
- Take what they can carry and leave quickly.
- Use misdirection to appear to have greater numbers.
- Flee to a nearby village that will defend them as their own.
- Tug at the heartstrings with a sob story.
- Take any deal that keeps them alive.

Pirates

Nobody really *wants* to be a bandit. It's not a very lucrative business model, and its often taken up from sheer need. Bandits try to play it smart, taking minimal risks to stay alive until they don't need to be bandits anymore.

Pirates are what happens when bandits get ambitious. They team up with like-minded fellows and cut ties to civilization, changing their goals from getting by to getting rich, and having fun along the way. Instead of enforcing tolls, they board and capture trade balloons. Instead of harassing travellers, they kidnap them for ransom or shoot them down as target practice. Instead of extorting settlements, they crush the militia, loot and burn the town, and have a party in the ashes.

In other words, pirates are Flying Circuses without the pretence, reduced to its rawest core. Living in the moment, not giving a damn, a nihilistic fantasy of a world without rules where they have the firepower.

Piracy can be an appealing life for many, a release from responsibilities, hardship, and cruel authority. Pirates often rally, in theory, around a political or cultural identity: they might see pillaging cozy towns as a class revenge fantasy, for example. In practice, the ideology is usually just an excuse, a framework to make their crimes seem justified.

Few pirate gangs last very long. Either they break up when the fun wears out and their conscience catches up, or they pick a fight they can't win.
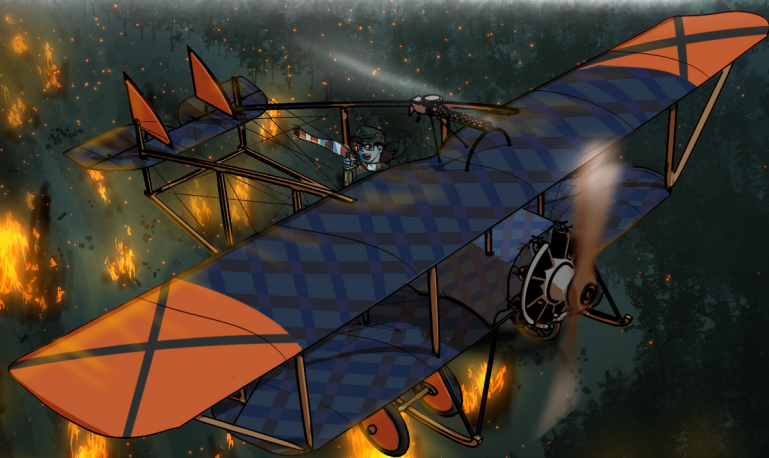
Running a Pirate Group

Pirates are basically the 'hardcore' form of bandits, who you can generally feel less bad about having to shoot down in exchange for them being much scarier. You can think of them as a Flying Circus which just attacks people and loots towns instead of taking on jobs.

Because they cut ties with the ground, pirates need to carry their mechanics, ground crew, and everyone else with them. This means that there will be at least twice as many 'civilian' pirates as combat pilots, and they'll either have a base they operate from or an airship that keeps them mobile. Pirate crews are typically held together by charismatic leaders, and they won't last without them. Give them a big personality and aesthetic!

Describing Pirates

There is a temptation to describe Pirates as, well, being like classic Caribbean pirates of the 16-18th century. The other way to describe them might be to lean into the imagery of vikings, which fits the aesthetic of Himmilgard a little better. A good compromise is that the northern pirates of the tropical areas do the Pirates of the Caribbean thing, and the southern groups do the Norse thing.

While bandits are kinda harmless and possibly even endearing, pirates are just straight up awful people. They are modelled on mercenary companies of the 30 Years War, who had a charming tendency to rampage around the countryside pretty much regardless of if they were getting paid for it. Where bandits are desperate, pirates are *entitled*, seeing the world as their playground and other people as not really deserving of empathy. Maybe this reminds you of some RPG groups?

Explicitly presenting a pirate group as a Flying Circus gone bad reminds the players that they really aren't too different.

Pirate Moves
- Approach and demand surrender.
- Surround and ambush from all sides.
- Board an airship with lines or gliders.
- Humiliate and take everything from the defeated.
- Flee once they begin to lose.
- Espouse a noble philosophy at odds with their actions.

Warlords

While the nations of the Old World are gone, not everyone is willing to accept that. Some minor states still linger, and new ones are established by would-be conquerers of all stripes. The largest, the Kingdom of Sopwith, still occupies a massive swath of territory. These are, by the standards of the Old World, pathetic powers, often less than a dozen communities, with 'armies' that number in the hundreds where once there were millions. But they are a seed of the terror that brought about the end.

A warlord adds to a campaign is a sense that there is a relatively stable authority. In this region, there's a flag, a king, people pay taxes. Your game takes on a very different tone when pilots navigate bureaucracy and aren't the only doers of violence that people tolerate.

One of the things that is important about the Warlords is that they are not, *necessarily*, evil people or evil causes. They can have noble origins, goals, and even leaders, and sometimes they really do bring peace and prosperity to the regions they rule. Inevitably, however, such kingdoms are always founded on violence and exploitation: somebody is being conquered, coerced, or ruled without having a meaningful say in the process.

Creating a Warlord

Central to a good Warlord is... well, a good Warlord. The archetypical image is somebody who styles themselves after old generals, but they could also be descendent of royalty, a wealthy ambitious merchant, or even a popular figure of the people whose revolutionary plans are spiralling out of control. The point is, there's a personality that drives them, and without that person the military and state they've created will cease to be. The players never even need to meet this person!

Though warlords are typically personally ambitious, they usually have a philosophical or ideological drive that'll underscore things. Often it'll be simple nostalgia: don't you wish you could go back to before the hard times? An extreme version of a Background is powerful: A Fisher warlord with a doomsday cult, a Student warlord digging up old technology, a Witch warlord (warlady?) forcefully bringing people back to nature...

Come up with an aesthetic for your warlord, define a few of their laws, and then put them in charge of a few villages. Simple as that.

Warlords as Threats

Flying Circuses aren't, as a rule, revolutionaries, and might not come into conflict with Warlords at first. A Warlord might make them jump through some hoops when they go to their villages, but they'll also pay well for jobs. They could turn on the Circus for breaking a law or something, but more interesting is the warlord's ambitions getting the better of them.

The classic Ghibli move is to have these military types try to harness a power they really should know better than to use, like reactivating a Leviathan Machine, cutting a deal with a Dragon, restarting poison gas factories, or throwing in with the Goths or Clockwerks. It's going to backfire on them, but it'll also hurt a lot of innocent people along the way.

A Warlord ought to have varied and numerous forces, but limited enough that losses inflicted add up. Perhaps two squadrons of aircraft, one or two airships or large bombers, and about a few hundred uniformed soldiers with rifles, grenades, and machine guns. When things get desperate, they can hire another Flying Circus! It's up to you if the Warlord is an ace pilot with a cool plane, or just a coward who hides behind their conscripts.

Warlord Moves

- Catch the pilots in violation of their laws.
- Fill the sky and ground with patrols.
- Make an unwise attempt to harness a greater evil.

Militia & Traders

Most towns have a militia of some kind of keep them safe from external threats as well as enforce internal order. Because only the very richest towns can afford to keep full-time pilots and soldiers on hand without them jumping ship to more lucrative mercenary groups, militia tend to be part-timers who aren't very skilled.

A town will have an Air Militia of 3+Wealth planes, an eclectic mix of wartime leftovers, home builds, and refurbished salvage, all painted the town colours. Most towns struggle to maintain enough fuel and ammunition for pilots to practice consistently.

Typically, a town will have one full-time member of the watch per fifty people. They might be like police, military, or simply night matchmen, and they will reflect their community: An military fort will have a platoon with rifles and helmets, while a cult might have a covert secret police. The watch of a coven might carry wands and have spy ravens. In extremely poor towns, a militia may be limited to muskets and homemade clubs.

It'll be helpful to figure out what role the militia plays in the community, the community's attitudes towards violence, and how the militia are recruited. In all cases, the militia represent an attempt to monopolize (or at least centralize) violence, and who this violence is directed at will tell you who qualifies as the in-group to power and who doesn't.

As travelling mercenaries, the players are almost always the out-group. A town where they aren't implies the power mostly rests with transient pilots and the capital they hold rather than with the citizens of the town. Needless to say, this is a precarious position for a community to be in.

Trade Companies & Post Services

Shipping companies range from lone pilots delivering sacks of letters to large companies operating fleets of zeppelins: they are as diverse as Flying Circuses. Assign companies Wealth values like towns, and arm them with escort planes accordingly. Losing cargo will lower their Wealth.

A number of 'Post Services' exist that only carry personal letters and news. Clearly marked, attacking them is poorly regarded by nearly everyone.

Whalers

Most mythologies revere the Sky-Whales: Gothic mythology holds they control the weather, the Skyborn believe they are the spirits that taught humanity flight, and the Rishonim believe they are earthy manifestation of angels. They are peaceful, gentle, and distant beings.

Industrialists saw only the profit that could be carved from their bodies.

Many consider whalers the lowest of the low, but the lure of profit is strong enough that they still find markets. Whalebone allows planes to be artificially lighter, while their oil can be refined into Luftane, a powerful lifting gas. Whalebone can be taken ethically from Sky-Whale graveyards and luftane can be synthesized, but hunting is cheaper.

Whalers operate at altitudes of up to 6000 meters, and the byproducts of the oil extraction are aerosolized acids. As a result, whalers must wear pressurized breathing masks and heavy clothing. Their zeppelins are armoured and filled with Luftane: they harpoon whales, drag them inside, and butcher and refine on-site. Whalers are usually accompanied by a smear of black smoke, a byproduct of the refining process.

Whaler Airship   Air Threat

A typical whaling airship, now decades old and barely operational.

Max Speed	Lift	Handling	Toughness
14	65	60	45

Luftane gasbags. 32 crew. x4 Engines. 8 Coverage Armour 2.
Six prow harpoon turrets, two twin LMG turrets. 1 Escort Fighter.

Flying Circuses

Probably the most dangerous threat to a Flying Circus is another Flying Circus. Nobody has as much combat experience in the air, and as they constantly reinvest their profits into improving their lethal potential, they'll have tricks that few can match.

Generally speaking, any Circus you run into will have a solid core of ace pilots, at least one, while the others will be skilled but less experienced. Most Circuses are between 4-8 planes, with large and successful ones as large as twenty, and they'll have one or more airships or cargo planes to move their group crew, spare planes, and luxuries. Often, a Circus will have a mechanical, thematic, or possibly political theme, like speed freak futurists, a fischer cult, or reenactors of a wartime squadron.

There's many reasons two Flying Circuses could come into conflict. The most common is that they are simply hired for two contrary jobs. If you're escorting a cargo zeppelin, and another Circus is hired to shoot down that zeppelin, there's not really a way for that to end with everyone happy.

Furthermore, Circuses could come to blows through competition. A client might hire two Circuses for the same job, reasoning they'll only need to pay for one. The conflict might be independently driven: a morally upstanding Circus could take it on themselves to take out one who are glorified pirates, while a successful group might be ganged up on by their rivals to even the playing field. Or it might just be that they're drinking in the same bar you are, and they took your favourite spot...

Famous Squadrons

Checkmate

The largest Circus in history, Checkmate started as a deserting Gotha air wing. The squadron is so large it has a hierarchy, with ranks named for chess pieces, and it can throw as many as fifty planes into a fight.

Leader: Rosa Heitmeyer, ruthless profit-chaser.
Roundel: A 3x3 checkerboard pattern inside a red square.

Red Talons

The Red Talons were once fairly well-regarded, but after the death of their leader and disagreement over jobs, they fractured into many small bandit groups. Bands are closely bound by a sense of collective guilt.

Leader: Each gang has their own leader. None are kind people.
Roundel: Landing gear and underside painted red.

Torschlusspanik

Translating roughly to "Mid-Life Crisis", Torschlusspanik is made up entirely of Great War veterans, each an ace pilot. These older pilots take jobs infrequently and cautiously, almost always scoring big payouts.

Leader: Madlene Goldhaber, cautious planner. Safety over profit.
Roundel: A purple, white, and red cockade.

ZG Valkyrie

ZG Valkyrie is a specialized outfit equipped entirely with heavy bombers. If you want something removed from the map, this all-female squadron should be your first choice. The squadron is so expensive to run that they mostly sit at their base in Albatros, taking job offers by telegraph.

Leader: Beate Rickenbacker, cynic. Noted environmentalist.
Roundel: Each plane has a black upper wing deck with feathers in white.

Winged Arrows

Originally a Skyborn protection squadron, Winged Arrows began taking mercenary jobs a decade ago. They are elite escort fliers and have extremely stringent recruiting standards and aircraft selection.

Leader: Achyut Dani. Determined to protect the cargo at all costs.
Roundel: A black arrow flanked on either side by peacock feathers.
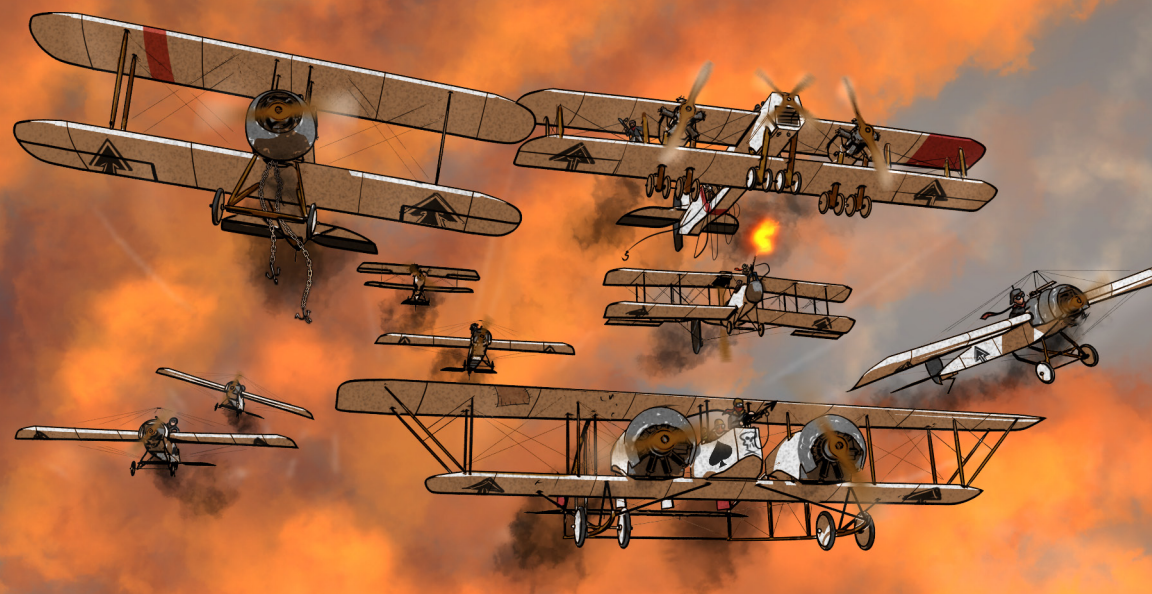
Goth Armies

Of the many people with a stakes in the horrors of the Old World, none had benefited more than the generals of the old militaries and their civilian counterparts in the military-industrial complex. The end of the world was, for them, a chance to rebuild it in their twisted image.

These officers took what loyal troops they could, the machines they could gather, and marched back to their dying cities. They commandeered refugee camps and launched costly salvage missions to rebuild an industrial base that could sustain their military endeavours. Mercifully, most of these groups collapsed from rebellions and infighting, or simply dispersed for lack of cohesion.

But in the old capital of the Gotha Empire, one such organization survived, claiming the mantle of the fallen Old World. Press-ganging anyone they could get their hands on, the Goth Armies expanded, reclaiming lost lands for a long-dead Emperor and the glory of the Forever War.

The Goths are an existential and horrifying threat whose philosophy and methods are fundamentally at odds with the kinder world which is slowly emerging from the ashes. Himmilgard is a land of great and terrible beasts, but none are as monstrous as these men.

Meta Stuff

The Goths exist as a sort of intersection between the relentless militarism of Imperial Germany, the barbarious imagery of their historical namesake, and the looming spectre of fascism. They are a relentlessly evil and controlling force who do unspeakable things and yet believe they have the moral high ground over the weak and impure.

The Goths have their metatextual roots in the War Boys from *Mad Max: Fury Road*, though they also bear considerable resemblance to Caesar's Legion of *Fallout: New Vegas*. As in both their inspirations, they are a brainwashed army of too-young men, fighting for a philosophy of hatred and the approval of old men and elites who see them as nothing but tools. They glorify death and violence, replace a working society with brutal discipline, and their industry is fuelled by slave labour. It's *bad.*

How much you want to go into the implications of this sort of social structure is going to depend heavily on your group. For most, it's enough to just say "*They're goddamn nazis!*", and people will get the idea.

Running the Goths

The Goth Armies make for a good large scale human villain who can provide a looming or imminent threat. As a military force instead of bandits or criminals, they raid and conquer and must be stopped.

You can use any aircraft for them, but multi-seaters with turret guns help give that *Mad Max* feel. Use weird weapons like wing blades and flamethrowers for that up close feel, and light monoplane fighters as a sort of motorcycle analog. Goth soldiers are armed with rifles, pistols, grenades, and melee weapons, and often have armour (usually leather, with a smattering of steel). Elite soldiers and officers carry automatic weapons and should be heavily armoured, and just about every Goth is tweaking on amphetamines during combat.

The Goth's industry being fuelled by stolen planes and stolen people should be represented directly in how they attack the players. Their soldiers are rewarded for taking planes intact and people alive, so they think nothing of leaping between aircraft or onto balloons to take them and their pilots at the edge of a sharpened shovel. To facilitate this, their turret guns can often additionally shoot harpoons, and their heavier planes have handholds for extra crew to come along.

Describing Goths

Goth planes are stark white, usually dirty and worn, with angular stylized spade roundels, more traditional Gothic spades, and skulls. Important people like aces or officers add a red stripe somewhere on the aircraft.

Goth soldiers sit somewhere in a continuum between the nightmare imagery of World War One soldiers in trenchcoats and gas masks, and the stripped-down, punkish post-apocalyptic raider. There's a uniform under there, black and white, but atop it is belts, chains, straps, harnesses, steel and leather armour. They cover their face in scarves, masks, goggles, and helmets, and carry cut-down rifles, bayonets, and sharpened spades.

They are a fevered vision of soldiers carrying on a war that destroyed the world, and they represent everything about that old order that is despicable. They are at once the conformity of soldiers and the random, awful violence of raiders, their actions equal part mechanized violence and pointless machismo. In short, they are the exaggerated caricature of the military-industrial complex and the imperialistic patriarchy that lead to the downfall of the world. They are fascists, but with the illusion of discipline and order stripped away to expose the marauder.

Their leaders and officers should particularly exemplify this and draw it to absurdity. The footsoldiers are indoctrinated, brainwashed, but the officers believe it because it benefits them, wear the absurd getup because they really think it makes them look strong and frightening and cool. When introducing an officer, show some way in which they are trying too hard to be badass. A big gold skull belt buckle? Really dude?

Buried under a Goth uniform and the post-apocalyptic nonsense, there's a young man trying to project strength in a culture that destroys weakness. When stripped of power to hurt others, the footsoldiers can sometimes be sympathetic, maybe pitiable. Their leaders, though, are always monsters.

Goth Moves

- Jump daringly between planes.
- Attack savagely and up close.
- Take a captive straight out of their plane.
- Die gloriously and absurdly for the cause.
- Fall to pieces when their leader is dead.
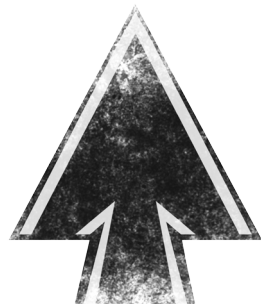
Goth Raiding Plane — Air Threat

A specialized aircraft designed to carry a large number of soldiers for boarding and raiding. No two are alike, but all have STOL capabilities.

Max Speed	Stall Speed	Handling	Structure
17	12	60	65

Covered in pintle light machine guns turrets, at least three.
Carries up to 18 soldiers and two pilots. Can land in small areas.

Goth Gilder — Air Threat

A cheap way of carrying soldiers to the battlefield, larger raiding planes will sometimes carry up to a half-dozen of these craft strung in a line behind them. Released, they drift down to the target filled with soldiers.

Max Speed	Stall Speed	Handling	Structure
-	15	80	24

Carries up to 10 soldiers.
Will have hatches men can pop out from to shoot.

The Clockwerks

Nobody knows where the Clockwerk men came from. If you ask people, they always seem new: most people insist they were invented just before the war somewhere in the Macchi Republic, the pinnacle of prewar technology. But if you look through the historical record, they show up again and again, always as a new and wondrous machine, back to the court of Sigvird himself.

For the Clockmen are not machines. Some theorize they are for industry what the fae are for nature, spirits of technology itself. Others say they are demons from another world. Yes, they may be built of steel and brass, of mechanisms, but do not be fooled. The true identity of these machines is as a pact between humanity and something else, bound up in golden keys. These keys are the animating force for the machines, the turning imbuing a metal frame with the spirit trapped within, for a time.

Clockmen have rules. They cannot harm those that carry their keys, and they must obey their orders. But don't for a second mistake this for loyalty, for the clockman is always scheming, always looking for a loophole to free their will and pursue their own agenda.

The war and the deaths it brought freed thousands of these machines; servants, soldiers, and factory workers. They gathered their numbers and left. That could have been the end of it, but humanity and the clockwerks are still bound in a pact. They cannot turn the keys that give them life. They need human hands.

Running the Clockwerks

Inscrutable and unswayed by emotion and morality, the clockwerks are a thoroughly inhuman foe whose sinister purpose will put them at odds with human settlements, and thus with player characters.

An important thematic element of the Clockwerk is that they never speak: the players must work out their motivations and objectives through context. Emphasis this inhuman nature at every turn.

If the key is pulled from a clockwerk machine, it will take a few final actions, then stop working. The keys are their souls, so all the other clockwerks will rush to get them back.
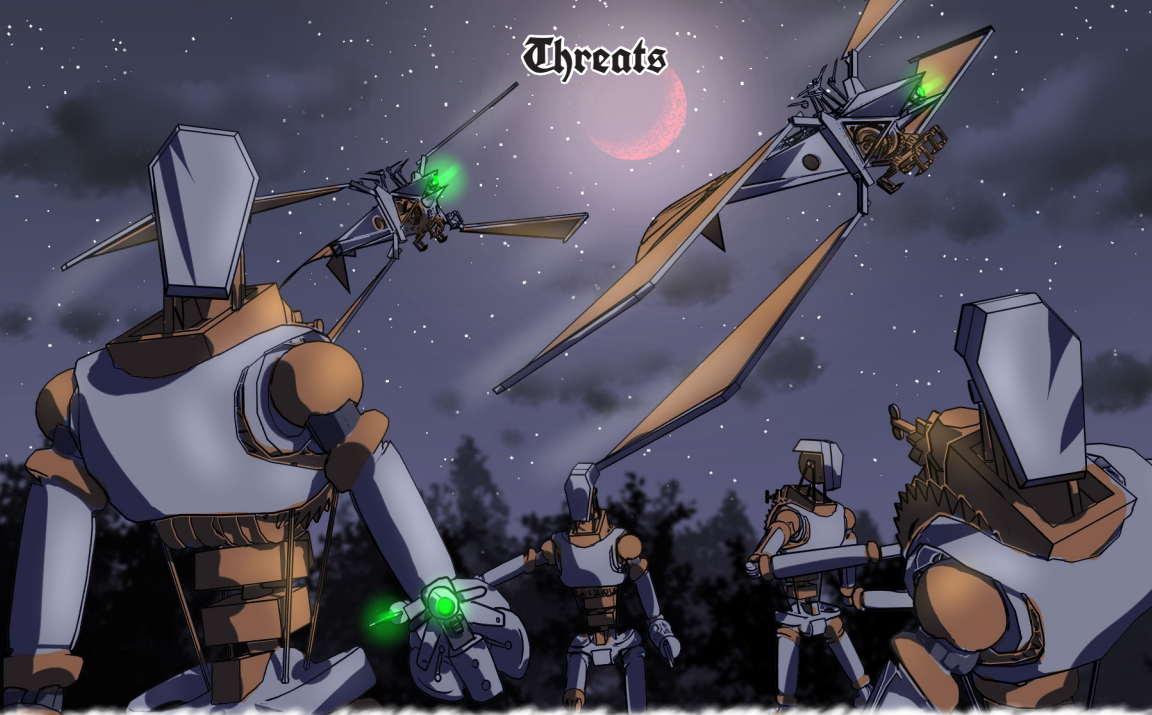
Clockwerk Fighter   Air Threat

A machine resembling a cross between a biplane fighter and a delicate clockwork bird. These machines fly silently on spring-powered wings.

Max Speed	Stall Speed	Handling	Structure
19	10	95	20

Choose 1: x4 Pneumatic Machine Guns, Heat Ray, x4 Clockwerk Missiles
Melee Attack for 2d10 Damage
1 Thickness 5 Coverage Armour

Clockwerk Man   Ground Threat

A servant of the Clockwerks in roughly humanoid form.

Limbs can turn into dart guns, heat rays, and blades (any weapon type).
Cannot be blinded or confused with visual stimuli.
Has 1 Thickness 3+ Armour.

Clockwerks Moves

- Obey the orders of their keyholders.
- Molt into bigger, more dangerous forms.
- Pursue their quarry indefatigably.
- Take people alive to turn their keys.
- Rebuild their allies with whatever is available.
- Chase down those who take their keys.

Leviathan Machines

Leviathan is the name given by the people of Himmilgard to any one of the massive autonomous war machines built by various powers through the Great War, each a unique and terrible device.

These machines are a combination of industrial vehicle, magical power, and stolen Skyborn artefacts. They have a simple electric autopilot, and they were first deployed for uprooting and destroying the Wild so civilization could take its place. They were later rebuilt into war machines, with armour, guns, and a directive to destroy any settlement in their path with explosives, fire, and poison gas. They are a rare sight, but any of them which still move presents a threat to everyone in the region.

Running the Leviathans

A Leviathan's armour is meters thick, they carry gas dischargers, massive heat rays, and flak batteries. They might be flying battleship, or they might be tanks or walkers with height measured in altitude bands (3-10). You must target individual parts like gears, weapons, exhausts, and reactors: give each hit points, an Altitude level, and an armour value.

A sequence of parts revealed in turn as they are destroyed is best. Perhaps players will need to bomb off the cover atop it and then fly inside to shoot the power crystal, or they need to destroy all its gun turrets and land a team of engineers. Maybe they need to fly a cable around its legs to trip with a series of Dogfight! moves before finishing it. Put key weak spots higher than the ones that reveal them to force player to climb!

The Leviathan is best as part of another threat: Hijacked by Warlords, Clockwerks, Goth forces, that sort of thing. It's the ultimate symbol of war and environmental destruction and the perfect end to a campaign, filling a role not unlike the God Warriors of *Nausicaä Valley of the Wind,* the battle airships of *Howl's Moving Castle,* or the titual *Castle in the Sky*.

Leviathan Moves

- Close the distance to its target. (Use a clock!)
- Crush everything in its path.
- Fire turreted guns in a huge barrage.
- Launch automated fighter planes.
- Reveal an alternate, possibly supernatural form.
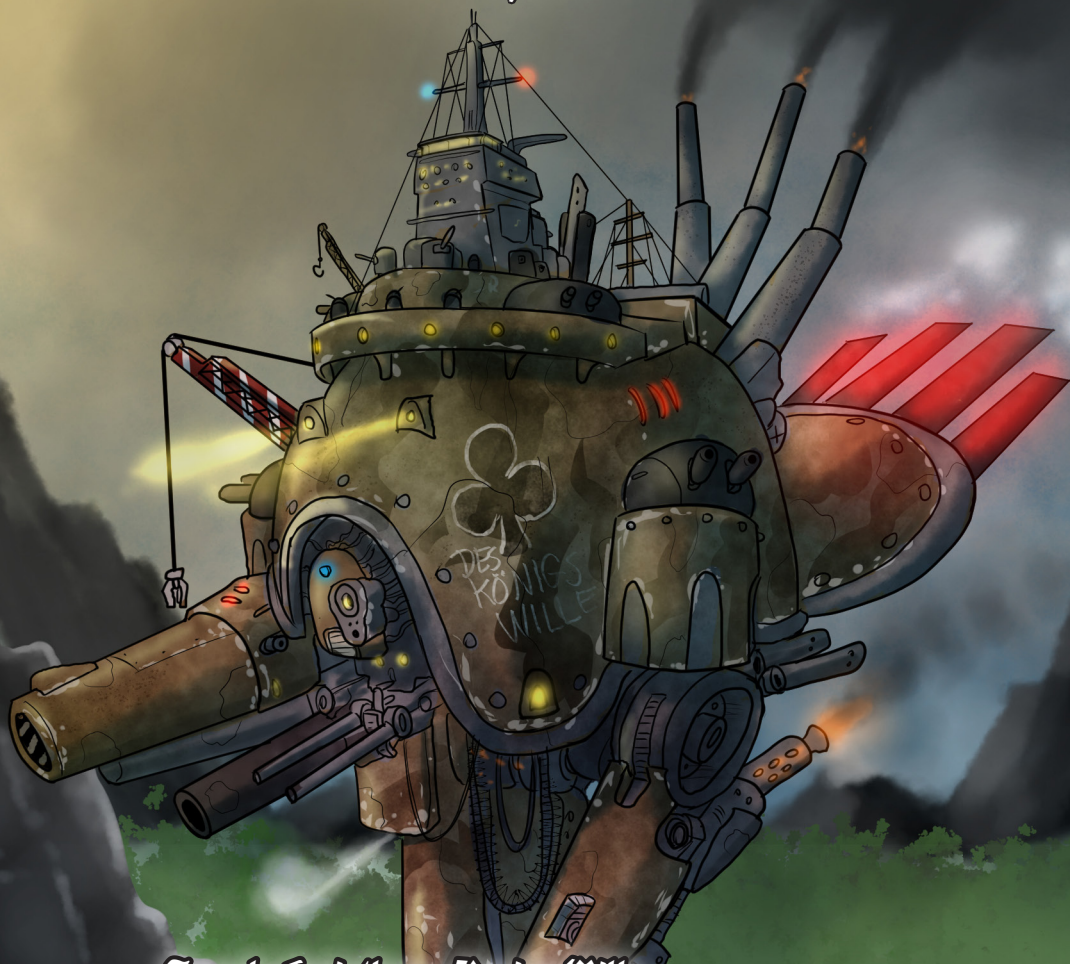
Sample Leviathan ~ Konigs Wille

- Walker. 7 Altitude Bands Tall. Walks at Speed 6.
- Main Weapon: Dragon's Breath Cannon.
- Turrets fire Flak Barrages, or Heavy Machine Guns up close.
- Crane can launch up to 4 pulsejet fighters (1 at a time).
- Weakness 1: Rear radiator panels (Alt. 5, 24 HP, Armour 1.) Destroyed, it will open rear panels and expose coolant.
- Weakness 2: Coolant tanks (Alt. 4, 2 HP, Armour 4). Pierced, it will slow down to half speed and expose the power core.
- Weakeness 3: Power core (Alt. 4, 10 HP, Armour 1). A very small target nestled deep inside. Will also be exposed for a minute before and after the main cannon fires.
- Can be boarded to try and take control. Defended by automated turrets and robot guards (use Clockwerk profiles).

The Fae

Himmilgard is divided. The world of Men is carved from the earth by blade and fire, and where the boundaries of towns end is The Wild, the sovereign territory of the Fae. The borders of these regions is a tense one.

The Fae are a feudal heirarchy of supernatural creatures: intelligent, but without the familiar drives of humans. At the bottom are imps and wisps, serfs blending into the natural ecosystem, and above them are the landed nobility of kobolds, dyriads, and elves. At the top are their lords and ladies, creatures of great power over species or elements, all serving (and scheming against) the High King and Queen of the Wild Court.

The Fae are of an alien nature, often incomprehensible to people, and they have at best a loose relationship with human conceptions of laws, perception, time, and morality. Most are invisible to humanity, concerned only with preserving their lands and feuding with rivals. Sacrifices or formalities to placate them in exchange for resources or passage are often enough. However, there are a minority of fae creatures who take an unhealthy interest in human beings: unhealthy to both them and to us.

If you crash in the wild, an encounter with the fae can be far more dangerous than anything that might happen to you in the air.

Running the Fae

The Fae in *Flying Circus* are a mash-up of various Greek, Germanic, and Gaelic conceptions of faeries, presented as a deadly and unpredictable threat looming in the places between civilization. Faeries usually don't attack out of the blue: They talk, they smile, they *make demands.*

Maybe the Fae are upset about damage done: a crashing plane, a stray bomb, that sort of thing, and all they want is compensation. The real trouble is if they've decided that the things humans offer them are *fun.* Song, booze, affection, gold, promises, sex... an obsessed faerie will make up offenses, offer deals, tell lies, or even threaten to get it.

Needless to say, *this can be, and is designed to be, intensely uncomfortable.* Pay close attention to the tone of your game and the needs and boundaries of your players. Ensure everyone is well versed in the safety tools before you go into it. Be careful, and err on the side of caution if you need to.

The Fae can be defeated in combat, but the threat they present is always enough that players are compelled to at least hear them out and try to negotiate. If they aren't being reasonable, they'll invariably be *pathetic*: obsessed fae are narcissistic addicts, fixated on some sensation or aspect of humans. The power imbalance is not as great as it first appears, because the Fae are desperate, and that means they can be manipulated.

- Wisp: Harmless glowing lights that spy, whisper, and mark paths.
- Kobold: Form of a small animal, acts as messengers & servants.
- Elf: Nimble, stealthy, proud, armed with bows and knives. 3HP.
- Dryad: Blends into trees. 1 Armour, +5 save, 6HP. Hammer attack.
- Nymph: Swift and cunning. Knife attack. Dodges attacks on a 3+.

Fae Moves

- Confront the players demanding deference and sacrifice.
- Kick the players up the chain to more dangerous faeries.
- Entrance with beautiful illusions or promises.
- Reveal how desperate they are for what they want.
- Hold the players to what they percieve as a promise.
- Strike out with sudden, swift, and terrible violence.
- Command Beasts to act on their behalf.
- Let the humans go when they aren't fun anymore.

Beasts

Himmilgard is home to many terrifying creatures, any one of which can be a threat to human pilots flying between towns. The end of the world has disturbed the ecosystem for many of these creatures, and desperate, they have begun to target humans, driven by hunger or supernatural forces.

Beasts of the Air

- Snatch a pilot right out of the cockpit.
- Call on other nearby beasts.

A beast lives until its health runs out. Critical hits on Beasts of the Air will have narrative effects of the GM's choosing, from blinding or enraging to imminent or sudden death.

Grand Raptor   Air Threat

In the highest mountains are predator birds with wingspans ten meters wide, which see the pilots of aeroplanes as a tasty treat. They resemble eagles, falcons, and vultures, but are smarter, faster, and more deadly.

Max Speed	Stall Speed	Handling	Health
19	5	120	16

Talons & Beak (2d10 damage melee)
Eagle (+1d10 damage), Falcon (+5 Speed), Vulture (+10 Health)

Sky Screamer   Air Threat

Diving from the clouds, a sky screamer has an methane-burning jet engine and a horn for impaling prey, be it animal or aeroplane.

Max Speed	Stall Speed	Handling	Health
30	10	85	12
Spike (3d10 melee). Incindiary weapons do triple damage.			

Cloud Jelly   Air Threat

Tales abound at high altitude, of creatures made from lightning and cloudstuff, filled with malevolent intelligence and hostile will.

Max Speed	Stall Speed	Handling	Health
10	10	30	-
Lightning Arc (2 hit 5 damage long) Lives above 40 altitude, cannot be harmed by conventional means.			

Beasts of the Ground

Beasts of the ground are a diverse lot ranging from familiar animals to monstrous creatures of myth and legend. They won't throw their lives away for a kill, unless they are acting on the orders of their Fae masters.

- Wolf: 3HP, 2Hit/3Dam/AP0 bite, stealthy, smart, packs of 3-12.
- Arthopod: 2HP, 1Hit/2Dam/AP1 sting, mindless, 2 Armour, +4 save. Swarms in large numbers in dark or poisoned spaces.
- Boar: 4HP, 1Hit/4Dam/AP1 tusks, tough and relentless, alone or stampedes of 30-50. Hunt by smell.
- Bear: 6HP, 1Hit/5Dam/AP0 claw, very mad, may wear armour.

Gremlins

A chattering little fae critter, gremlins mean no harm, but love taking apart machines. If a gremlin gets into a plane, it will cause all kinds of mechanical problems. It can't be hurt, but it can be appeased and even trained with sacrifices, like watches or music boxes.

A trained gremlin gives a hold each routine. When spent, roll Maintenance +3. On a miss, it gets carried away and breaks something else!

The Poisoned Cities

Everything in the world has magical resonance, with even the foulest products of war industry no exception. The world didn't simply die to poison: It died to a malevolent hex, dark curses against life itself distilled and bottled and unleashed. And they still linger.

Poison Gas

Almost every urban area left in the known world is still blanketed by thick poisonous fog. Either the gas is magically resistant to dissipation, is still being produced by the bombs that were dropped, or the natural processes working the poison out of the ground are creating new toxins.

All poison gas functions in three progressive stages. Every time a character gets exposed to the gas, or if time has passed and they still haven't escaped it, advance the clock by one.

- <u>1 Tick:</u> No lasting harm done, but there's frightening warning signs of some kind.
- <u>2 Ticks:</u> Early Symptoms manifest. No Injury yet, but potential relevant Disadvantage on rolls or other narrative consequences.
- <u>3 Ticks:</u> Characters take Injury, Stress, and other effects as the poison fully takes hold.

Subsequent exposure past this point is usually a good point to ask if the character dies or not, and will be lethal to NPCs.

Rather than having a set list of poison gases, you should come up with new ones as needed, aiming for a sort of revulsive horror. Real poison gases are a good starting point: phosgene, chlorine, and mustard gas are all horrifying weapons with unique and awful effects.

- A toxin so completely lethal that nothing decays. Everything and everyone is dead, but perfectly preserved.
- The gas is a sentient thing that creeps and probes and follows.
- A cloud of particles, like chalk dust, that turns those who breathe it to stone. The city is filled with petrified, statue-like corpses.
- Rapidly spreading plants and fungi whose spores grow inside the body. The city is an overgrown jungle filled with oversized insects.
- The gas doesn't kill you. It just hides the thing that does.

The Restless Dead

The unburied dead can leave shades who find themselves unable to move on, and in the cities, there was often nobody left to tend to the bodies.

Most shades just relive the last hours of their lives, over and over, but some serve the malevolent will of the chemical gas itself. When things disrupt their routine, they react: sometimes with understandable wartime fear of invading outsiders, sometimes with unnatural coordinated hostility.

Shades might be little more than silhouettes made of poison gas, they might be real bodies propped up by tendrils of sentient chemicals, or they might be something in between. <u>They are not zombies</u>: they are sad reflections of the dead, not shambling corpses that eat human flesh.

You might be able to dissipate or destroy an individual shade with sheer violence, but it is more likely you'll need to trick, evade, or outrun them. Shade aircraft are immune to Critical Hits: you must wear them down until they fall apart. If you can talk to them, they might not have much to say... at least at first. Only two things can really placate a shade: being convinced they're really dead, or being given hope they might live.

Shade Moves

- Follow the pilots from just out of sight.
- Confront the pilots as though they were wartime intruders.
- Confuse the pilots for somebody they knew from life.
- Reach out, grasp at the pilots, and beg for help.
- Pull gas protection off of pilots to spread the poison.

Dragons

A dragon isn't merely a creature: it's an ancient malevolence, centuries or even millenia old, gnawing at the roots of the world. It's said that every ill that plagues mankind, mortality itself even, was taken on in exchange for a wish granted from a dragon. They are thinking, scheming beings, at once both vastly more powerful and more intelligent than any human, yet also relatable in their startlingly fallibility.

Dragons see themselves as the true masters of Himmilgard: they've been here longer than anything else, they'll be here long after we're gone. Though seen in human mythology as an ultimate, apocalyptic evil, the dragons just see their continent as infested with an irritating pest. They simply figure it's easier to wait for us to die out than to track us all down.

It is rare these days that dragons even bother to spread their wings and take to the skies: more and more of them have taken to simply slumbering with their riches until the end of the world, when they can finally have the place back. If they do awaken, it is either because a human has come to them looking to make a deal, or a because a human has gone back on that deal and is in desperate need of immolation.

But that's so much effort. Perhaps they can just go back to sleep.

Fielding a Dragon

Picture a dragon with steel skin, jet engines, a nuclear laser, approximate knowledge of all things that were, are, or will be, and a hangover. It's that.

Dragon			Air Threat

If the GM has to use this profile, you've made a mistake.

Max Speed	Stall Speed	Handling	Health
30-40	0	20-40	40-80

Energy Beam (Roll 1d20. 3d10 damage on 11-15, auto-kill on a 16+.)
Psychic Control (see below), <AP3 Attacks do no damage (but can crit)

Dragons are lazy and only fight if they really have to. They much prefer to talk, being remarkably personable. They know they hold all the cards, so good luck *Pressing the Issue*, but they'll entertain an amusing human.

Dragons have limited powers over the minds of humans. If you are indoctrinated by a dragon, they can either compel or try to prevent an action. This is offered as a choice: comply, or retain your free will and roll +your lowest stat. On a miss, take 3 Stress. 11-15, 2 Stress, 16+, 1 Stress.

Dragons have desires, like retrieving an egg, killing a traitor, or destroying a war machine that offend them, but why expend the effort? A human can do it for them, after all, and they can temporarily part with some riches.

Dragon Moves

- Offer a generous reward for a dangerous job.
- Subtly indoctrinate a nearby human.
- Burn those who annoy them, then go back to sleep.

Dragon Eggs

The eggs of a dragon, which are said to incubate for a century, are made of gold. Many a foolhardy adventurer have tried to spirit one away. It usually doesn't end well.

Dragon Eggs have the same indoctrination ability as the full-grown version, and will try to use them to protect itself, get returned to its parent, or wreath itself in comfortable flame.
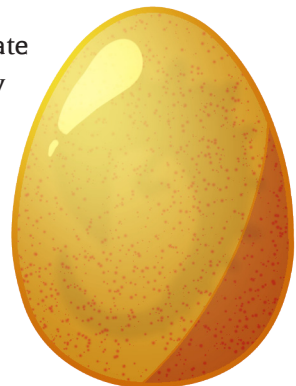
Setting

The Land of Himmilgard

Himmilgard is the continent that the adventures of *Flying Circus* take place on. It is a fantasy world that draws inspiration from the history of Central Europe, having a historical arc that mimics or invokes real life history: the Germanic peoples encountered by the Romans, the long and tumultuous history of the Holy Roman Empire, the unification of Germany in the 19th century, and the culture and economic effects of the First World War and subsequent revolution of 1918-19.

Himmilgard is a place where magic and technology exist, not side by side, but as opposing forces that frequently escape the control of the human population. It is not the only place in the world: there exists other lands beyond the seas and the scorching equatorial desert. However, these places are outside the scope of the campaign setting for the most part, and mostly inaccessible to the people living in Himmilgard.

The first and most important thing about this setting is that it is flexible. There is no central canon that must be adhered to, no details that absolutely must exist. The playbooks and cards are all that really matter.

Geography

Himmilgard is a sub-equatorial continent on a planet much like our own. It's slightly larger than North America, an utterly enormous space, and is a place of geographical extremes. Massive snow-capped mountains and deep valleys cover through every part of the continent: there's almost no natural flat ground of significant size anywhere.

As it is sub-equatorial, Himmilgard gets colder the farther south you go, and warmer as you head north. The west coast is also generally warmer than the east coast, due to tidal effects and/or magic.

The continent is hemmed in by natural barriers on all sides. To the west and east are massive oceans which, to the best knowledge of most of the population, cannot be crossed even with modern technology. Certainly, nobody has left and come back. To the north, the neighbouring continent of Vought has a small amount of habital coastline before giving way to a scorching and seemingly endless desert. Finally, to the south is the icy shelf that eventually leads to the South Pole.

Outside Himmilgard

Himmilgard is not the entire world, and the people who live there know that, at least in theory. The world is a sphere and other continents presumably exist beyond the seas and desert: there are countless rumours of these far-off lands, but there is little concrete information.

The most notable aspect of Himmilgard to us would probably be the night sky. In addition to the beautiful carpet of stars, mostly unmarred by city lights, the world is orbited by three moons. These moons are culturally and spiritually connected to the three great rivers that run through their continent and the three Goddesses they represent.
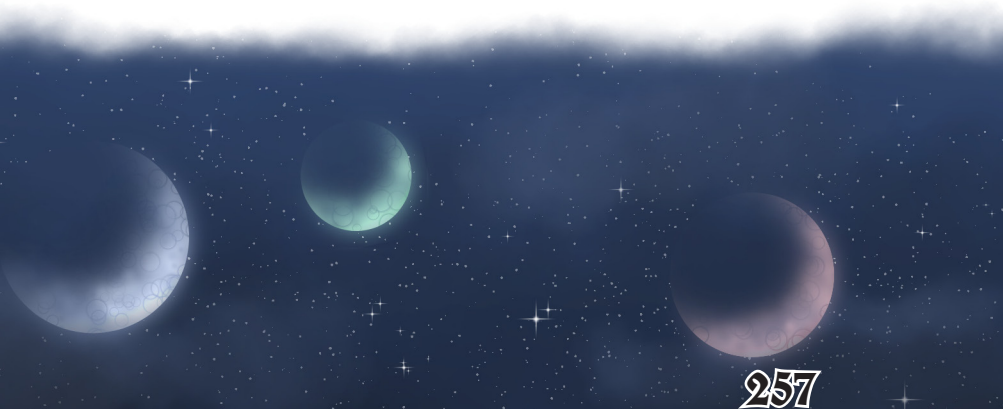
Regions

Himmilgard can be divided into a number of regions by tradition, climate, politics, culture, and their relationship with the three great rivers that cut through the continent. There are many rivers in Himmilgard, obviously, but these three have particular geographical and cultural significance.

These rivers are, from west to east, the Doana, the Rhona, and the Elba, named shared with the three goddesses of Himmilvolk mythology and the three moons. These rivers originate in the Great Mountains in the northern part of the continent, and snake unnaturally down through the landscape to empty into the Dark Sea in the far south. Each river is said to have a character that colours the landscape around it.

Doana is imagined as the youngest and most dynamic of the Goddesses. Her river runs through the lush western coast, a warm and beautiful place. There you will find the the vast tangled woodland of Lohner where the Wild Court is said to rest, the rocky Schuckert Highlands, and the Dorand Lowlands, an expanse of flat land artificially reclaimed from the sea.

Rhona is the warrior mother, and her river runs over the supposed centre and origin of human civilization on the Gotha Plateau, down through the stark and isolated Albatros Valley and the mineral rich Fokker Mountains. It was poisoned by the deployment of chemical weapons in the last war, and while the taint has faded, the river and the land are not yet healed.

Elba is often depected as a wise old woman, and her side of the continent can often feel starker, colder, more ancient. The eastern coast is dominated by vast, well-worn cliffs and hardy people. Here are the stark expanses of Euler, the swamps of the Voisin, the industrialized cliff cities of Damlier and the rainy Island of Sopwith, where the last Kingdom clings to life.

Above the Great Mountains are lands somewhat more culturally isolated, where the climate changes from temperate to tropical. This area provides vital goods to the continent: sugar, cotton, and castor oil. The Vought continent has a small habitable area before giving way to endless desert.

The land around the Dark Sea is home to the Fischer people, who live all around the coast. To the far south, the Antarctic circle contains dozens of colonies, most built around the extraction and refinement of oil.

Himmelgard
The World of Flying Circus

1000 Kilometers

Continent of Vought

Caproni Archipelago

Macchi Peninsula

Loring Hills

Hanriot Highlands

Lohner Forest

Great Mountains

Islands of Sopwith

Daimler Coast

Gotha Plateau

Schuckert Highlands

Euler Valley

Eastern Sea

Albatros Valley

Western Sea

Dorand Lowlands

Fokker Mountains

Vosin Valley

Dornier Delta

The Dark Sea

Sikorsky Peninsula

Sablatnig Steppe

Demographics

Nobody is really sure what the population of Himmilgard is, save that it's a lot lower than it used to be. The conventional wisdom is that the Great War, its apocalyptic finale, and the unrest that followed cut the population in half. These lost generations have skewed the population young, and most people over thirty are deeply haunted by what they've seen. The youth have collectively agreed that it's best not to dwell on it.

Most of the population live in rural communities scattered haphazardly across the continent. Anywhere with a resource worth gathering or land worth clearing probably has a small village. The vast majority of towns have less than a thousand people in them, and only a handful of places with more than ten thousand inhabitants survive.

Through generations of cultural exchange and imperialist conquest, the most of the continent shares a fairly similar set of cultural values, iconography, clothing, food, and so forth, though there are regional variations. *Gotisch* (Gothic) has emerged as the dominate language of the Himmilvolk, and most everyone else has to learn it to get by.

That said, Himmilgard is not a monoculture, and people who say it is are usually doing so with an agenda to erase the people who don't fit the mold. Maybe supposedly-dead cultures survive, through resistance, transformation, isolation, or exile from the cultural hegemony.

Himmilgard's people have a wide range of phenotypic variation, but the aforementioned history of air travel has made the edges very blurry. While skin tones tend to be darker in the north and lighter as you go south, and people in a region often share a similar appearance, there has been so much movement that even those rules of thumb are of dubious utility.

Youth Culture

The youth of 1619 have no memory of the Old World, but see evidence of its horror everywhere, especially in the adults who raised them. They reject it with every fibre of their being: The coolest music, art, and clothing is made by cutting apart the marching songs, posters, and uniforms of a bygone age and stitching them together into something personal. Authority and tradition are inherently suspect, the old at best pitiful and at worse responsible. Live fast, love freely, trust no-one over thirty.

History

The early history of Himmilgard is murky, and as with many things it is difficult to tell fact from myth. Sometime long ago, thousands of years ago, Himmilgard was given over nearly entirely to the Wild, posssibly save for the the Rishonim homeland in some theories. The arrival of other populations to the continent is shrouded deeply in myth.

In any case, humans spread quickly along the rivers, with travel over water the only real safe option, carving out towns and cities wherever they could. Trade has always been a lifeblood: no village has ever really been self-sufficient, and mechanisms of trade are of huge importance.

The development of the first flying machines are tied closely to the rise of empires. Though the details have become mythic, it is generally agreed that, sixteen hundred years ago, a river-king named Sigvird used primitive balloon ships to move raiding parties independent of the riverways, bypassing defences and conquering a vast amount of land. The speed and sophistication of this campaign is explained in mythology as Sigvird having stolen the power of flight for humanity from a primordial Titan.

Sigvird was crowned emperor by a council of defeated and allied kings and queens, naming the Gotha Empire for his people, and the traditional Himmilgard calender starts from this date. The empire would last, in one form or another, for six hundred years before its final fragmentation, and it left an unmistakable mark on history. Since then, the metaphorical throne of Gotha been pursued as a form of legitimacy for rulers.

Fragmented Age

What followed was a political and social fragmentation, and corresponding period of conflict, which was traditionally referred to as a Dark Age. The popular conception of this time is as one of constant conflict, technological regression, and ignorance, but this is a retrospective and revisionist perspective of nationalistic scholars, crafting a narrative of a time of ignorance against which the Imperial age would seem enlightened.

The towns, villages, and cities of Himmilgard became mostly independent of each other, trading but not overly reliant on any one ally, and many of the larger political bodies were in a sense nearly theoretical. Holdover governors of the Gotha Empire still held large portions of the continent, but de facto were at the mercy of their subject's continued buy-in, with the real control initially resting with trade guilds and local authorities.

This state of affairs did not last. Financial power became increasingly centralized in the hands of a noble classs, the Glider-Knights. The combination of balloon airships, wingsuits crafted from the feathers of great birds-of-prey, and heavy steel armour made a potent combination of airship raider and heavy infantry, and they dominated warfare.

Towns were forced to pledge to Glider-Knights as lords, lest they suffer raids, and their success lead to increasingly interconnected defensive pacts that eventually became kingdoms. Some of these instiutions, like the Fokker Kingdoms, survived until the Great War, and one, the Kingdom of Sopwith, survives to this day.

The Civil War

Despite the political fragmentation of the continent, the culture spread by the Gotha Empire transcended kingdoms and burgermeisters. This continental (and, to be clear, conditional) kinship shattered in a period from 1218 to 1248, a chaotic time period referred to as the Civil War.

The conflict developed in 1217 when an assembly of representatives from various nobility attempted to elect from their number a new Emperor. After a year of increasingly hostile negotiations resulted in a pick tolerable to most of the represents, the opposition, chiefly delegates from the Fokker Kingdoms, promptly rushed the throne, picked up the Emperor, and threw him from a window. To put it lightly, this was followed by a period of political instability.

The initial dispute was soon subsumed as the fuedal system broke down and every actor tried to seize as much pillage as possible to fuel the non-stop campaigning. The mercenary armies grew vast through forced conscription, and the looting of newly-arrived Skyborn communities brought the gunpowder that ended the age of the glider-knight. Ironically, the art of the wingsuit now survive only in the hands the Skyborn.

In desperation, a prince foolishly called on Sigvird's pact with the dragons, ending the war in indiscriminate fire. The vast material and human cost broke the carefully ordered systems of the Fragmented Age.
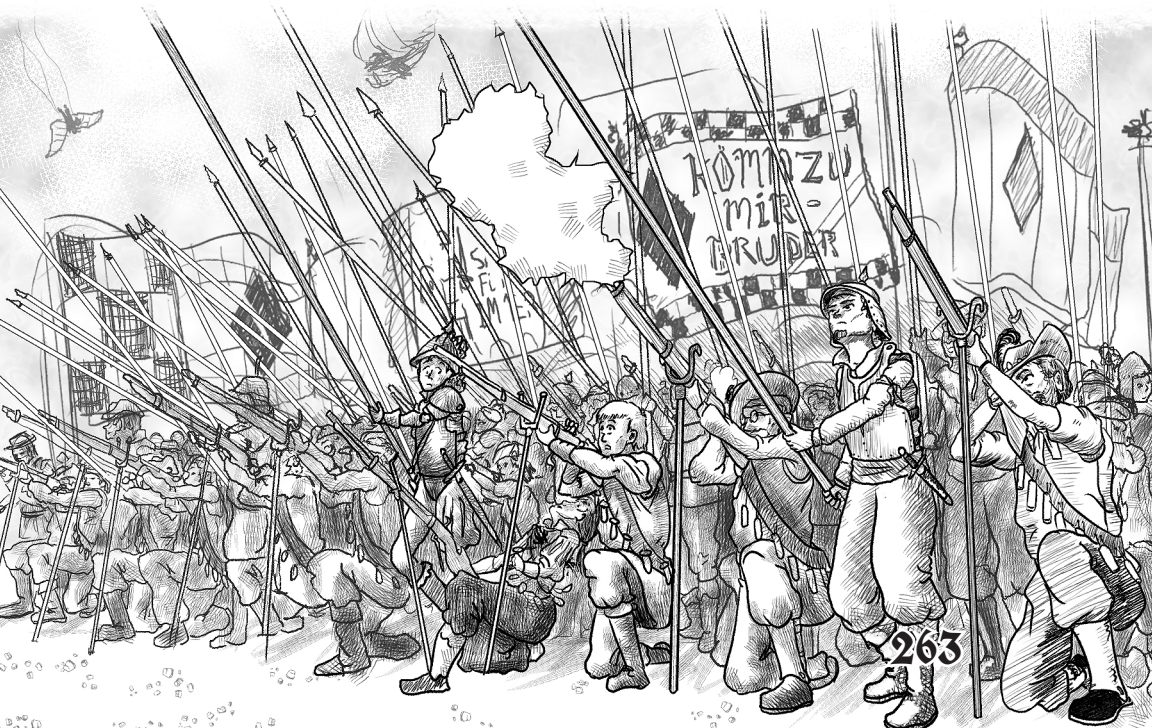
The Age of Nations

When the conflict came to its final end, not due to any victor but simply due to all belligerents being exhausted, bankrupt, and politically unstable, the treaties that followed had an immense effect on the structure of the world to come. It was thought that the conflict had escalated as far as it did because individual communities and princes had no loyalties or scruples, and so every village had to be treated as hostile by every belligerent. This was something of a self-serving fabrication by the men who oversaw the treaty, bitter that they could not count on the loyalty of their vassals.

The world was carved up into distinct borders for the new concept of the 'geographical state', with a second Gotha Empire among the new bodies. Any village that fell within these geographical borders was to be considered part of that nation, regardless of their opinions on the matter.

Of course, it wasn't so simple. There were centuries of resistance, with powers rising, falling, splitting or unifying, before the dawn of mass industry swung the balance of power fully toward the cities. This was the so-called 'Conquest of the Wild', which was less about pushing back the boundaries of fae territory and more about ensuring that no communities could slip through the cracks of imperial rule.

When the first true aeroplane took off in 1532, powered by a 9 horsepower engine and built partially of gravity-defying whalebone, the world was divided into roughly two dozen nations, and centred around four large powers: the Gotha Empire, the Fokker Kingdoms, the Macchi League of Republics, and the United Western Federation.

The Great War

The geo-state was unstable from the start. It was soon clear that war was inevitable, and when it came the network of alliances would make it total. The already stratified societies stepped up their suppression and exploitation of the working class to support an arms race, and the increasingly powerful military-industrial complex drummed up fear in a vicious cycle. War was coming. It was just a matter of when.

In 1579, the Gotha Empire and its vassals declared war on a forgotten micro-state, the UWF and Fokker declared back, and the Macchi Republics sold weapons to all sides, at least until Gotha marched to stop them.

The conflict was total and inescapable, and raged for decades on end to the destruction of the belligerent nations. It was fought by air destroyers, paratrooper divisions, clanking automatons, grinding panzers, and fields of artillery cannons, but most of all it was fought by aeroplanes. Untold hundreds of thousands of aeroplanes were built, flown, and destroyed, taking a generation of young men and women with them.

By the turn of the century, Gotha and Fokker were the only remaining significant political powers: they'd temporarily allied to destroy Macchi and force Sopwith back over the sea, but it couldn't last. Too exhausted to fight another conventional war, they turned to terrible weapons.

The End of the World

Everyone knew the end was coming. Chemical weapons, poisonous gasses that choked the life from their victims, were becoming more common, more sophisticated, and more horrifying throughout the war, and bomber aircraft that could carry heavy payloads thousands of kilometres to rain fire and death on cities were well-tested. It was only a matter of time before these technologies were married.

It could have been avoided. There was no need for it. It was as pointless as any war in Himmilgard's history, and the populations of both sides were exhausted, begging for peace. Even once the bombers were launched, the cities could be evacuated, millions of lives could have been saved. But that would have been inconvenient to the ruling classes, who simply retreated to their mountain estates to watch the world die.

There isn't really a date where the war ended. The bombers flew for weeks on end against every industrial centre within range: not just of their enemies, but any city that might throw in with them or be captured. The weapons used were not just deadly chemicals, but biological and arcane substances with unpredictable and horrifying effects. To this day, there are cities of corpses frozen in time, streets drained of colour and light, and places where the dead walk, animated by tendrils of poisonous gas.

The war didn't so much end as run out of people fighting it. Desertion had already become a problem, but as command broke down, millions of soldiers streamed to their home villages, and millions more found themselves with nowhere to return to, no hope for the future, with nothing but an aeroplane and ammunition. Autonomous war machines, left abandoned, ran rampant across the landscape.

The effects were reflected in nature as well. A great and powerful storm brewed in these final days, and it raged for years, torrential rain flooding valleys and destroying crops. Air travel was nearly impossible, and villages who had depended on trade for centuries starved. Worst, this act of horrific violence awoke something foul in the Wild. Beasts became more aggressive, the Fae's indifference to humans turned to hostility, and dragons were seen over the the skies for the first time in centuries.

For most, the world was dying, and there was no one to save it.

The Flying Circuses

Some were military deserters, defending communities instead of preying on them. Some were retired veterans getting back in obsolete trainers to throw themselves once more into the sky. And many were simply brave young people who volunteered. All across the continent, militias formed, first to hold back the violent tide threatening their homes, and then to try and reconnect with the rest of the world.

These pilots began to paint their planes bright and recognizable colours, reclaiming the faceless machines of war and turning them into canvases for individual expression and self-advertisement. This tradition is thought to have begun with the protection squadrons of Skyborn convoys, and thus spread across the continent rapidly as trade was reestablished.

These squadrons of oddly-coloured planes soon became known as Flying Circuses, and this first generation of pilots are regarded by most as heroes all. Of course, it is more complicated than that, it always is, but this might be a time where it is better to dwell on the fantasy for a while.

It has been twenty years since the end of the world. The existential threat is over, the scars have begun to heal, and the world is rebuilding. But there are still dangers looming in the sky, and as long as there are, there will be Flying Circuses to face them.

For a price, of course.

Peoples

There are a dizzying array of people groups in Himmilgard with their own identities, dialects, and traditions, but for the sake of simplicity they are summarized in this book as eight people groups. Of course, things aren't so simple. Each of these groups represents dozens or hundreds of communities, and thousands of interpretations of these identities.

These groups are not as rigidly defined as they appear. They blur at the edges and where people interact. Some are ascendent, some are clinging to life, some are breaking down without state support, their people diffusing into other cultures through assimilation or reversion.

A pilot may see themselves in many of these identities, or in none, and people around them will make their own judgements. While the romantic might say that everyone's the same behind flight goggles and a scarf, these identities still have meaning to people, for good and ill.

The Gothic Identity

The dominant identity of Himmilgard rests on the idea of a unified solidarity of the Gothic peoples, as defined loosely and inconsistently by the people belonging to them. This is a fraught and tenuous construct, the edges of which vary depending on the teller and the context, but at least in theory most of the dominant populations of Himmilgard recognize one another as having a shared national identity. But the world is changing, and the way people see themselves will change too.

What creates this common bond is nebulous, but is usually put down to some combination of a shared language in Gotisch, shared religious imagery (the River Goddesses and the mythical king Sigvird), and the assumed loyalty to the goal of a unified Himmilgard. It's easily observable that many people are much more able to give reasons why a person might not be Gothic than they are able to define what Gothic means.

Of course, this is in part the point. This shared identity is deeply political, designed to create an in-group and array it against out-groups. This identity has proven malleable when it is convenient to governments, hierarchical authority, and garden-variety bigots in taverns.

This messy construct typically covers the Himmilvolk, Städter, and Edelfrei peoples for certain: these groups mostly identity and are identified as Gothic people. Outside of that group, things start to get a little messy.

Historically, most Wildleute people were seen as Gothic, and most still see *themselves* that way, but in recent centuries the narrative of the conquest of nature made the fae-touched suspect, so they have been either slowly subsumed by or forced out of the dominant identity. This is doubly true for anyone whose brush with magic has left physical signs.

Conversely, the Verloren are typically people who do not see themselves as Gothic, but whom Gothic authority saw as ought to be belonging to them. This has often led to historical policies of forced assimilation, with the suppression of language and culture a tool in these campaigns.

The Fischervolk are conditionally Gothic, having historical connection to the Gothic people, but can be seen as existing on the outside boundary of what might be considered part of the volk. The role of convenience in the definition of Gothic comes into play here: the Fischervolk will be seen as Gothic right up until their divergent social and religious practices threaten the dominant cultural norms, and then they're obviously outsiders.

Finally, there is nothing conditional about the exclusion of the Rishonim and Skyborn. These people are typically seen as foreign, incapable of belonging, curious strangers at best and cultural enemies at worse. But the end of the Old World bring a chance for the new to be kinder, more just, and to right the long history of wrongs done that still linger.

Himmilvolk

You are Himmilvolk, the dominant rural identity of Himmilgard. Loosely connected by language and mythology through air travel despite divergent phenotypes and lifestyles, Himmilvolk consider themselves to have a vague kinship. Your people worship local spirits, the river goddesses Rhona, Elba, and Doana, and the mythical hero Sigvird. You respect wild magic, and value hard work, fair play, peace and quiet, and the open air.

The Himmilvolk are by far the most populous group left in Himmilgard, and might be considered the archetypical image of a person on the continent. Himmilvolk populations are typically farmers and craftspeople, living in small clusters of communities linked together through air travel.

Himmilvolk communities tend to be defined by family ties, and most people in a small village will be related. While this does mean that these communities are unfailingly loyal to one another, they can strangle divergence of any sort, and be suffocating or even outright dangerous for people who don't fit in. This in-group loyalty and sense of belonging made many Himmilvolk communities fiercely nationalistic, though the trauma of the War and its end has most eroded this tendency.

The Himmilvolk are most connected through a shared mythology. The Himmilvolk religion is animist, believing that all natural things have spirits, with the fae as tangible manifestations governing them. The most important of these spirits are those of the three great rivers in Himmilgard. The clubs sign serves as a shared iconography, with the three circles representing three moons, three rivers, and three Goddesses. These Goddesses are frequently invoked, by name or collectively, to bring favour to the speaker, and infrequent, private religious ceremony is typically held in natural groves, sometimes with sculpted trees.

The Himmilvolk also share a mythic cycle of the Gothic Saga, recounting the family history and deeds of the chiefs of the Gothic tribes. The cycle is centred on Sigvird stealing flight from the Titans at the top of the world with a sword and cloak gifted by a dragon, while his wife Ildico and the Goddesses trick the Wild Court into giving up control of the sky.

Städter

You consider yourself Städter, of a modern and special people from the imperial urban centers elevated above the common country folk. When the world ended, you endured hard years of labour and cruelty from dying governments desperate to hold onto control, and now you struggle to find a place in the world. Your people worship the demigod Sigvird, first king of Gotha, who made wives of the river-daughters and slew the Titans.
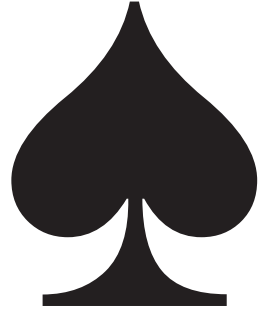
Industrialization lead to a large wave of migration to the new cities forming the heart of the up and coming states, which slowly lead to an erosion of previous identities and created new cultures in its place. Living in these political and economic centres, the city-dwelling populations developed divergent values and self-conceptions which, over time, became a cultural battleground over the essence of the Gothic national identity.

Religion formed the central divide, with a modern reinterpretation of traditional Himmilvolk mythology developing under the auspices of nationalized interests. This religion centred Sigvird, elevated to a sort of demi-god status in his role as the first king of Gotha. The river-goddesses were sidelined (as fae 'river maidens') and old sacred groves were cut down so the trees could be used to build churches.

While one could fairly cite to arrogance, nationalism, militarism, and capitalism as the Städter's defining (and damning) characteristics, urbanites were as a rule also more open-minded and politically engaged than their more insular rural cousins. The cities played host to a variety of feminist, labour, and anti-war movements, to a far greater degree than the countryside, even as the factories churned out war machines.

The Städter were undoubtedly affected the worst by the end of the world. Not just from the bombs, but from the desperate scramble to hold together their governments. Those that survived are now refugees, escaping into the countryside and either carving new communities or integrating into existing ones. Though without the institutions which once formed the bedrock of their world, they bring with them values and ideas that will change their adopted homes, even as they are changed in turn.

Fischervolk

You are Fischervolk of the Dark Sea coast, and you are marked as different by the blood that runs cold in your veins. No matter how far you are from the sea, you hear the whispers in your dreams. Your people value trust and community, and believe in a city under the sea where the dead sleep, to which the river goddesses ferry spirits.
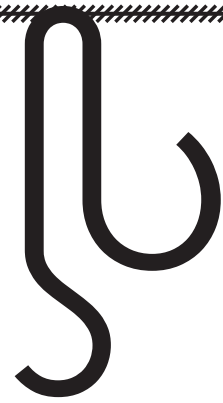
The fischervolk live clustered on the coasts of the Dark Sea, dangerous living that has created not only a distinct culture, but a divergent physiology. Though it varies, most fischervolk have tough grey skin, dark hair, gills on their neck, and triangular incisors. Their blood runs cold and blue in their veins, and when spilled slowly oxidizes to a wine red. The fischervolk claim these adaptations are the result of their distant ancestors interbreeding with creatures from the Dark Sea.

Faith is central to the fischervolk: they believe a drop of blood in salt water can call their god's attentions, and most fischervolk engaged in rituals to bind themselves to patron gods who can whisper into their minds. Inducing trances to commune closely with these whispers is often a daily ritual. Many fischers sport tattoos of bio-luminescent ink, the symbols and patterns recording their life history so their Gods can recognize them.

The Fischers believe the afterlife is a vast sunken city under the Dark Sea, and their unshakable faith in it often makes them seem morbid and fatalistic. Their system of divine patronage and the close connection to the afterlife have resulted in a culture that makes trust in one another, and in the Gods, paramount. To fischervolk, 'inlanders' often seem paranoid, distant, and obsessed with the fleeting world of the material.

Most fischervolk communities are very insular and communal: they were fairly distant from the industrial capitalism of the prewar world, though the conscription of many of their young men by the Fokker Kingdom was hugely disruptive to the traditional way of life. Fischervolk isolated from the Dark Sea often develop divergent cultural and physical traits: there are communities of so-called "Freshwater Fischervolk" all over Himmilgard, clustered around deep lakes in the isolated parts of the world.

Skyborn

You are Skyborn, the nomadic people of the trade winds above Himmilgard. Centuries ago, your ancestors came as refugees on vast balloons from over the endless sea. You find your gods in the endless stars, and are voyagers and sailors all. The groundpounders are welcome to their boring lives: You have adventure, romance, community, and music!
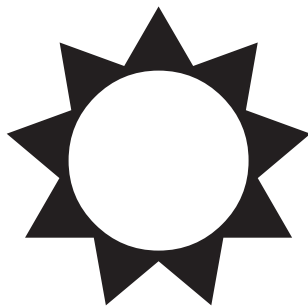
'Skyborn' is a translation of the collective name used by a number of nomadic groups: it is translated as *Luftkinder* in Gotisch, though they don't care much for the infantilizing implications. These groups are, relatively speaking, newcomers to Himmilgard, arriving just four centuries ago and bringing goods whose absence now seems unimaginable, such as tea, silk, gunpowder, corn, sugar, and the potato.

The Skyborn arrived as an amalgam of refugees who settled onto empty land on the west coast, farming and trading peacefully. Relations soured as the locals realized how profitable these farms were, and armies of the Himmilgard Civil War seized the land. To survive, the Skyborn returned to the skies, becoming nomadic traders, and have never come back down.

The emergent Skyborn identity was born of ships gathering to share news, trade, and most importantly, to marry. As crews are extended families, captains handle marriage arrangements: One of the couple joins the crew of the other, in exchange for compensation based on skills or status.

Though colourful ships, clothing, and jewellery give the image of carefree souls making easy money, the reality is harsher. Life in a balloon is fragile, so it is governed by strict hierarchy, ritual purity, and rigid schedules. That elaborate jewellery is easy to liquidate during hard times, often being crafted from coinage. Post-War, many young people look longingly to the ground as an escape, much to the chagrin (and terror) of their elders.

The Skyborn navigate primarily by the night sky, and assign names, personalities, and divine meaning to stars and constellations. Many Skyborn have a patron star, and one of their unique arts is reading the future by interpreting the movements and intensity of heavenly bodies.

Edelfrei

You are Edelfrei, descended from one of the ancient lineages of nobility, claiming ancestry back to Sigvird's court itself. Long before the rise of the great imperial nations, your kind guarded the mountain passes and ruled fiefdoms, but the rise of nation-states rendered the old castles and glider-knights obsolete. You were raised to value personal honour, history, beauty, ancestry, and the few heirlooms you have left.

Nobility in Himmilgard was in a strange position when the world came to an end. Most of the current noble families originated in the mercenary glider-knights of the Fragmented Age, though many claim ancestry as far back as Sigvird's court. Originally enriched by war and taxation on subjects resembling protection rackets, in time the nobility was a self-sustaining entity whose authority rested in the just-so story of their lineage.

By the industrial age, however, this power was beginning to wane. The rise of the merchant capitalist began to eclipse landed nobility, who began to marry into new money families to salvage their finances. The ancient castles fell under the care of fourth and fifth children, bastards, and stewards, while the bulk of the family occupied manors in the cities.

Thus, when the gas bombs fell, the core of the old nobility was wiped out in one fell swoop, and lines of succession suddenly fell to obscure branches and unready youth. At the same time, many of these nobles found themselves sitting on treasure troves of industrial equipment and wealth in their holdings, once again making the shadow of mountain fortresses safe havens against a hostile world.

Teaching the next generation to steward the family name and estate is of the upmost importance to the Edelfrei, with lessons centring on language, culture, finance, noble lineages, and war. Even twenty years on, the children of nobility can expect to benefit from their family's traditions of classical and martial education, even if the money and land is all gone. If nothing else, they have their pride, and the drive to reclaim what they feel they are entitled to.

Rishonim

You are Rishon/Rishona, of the first people of Himmilgard. Your people once lived on the spring at the centre of the world, asking questions of the Goddess and recording their answers. But your ancestors sought forbidden knowledge, and as punishment were exiled here, in a hostile land full of hostile people. Your people need to be clever, tough, and close-knit if you want to survive to find your way back home.

An ethnic and religious group spread across the continent, the Rishonim share a monotheistic religion with a single powerful (perhaps all-powerful) deity who created the world. Their foundational myth holds that they were once afforded a utopian existence in communion with this diety, but were cast out into an unforgiving world. A central theological dispute is if this was supposed to be a lesson, a test, or a punishment.

Traditional interpretations hold the Rishonim were the first humans, and all others exist as part of this cosmic trial. More reformist mindsets posit a physical homeland the Rishonim were driven from. In either case, it is the grand task of the Rishonim people to one day return home.

Though often reliant on their wisdom, the powerful in Himmilgard have always been quick to use the Rishonim as scapegoats. Long lists of imagined crimes have been invented to justify this persecution, leading to cycles of integration, nomadic life, and living in isolated communes.

Rishonim communities cluster around learned figures who safeguard knowledge and artefacts, especially their ever-evolving texts of law, history, and theology. As maintaining coherent communities can be difficult, the Rishonim use what snippets of their ancient language they know to identify one another, and texts are compared, debated, and then synchronized whenever communities meet.

While the Rishonim consider their deity beyond gender, the word 'Göttin' is commonly used while speaking Gotisch, as Himmilvolk find the idea of a Goddess more comfortable. This survival tactic has inevitably come to influence the way many Rishonim picture their deity in the modern day.

Verloren

They call you Verloren, lost, but you aren't. Your people have a name and a distinct culture, no matter what anyone else might say. Verloren communities are holdovers of the old cultures from before the Imperial age, who have resisted assimilation through whatever methods were available. Your traditions, language, and religion may have changed or been suppressed, but your people live on.

Himmilgard's supposed monoculture, and the dominance of the Gothic people on the continent, did not arise organically, as much as they might want to claim it is the natural state of the world. The continent was once crowded with diverse cultures, speaking different languages and having different religions and traditions. Over centuries and millennia, many of these cultures were slowly subsumed, integrated, or wiped out by empires, wars, and generations of persecution. Often, all that is left of these cultures are place names and half-remembered legends.

But not always. Through armed struggle, stubborn civil resistance, migration, revival movements, or simple isolation, some of these cultures have persisted to the modern day, and the end of the Old World have given these peoples a chance to freely reestablish their communities.

Most of these cultures are divergent from the same recent roots as the Gothic people, so their languages and customs, while different, often bear degrees of resemblance. Others are farther diverged, through long isolation, earlier divergence, or even stranger circumstances. A few even claim to be from over the sea, or from beyond the Vought desert.

To be clear, the Verloren is an option meant to explicitly give permission in the rules to play somebody outside of the limited cultural touchstones of the game. The obvious use is to draw on cultures neighbouring Germany, or which have been subject to German imperialism. That said, they could also be used to represent real-world cultures that simply aren't represented in the fiction at all due to the conceptual and physical constraints of the book. It's the wild card, if you need it.

Wildleute

You are of the Wildleute, the people of the woods. Few, scattered, and keeping to yourselves, your people survived in the wild places where few dare to tread. During the Great War, many of your people were forced into contact with civilization, settling as refugees or conscripted to act as guides. You grew up in the shadow of spirits and fae things, with the touch of magic a daily reality, and ritual superstition informs everything you do.

The Wildleute are, in many ways, a throwback to an earlier incarnation of the dominant cultures of Himmilgard, before organized agriculture and airborn trade allowed humans to carve some distance from the Wild. While most people transitioned to this life of larger scale agriculture, not everyone did, and other communities ended up rejecting industrial civilization and returning to this simpler living.

These communities, though very diverse, tend to have a few similar elements. Most important is a very close connection to the Fae, magic, and the animistic spirits of the Wild. It's common in these communities for everyone to know a little bit of magic, or to routinely appease or deal with the Fae. This connection leads to deeply valuing the untouched wilderness, and an often reflexive distrust of technology or authority. It's also a pattern that many of these societies tend to be matriarchal, especially the recently founded revivalist ones.

Living close to the Wild and under the close influence of the Fae has effects, often glowing patterns, strange eyes, or animal features like ears, tails, or fur. These physical manifestations of influence are referred to as 'The Touch of Magic', those affected 'Fae-Touched', and it was seen in much of the Old World as a sort of corruption, a creeping and sinister thing that twists those infected into inhuman monsters. In reality, of course, its usually just a mild curiosity, a sign of your closeness to nature, or embarrassing evidence of a parent's dalliances with the faeries.

Wildlings, especially those with the touch of magic, were often ill-trusted in industrialized society, in ways branded as traitors to civilization. Now, though, the industrialized world is gone, and the Wildleute live on.

Flight School

Let's imagine you are a pilot in this era. Fundemntally, your aeroplane is a machine which uses a motor to provide thrust, and wings to turn that thrust into lift. Most are controlled with a flight stick and two rudder pedals: The flight stick controls the roll and pitch through the ailerons on the tips of the wings and the horizontal elevator in the tail, while the pedals control the yaw through the rudder.

Because of the forces that keep aeroplanes stable, they can't turn like cars. Instead, most aircraft make turns by banking: the stick is pushed to one side to roll the plane onto one wing, then pulled back so the plane moves 'up' into the turn, with lifting force doing much of the work.

The engine is controlled with a throttle lever, though rotary engine planes often just have a 'blip switch' that cuts power. A knob affects the ratio of air to fuel in the engine: the higher you go, the leaner you need to run. If you fly upside down too long, the engine will be starved of fuel.

The only gauge you are certain to have is an RPM gauge, while the next most common is an air speed indicator. This might be in your cockpit, but is just as likely to be mounted on the wing, ranging in sophistication from cup anemometers to a stick and protractor. If you don't have an altimeter, you might buy a pocket model. You might also have a compass, a timepiece, an artificial horizon, and various temperature indicators.

You sit in a small wicker chair inside a wood and canvas frame: if you're lucky, you have a seatbelt. You wear heavy clothing, both because of wind sheer and because the temperature drops about 6°C (11°F) every thousand meters up you go. You wear goggles to protect your eyes from wind and oil, cover your face, and you wear a silk scarf so you don't chafe your neck constantly looking about the skies.

Engine Sounds

Every engine sounds different, and pilots quickly learn to identify them when they hear them. Every kind of engine, every mount of that engine, even every individual machine has quirks that make them sound different, but broadly speaking different configurations are recognizable.

As a general rule, the larger the displacement of an individual cylinder, the lower pitch the engine sound is. Liquid-cooled engines of this era have a tendency to have larger cylinders than air-cooled engines, which instead usually have more cylinders overall.

Radial engines, with the cylinders fanned out in a circle, fire only one cylinder at a time, so you can hear the mechanism of each, one after another. Each cylinder makes a throaty pop as the valve opens, like a cough recorded and spend up, and when the engine runs at full speed they all blend into each other in a symphony of lawnmowers.

Rotary engines add the rapid rotation of the unit into the mix, which distorts the sound into a high pitched buzzsaw scream as each cylinder fires in turn, the sound of each action completely indistinguishable from the next in a blur of noise. Rotary engines are usually throttled with a blip switch, so the sound constantly starts and stops, a few seconds of hellish noise followed by a pause.

Inline engines tend to have the largest cylinders and so produce the deepest and throatiest sound, a low rumble like the engine of a truck. The acoustics of each cylinder is different based on its mounting, so these engines often have a sort of strobe effect to their sound, quick changes in pitch that speed up as the engine runs hotter.

V engines tend to have smaller cylinders, but run them under greater mechanical stress that was not well compensated for in this era. This can create an unusual oscillating sound in the engine that many pilots compared to the sound of a sewing machine, a sound that would reverberate through the canvas of the machine.

Rockets roar, turbojets whine, and pulsejets have an unearthly throbbing scream that sounds like nothing else on earth. Electric engines are almost completely silent, just a low whirl and the sound of creaking canvas.

Air Tactics

First World War air combat doctrine and tactics had to be developed by trial and error in the midsts of battle. It was surprisingly sophisticated in some ways and extremely crude in others, but generally, victory comes with a combination of awareness, nerve, and energy.

Like almost all combat, awareness is the most important elements. As planes range over vast distances, it is very difficult for them to find one another. Most kills between planes are scored when the victim isn't aware of the attacker, rather than in thrilling dogfights. After you've been up for forty minutes, your goggles are streaked with oil, your ears deadened to noise, and your arms and core burning from exertion, its easy to forget to check behind you periodically.

Nerve is a hugely underrated element of air combat. There's nowhere to hide in the sky, nothing to protect you, really. Pilots had only a few dozen hours of training, not enough to really ready them for the experience. As a result, it was very common for pilots to panic and turn away before making an attack, or to make bad decisions when ambushed, like wasteful climbs, freezing up, or fleeing towards enemy lines. While different ace pilots used different tactics, the thing they all shared was that they learned to remain collected and keep their wits about them in combat.

Finally, energy makes a huge difference. All other things being equal, the plane that starts a fight a hundred meters above their opponent will win. 'Win' doesn't necessarily mean shooting down an enemy: in any given fight, shootdowns were fairly uncommon. Instead, it means that the plane with the higher altitude has control: they can engage, escape, or shadow the other, and unless they make a drastic mistake they are relatively safe.

While very early dogfighters flew alone, they soon learned to fly in groups. A formation typically has a more experienced 'wing leader' and one or more 'wingman' positions. The wing leader makes the decisions, leads the attacks, and typically gets most of the kills. The wingmen follow up, keep an eye out, and protect the wing leader and each other. As the Great War went on, this went from an informal arrangement to a rigid hierarchy, and soon the age of dogfighting was over, replaced by formation tactics that emphasized organized firepower over sustained manoeuvring.

Lerne etwas Deutsch!

German is a fascinating language for an English speaker to learn. It has lots of neat features, an almost-familiar vocabulary, and dynamic compound words! That's right, the Germans don't *really* have a word for everything, they just have a system to make up new ones on the fly.

So, while I'm not saying you should put on a dumb Hollywood German accent to play *Flying Circus* with... I'm not saying *don't* do that.

Titles!

Like Mr, Ms, Mrs, Mx, German has gendered honourific titles. For men, "Herr" is used in much the same way as "Mister" in English. For women, one ought to use "Frau". In the eras *Flying Circus* emulates, young and/ or unmarried women would be called "Fräulein", but in the modern day, that's considered rude unless applied to a very young girl.

Unfortunately, German has no standard nonbinary honourific, and like many strongly gendered languages can struggle with representing these things in speech. German's grammatical neuter gender is not like the singular *they* in English, and using it for a person can be quite infantalizing. Neopronouns struggle to gain traction because of how much of the language relies on a specific set of gendered conjugations.

Common Phrases

Here's some common phrases to pepper into your dialog. You can figure out the swear words on your own. Remember, pronouce 'J' as 'Y'.

Alles Klar
Literally means 'all clear', but used for 'alright', 'okay', 'good' or "I understand." Common and flexible.

Danke/Dankeschön
Thanks/Thank You. The second is a bit more formal.

Entschuldigung
You'd think the German word for 'sorry' would be easier to say...

Auf Wiedersehen
So long, farewell...

Ja/Nein
Yes & No. You knew that! 'Jawohl' is stronger, like 'Yes, sir.'

Guten Morgen/Tag/Abend/Nacht
Good morning, day, evening, and night, used just like in English.

Jagdstaffel/Jasta
A fighter squadron. A squadron name might be 'Jasta _____'.
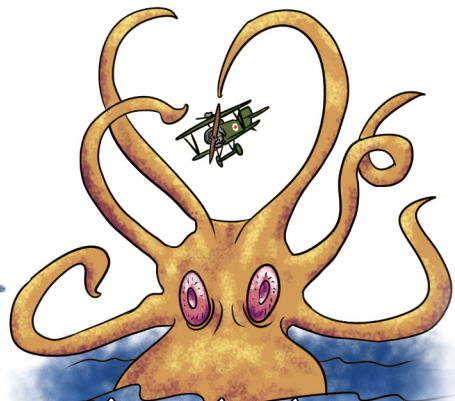
Krankenwagen
It means 'ambulance'. That's not really relevant, but it's *very* funny.

Nose Art

Though once the interchangeable war machines of imperialistic powers, the Flying Circuses turned their aircraft into canvases of personal expression. Here are just a small sample of the nose art of the era.
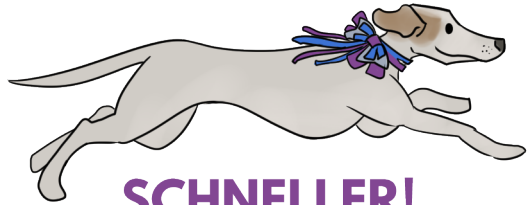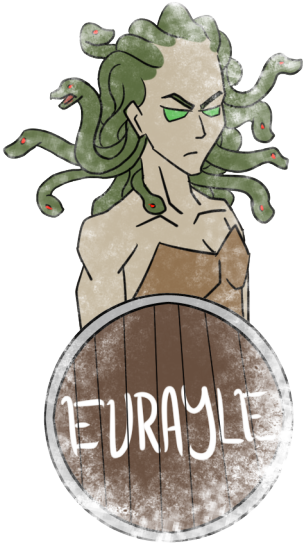
Memento Mori

FEINE FISCHERIN

Riesenkraken

GLÜCKSZAHL 13

EURAYLE

SCHNELLER!

ZWEI KATZEN

KISTE & KURIER

ALARM!

Paint Schemes

The Theler Kobra MC is one of the most common planes available to pilots in Himmilgard. Many pilots began their career in it or one of its cousins, because tens of thousands of them were made and still linger. They have been flown by aces and rookies, heroes and villains, militia and bandits.

Original

This plane, G-4527, shows what the average Kobra MC looked like in service. It was produced for the Gotha Empire and was assigned to Lt. Joseph Gehring of Jagdstaffel 199 in 1594, but planes just like it were sold indiscriminately to all sides of the Great War.

Bardame

Checkmate Squadron was one of the largest and most successful Flying Circuses. At it's peak in 1619, it numbered over 40 planes. This plane was flown by Lilly Eichinger: the nose-art depicts a local barmaid, Flora Koegel, who she later married. The chess piece on the tail indicated the pilot's rank: Lilly was a section leader.

Pinfeather

This plane belonged to Hedwig "Wiggy" Shultz, a member of Torschlusspanik, a Circus made up of Great War veterans. It is the same plane she flew for the Gotha Luftstreitkräfte at the turn of the century. When she retired in 1618, she was 51 years old.
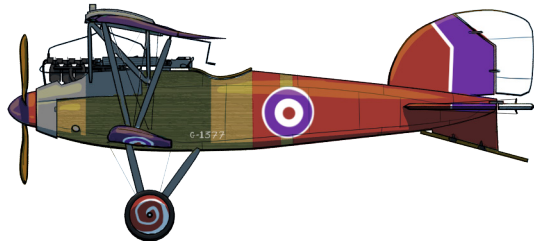
Goth Pursuit Plane

Planes of the Goth Armies were rarely treated well by crews, and generally had short lifespans before being replaced or rebuilt. The red stripes indicate it was flown by an officer or ace.
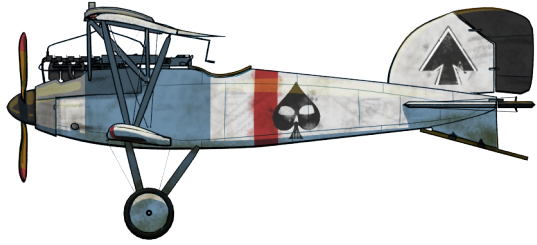
Bird of Prey

The Red Talons were once a respected Circus which fragmented in 1617 into a series of bandit groups. The red-painted landing gear invoked the bloody claws of a hunting bird. Oliver Wirths scored six victories in this plane before his 1619 death, by rollover while taxing.

Maid for Battle

Aldershof Manor was a major trade hub in Voisin post-war. The servant staff revolted soon after the war, exiling the Aldershof family and seizing, among other things, their escort planes. Proud of their origins, the Aldershof militia merely slashed out the original heraldry.

Exile

This example was flown by Minna Hammerl during her time with the Circus Morganthau's Minnows. A political exile from her town, she painted over the roundels with that of her new Circus, and a poppy to honour her parents, both veterans. The machine carries a 20mm cannon.
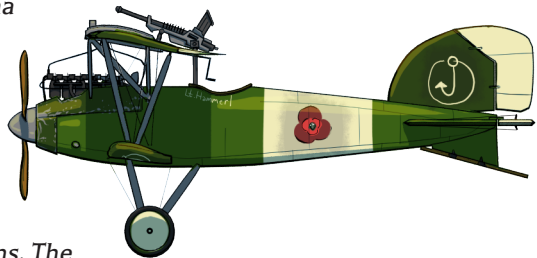
Everything is Political

This section is about taking everything from the previous chapter and throwing out the subtext. Maintaining subtlety in historical parallels has a place, but that place isn't really in a roleplaying game where creative control will be further filtered from the author to the GM and players. The purpose of this chapter is to talk frankly about the where and why of elements of the game in order to make clear what these things are for.

This is not about playing apologetics or hedging to prevent callouts. It's about ensuring that the reader is informed about the context that surrounds the creative choices made, so they can interpret and use the information more responsibly.

Himmilgard & Germany

Let's get the obvious out of the way. Himmilgard is a sort of smeared pastiche of select portions of German and Central European history. It plays with the early Medieval intersection of northern Germanic paganism and Christianity for its mythology, takes the fragmentation and apocalyptic political realignment from the Holy Roman Empire and the 30 Years War, and its rough imagery and national mythology of the 19th and early 20th century. It further draws on fragments of other Germanic history in snippets here and there for flavour.

So... the elephant in the room. It would be easy to simply say "this is German imagery free of Nazi influence", but unfortunately such a simple division cannot be made. The Nazi Party, its imagery and ambitions, arose out of cultural and political trends which predated the unified German state, and in its effort to solidify itself as an authentic representation of the national will the Nazi Party deliberately entangled itself with nearly every piece of Germanic cultural and historical iconography it could, even when that imagery was contradictory to each other and Nazi ideals.

So... it's complicated. It is unfortunately impossible to write something about Germany or something like Germany and not confront the historical reality of a nation's descent to mass, industrialized genocide undertaken while wrapping itself in every one of its cultural symbols that they could get their hands on. *Flying Circus* tries to walk a line of acknowledging this reality while not allowing it to dominate the portrayal of the setting.

The Word 'Volk'

It's important before we go on much further to dive into a rather complex word for a moment here. Volk, which was transmitted to English as "folk", is the German word meaning "a people". Like a lot of similar words, it has a deluge of meanings that vary depending on the speaker, the language in which it is evoked, and the general context.

If you want to talk about the people who live some place, well, they're the volk there, hence Himmilvolk (the people of Himmilgard) and Fischervolk (the Fisher People). If you're a leftist talking about the proletariate or a liberal talking about citizens, you can use the word volk and it'll mean those things. But volk can also be used to mean "ethnic group" and specifically the construct of "The Ethnic German People" in an exclusionary sense.

Generally speaking, the word volk itself remains neutral and flexible in the modern German language, but the adjective form 'völkisch' is directly and inexorably associated with right-wing ethnonationalism.

In the time period this game apes most closely, the foundational philosophy that would birth and nurture the Nazi Party was already deeply present in the form of the *Völkisch movement*, an ideology proposing the marriage of premodern mythology and modernist genetic racism to create a postmodern eternal and preordained ethnonationalism.

The Völkisch movement did not have much in the way of direct political influence in the German Empire, the political body that most influenced the fictional history of the setting, but did have sway in large parts of the population and it was exploited for political support, especially where it was paired with antisemitism.

Flying Circus uses, in places, the word Volk, and tries to do so with an awareness of these many meanings. It is used in the basic definition to deonate "this is a group of people" and can be left as that. It is also, in places, used as a parallel to the exclusionary and nationalist way it is sometimes used in real life, specifically in the way that it is applied to the cultural groups to create a sense of an in-group and out-group.

In short, it's not some sort of inherently Nazi word the way it is sometimes treated. But its a delicate word to be handled delicately.

Inclusivity

Generally, the intent is that while familiar forms of discrimination and oppression existed and exist inside the world of *Flying Circus*, it's not to place them in the spotlight, with some controlled exceptions. Himmilgard shares these problems with our own world as a mechanism for representation. It allows characters to come not just from similar demographics as the players, but from similar struggles.

A good rule of thumb to play with is the idea that before the game has begun, before any of the players sat down, the Very Special Episode of this television show where all the characters learn that Bigotry Is Wrong has already happened. *These lessons have already been learned.* Or, in short, <u>don't play bigoted characters!</u> Nobody cares if you have an in-universe reason why you're doing it, just don't!

Playing out acts of violence along hierarchies of oppression at the table is pretty much always hurtful, can't really be done well, and is really just crass and insensitive. However, acknowledging the reality of these hierarchies and the violence contained within can be a part of the fabric of the world, if the players want. This can be used to play characters with familiar life experiences to your own, or to explore these subjects in a safe space. Roleplay can be a powerful tool for catharsis and empathy.

If you want to summarize these ideas to your players, the following sentence works wonders.

<u>You shouldn't play out trauma, but you can play out recovery.</u>

We don't need to see the awful things that happened to your character. But we can see them pick themselves up and rebuild themselves from it.

Limited Scope

The game constrains its world to a isolated continent with a small set of cultures and a simplified history. If the world was as dizzyingly vast as our own, it'd be nigh impossible to have all the parts be detailed and mean something to the mechanics and narrative threads. The cut down scope is a function of thematic and mechanical cohesion as well as, quite simply, preventing the author from further losing her mind. There *is* more world out there, but our faux-Europeans are blissfully ignorant of it.

Sex, Gender, & Queerness

In terms of mechanics and general gameplay, the gender of player characters doesn't really matter. Flight is not a gendered activity.

On your character sheet, gender is handled through two sections. The first is the gender section of Expectations, which lays out the modes of gendered presentation and identity seen as 'normal' for this background, and invites characters to use it to define themselves, either through agreement or by contrast. Often, these options are very restrictive or judgemental, but pilots are people who break the rules. Second is the pronoun section, where you can write whatever you want, including multiple pronoun sets if you are inclined.

If we're talking about bodies and the effects sex hormones have on them, flying early combat aircraft is a very physically taxing activity, and it is likely that the average female pilot will need to spend more time than their average male counterpart training, preparing for, and recovering from the rigours of flight. This is rough on everyone, though.

As a land of fairy tales and junk science, there's some deliberate leaning into a few gender essentialist ideas. The once-egalitarian world had a patriarchal order imposed by industrial society, and in response women took power from nature. This is most notable in the Witch class, which draws heavily on pagan revival imagery of the sacred feminine, and the Goth army, a throwback to this mechanical masculinity. Feel free to play with this if you feel comfortable, or to just ignore it if you aren't.

Transgender characters have an interesting journey ahead of them. The medication necessary for medical transition are well within the ability of the stunted industrializing societies of Flying Circus, though the expertise may be rare. A fun possibility is that HRT medication was sold by travelling snake-oil salesmen types while the 'legitimate' medical world dismissed it, so hormone therapy drugs take the form of old-timey medicinal tonics and powders with silly names. There's also magical options: deals with the fae, witchy charms, or a kind elder thing below the waves.

Leaving home to become a pilot is the perfect time for a character to explore their identity. When you've flown halfway across the world from your hometown, nobody can deadname you.

Sexuality & Queerness

As a game dealing with romance and sex, gender is never a factor in the rules. Your character can be gay, straight, bi/pan, ace, or whatever else. That's just a character choice, and is not reflected in mechanics.

The general idea is that Himmilgard has had a nebulous queer-er past, but the old empires generally tried to impose a heteronormative worldview on people, and it only partially stuck. So most people aren't bothered, but all the sort of people who are fun to offend find it offensive.

Exactly how friendly a given place is to queerness is up to the players. Generally, nobody cares, and it should never be an issue where you go. This might be because it's genuinely not an issue, or it might be because, as a pilot, everyone already knows you're a degenerate. That's up to you, though consider that sleeping with somebody important and causing a stir is always more exciting if there's transgressive queerness involved.

Remember that the intimacy move implies, but does not require, sex. There's room for moments of nonsexual or platonic intimacy as well, and you shouldn't implement rules in a way that would put asexual or aromantic characters at a disadvantage.

Imperialism

Woven into the fundamental background of Himmilgard is a long history of imperialism. While there is a sort of Germanic fantasy monoculture used as a simplified shorthand and recognizable set of imagery, there is evidence presented in the People options and the multinational origins of the region names which indicate this wasn't always the case.

In real life, Poles, Sorbs, and Czechs, among others, were subject to colonization, cultural and linguistic suppression, and even genocide by various German states and empires. This 'local' imperialism between white nations and cultures can be invisible to North Americans, and the Verloren serve as representation of this in the game's world. That said, it must be acknowledged that European colonialism outside Europe was far worse in every respect, and Germany was no exception, with colonies in West Africa, East Asia, and the Pacific. The scope of this game does not centre these crimes, but this isn't to deny or minimize them.

Race

Race is difficult to discuss in fantasy because it is a cultural construct whose boundaries vary with time, location, and context. What defines a race or ethnic group is essentially arbitrary when divorced of historical context, and at best only ever loosely associated with phenotype.

The construct of scientific racism and white supremacy as it exists in our world does not exist in Himmilgard: This is reflected in how all the culture cards offer a range of skin colours to the players. However, the concept of the Gothic people *emulates* the concept of whiteness as a subsuming pseudo-national identity that rests atop an assumed hierarchy, while also exploring the historical construction of the German national identity.

It is unfortunately impossible to construct a parallel to Germany which contains analogs of Jewish and Roma people and not address the history of racial discrimination, because they would then cease to be meaningful analogs and would emulate the whitewashing of these issues in the real world. That said, unless you are playing in a group you trust absolutely, racial discrimination is not something that should really come up directly during gameplay. As with sexualized violence, being subject to this discrimination can inform the backstory and worldview of a character without having to be on-screen, and the purpose of the identities and their interactions is to give everyone a sense of place and history.

While the Skyborn are a visible minority, much of what makes them stand out is kept vague: this prevents players from either trying to sidestep it or from creating caricature, and still allows any character to look like anyone. The art, and some suggestions, create implied Skyborn phenotypes, but there's no reason to stick to it. It doesn't matter what sets them apart, it's ultimately arbitrary, singled out to create a hierarchy of power.

The historical treatment of Jewish people and communities in Europe is given something of a light touch in this text, as this simply is not the space to explore this vastly complex subject. Track down Benjamin Rosenbaum's *Dream Apart* instead; it is brilliant, thoughtful, and beautiful.

It's important to keep in mind that the constructs in-universe are much less important than the realities of racism, antisemitism, and white supremacy in the cultures the game is actually played in. Be mindful.

Class & Capital

It is the tendency of pilots in *Flying Circus* to be flush with liquid capital, but not rich in any kind of structural, consistent way. They might operate in huge quantities of money compared to most folks, but their business has correspondingly extreme expenses, They see a lot of cash, but flows quickly through their hands. This is intentional.

The financial rules of this game are designed to prevent wealth from accumulating in the hands of the players in overly large amounts, and especially from compounding. That said, regardless of the origins, the pilots cease to be proletariat pretty quickly after getting their first job.

The structure of their company is not something the game really tracks, but for ease of understanding and book-keeping it is organized as wage labour. This can be fraught, hence the systems in the game for NPC workers to unionize and try to hold the players accountable.

In any case, class analysis is not a focus of this game. It is set in a post-apocalypse with no large-scale economic systems remaining. Every town can be presented as functioning differently internally, but externally all must confront scarcity and coercion both violent and economic.

Religion

Himmilgard does not have real-world religions. It does, however, have religions that play analogous roles to real-world religions in various points of central European history. The traditional folk religion of the Himmilvolk is something like pre-Christian Germanic Paganism, while the faith of the Gothen people is something like Catholicism in its social role, if not actual theology. The faith of the Rishonim is analogous to Judaism. The other religions presented are much more fantastical and further, but not entirely, detached from real-world inspiration.

A notable absence from the setting is an analog to Islam. This is due to the setting's deliberately narrow scope as a fantastical representation of a slice of Europe that did not have a significant Muslim presence at the time, a reflection of limited conceptual and physical space. That said, if you want to play a character with a faith explicitly inspired by Islam, or any other religion not given space in the rules, you have both my explicit permission and my apologies for the fact it is not better supported.

Disability

To fly an early aircraft, the pilot must manipulate three sets of control surface against the force of air pressure to control an aircraft. Disabled pilots may need to use tools to mitigate these requirements in order to fly.

Pilots rely heavily on visual information, but we can imagine methods mechanical or magical to compensate. These will likely be fantastical, like artificial eyes or a scrying spell. Instruments could have physical elements that could be read by touch, or which use auditory warnings.

If a pilot does not have full use of both legs and at least one arm, flying will be difficult with a traditional control setup. A paraplegic pilot, or a pilot missing both legs, may be able to use an alternate control scheme, such as mounting the rudder controls to a swivel or bar on the flight stick.

A quadriplegic pilot or a pilot unable to provide the necessary force to move the aircraft's control surfaces will require a fly-by-wire electro-hydraulic system to interact with the plane using minimal movement.

Pilots might use prosthetics: Douglas Bader, Colin Hodkinson, and Alexey Petrovich Maresyev were all WW2 pilots who were double amputees. It would fit very well with the industrial fantasy world to have plentiful clockwork prosthetics salvageable from the war.

Being deaf or mute will have no effect on flying, given the giant loud engines and lack of radios. All pilots share an emotive sign language.

Polarized goggles can help with light sensitivity, while flight masks and ear plugs can help those that experience sensory overload. Pilots with chronic pain must ensure it won't flare up badly during flight. This could require extensive pain management and careful use of medication while on the ground, but wouldn't prevent them from flying.

The last options on the People cards for skin, hair, and eye colour can be used for characters with albinism. Albinism is accompanied by visual impairment, light sensitivity, and UV sensitivity. Protective clothing is a must, as with greater altitude you have reduced protection from UV light.

Many disabled characters will need assistance getting into and out of their aircraft, but many abled pilots will as well, especially once you load yourself down with a parachute and flying leathers!

Reverie Hills

'Mid the human race, there's a special place
For the boldest pilots' souls
When their grand designs run their final test
Or they've flown their last patrol

When those who've never dared to fly
Feel mortality's terrible chill
They are each of them dragged to their place in the sky
By some spirit or deity's will

But to those who have flouted gravity's force
And shun angels for flying machines
Well, they chart for themselves a different course
To a land of Elysian greens

Its hills roll on for uncountable miles
'Neath an endless summer day's light
And the higher one climbs, the more it beguiles,
That distant and comfortable sight

And the air is as clear as the youthful dream
That some distant day you too might fly
And eternal you'll bask in a goal achieved
As you soar through a flawless sky

You'll not lack for company, that much is true
All manner of friends dwelleth there
Whatever their story, their sex. age, or hue,
Of this fabled place, each has their share

Be they pilots cut down on their morning sortie
Or felled when they first took to air
What counts is their courage, their glory, their dream,
These things that have carried them there

And far greater still, on the hills below,
With their shining eyes fixed up above,
Stand fathers and mothers, friends lost long ago,
The tender face of a lost love

And they'll marvel at you as you sail through the skies,
Call your name as you pass overhead,
But they'll fruitlessly yearn to join you and arise,
And you to join them and descend

For in order to soar o'er the mortals below,
A pilot knows weight must be shed,
And their spirit, left floating wherever they go,
Will pass over heavier heads

When they each cast off, they were outward bound,
They will never again make for home,
Their planes took them up, but could not set them down,
Thus rootless forever, they roam

For the skies may be clear, and the scenery grand,
But two things guide each pilot this way;
The dream that some long-distant day they will land,
And the hopeful voice calling their name.

Luke Marchand
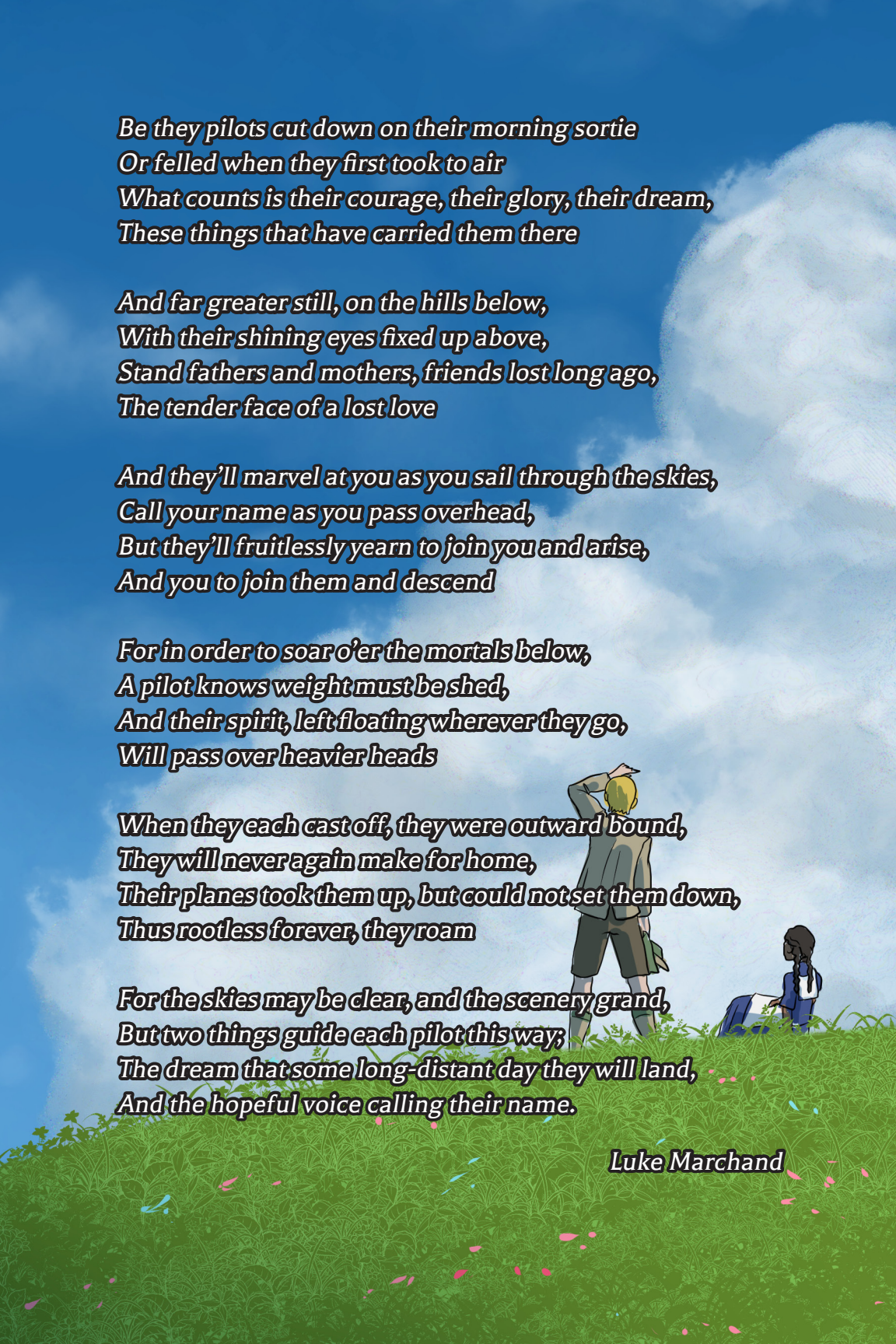
Resources

Flying Circus is inspired and informed by a wide array of fiction and nonfiction. Listing it all would be impossible, but here's a start.

Ghibli Films

Almost all of Miyazaki's works are influences, but most important:

- *Castle in the Sky*: A cozy post-apocalypse, robots, and air destroyers!
- *Nausicaä*: Deadly wild, dread war machines of a forgotten age.
- *Porco Rosso*: Air mercenaries, animal-folks, and sky pirates!
- *Howl's Moving Castle*: Dreamlike flying war machines.

WW1 Flying Ace Media

- W. E. Johns' wartime *Biggles* stories, written by a man who was there.
- *Flyboys* (2006), a pulpy romp of a World War I movie. Silly but fun!
- *The Red Baron* (2008), a darker film focused on the flying ace.
- *The Blue Max* (1966), a gritty film focusing on the industrial war.
- *Aces High* (1979), a bleak film about the stress and high mortality rate.
- 777 Studio's *Rise of Flight* (2009 Flight Simulator).

Other Media

- *Babylon Berlin*, a German crime drama about intewar Berlin.
- *Crimson Skies*, in all its incarnations.
- Jason Morningstar's *Night Witches*, an RPG about Soviet airwomen.
- Arthur Conan Doyle's *Horror of the Heights*, a short story.
- Just go watch the Trench Run scene of *Star Wars* again.

Reference Material

Properly, you should be playing Flying Circus with the downloadable playbooks, which you can print or reference on a laptop or tablet. If you can't, here's some emergency backsup. It lacks some of the narrative elements for reasons of space, but you can copy the information and layouts here and still play the game no matter what happens.

In the print version, this section will contain...

- A mock-up Instrument Panel.
- The summaries for all 10 Backgrounds.
- A selection of generic aircraft.