

THUNDERSCAPE™

THE WORLD OF ADEN



THUNDERSCAPE WORLD

02

The Thunder Trail

PATHFINDER
ROLEPLAYING GAME COMPATIBLE



THE WORLD OF ADEN ORIGINALLY CREATED BY SHANE LACY HENSLEY

Thunderscape World 2:

THE THUNDER TRAIL

Written by Shawn Carman & Rich Wulf



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THUNDERSCAPE

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Thunderscape World 2: The Thunder Trail

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Credits

Written by: Shawn Carman & Rich Wulf

Editing: Shawn Carman & Rich Wulf

Cover art: Biagio D'Alessandro

Interior Artwork:

Biagio D'Alessandro (p. 10),
Edwin David (p. 13), Jason Engle (p. 4),
Shen Fei (p. 7), & Jeremy Walker (p. 12)

Graphic Design: Mike Brodu

Original Design: Robert Denton

For Kyoudai Games

Shawn Carman, Creative Direction

Rich Wulf, Mechanical Design

Ryan Carman, Brand Development

Robert Dake, Logistics & Production

Matthew Schenck, Art Director

Butch Carman, CFO

THE THUNDER TRAIL

THE SURVIVOR, PART 1

"Guys, come look, this is amazing!" The little faerkin peeked up from the underbrush. A scraggly sprig of plant matter dangled from one of her tiny horns. She brushed it away and waved to her companions with an enthusiastic grin.

Her two comrades looked over from the far side of the scorched clearing. The smaller of them was a stocky, sharp-faced man garbed in heavy black armor. The larger was a massive tiger-ferran whose right arm and much of his torso had been replaced with well-used mechanical implants. The man scowled in annoyance and returned to studying the blasted terrain. The ferran smiled in curiosity.

"What is it, Bili?" the ferran asked. "What did you find?" He strode over to her side and knelt down to see.

"It's cetara vine, Hesh," Bilkaf replied. The tiny woman's face split in a wide grin as she held up a handful of scraggly orange vines. "I didn't know it grew this far north of the Crawling Jungle!"

"Yes. All manner of bizarre things have been wandering north from Kyan lately," the man in black observed dryly.

Bilkaf blinked. "Don't be rude, corporal," she said, hurt. She tucked a sample of the vine into one of her many pouches. "I thought you'd be happy to hear that there's new vegetation growing out here after all these years. There's no need to make fun."

Vandergris ignored her.

"Don't pay him any mind," Hesh whispered to her. "He's young."

"So am I," Bilkaf said, fuming. "You don't see me treating people like garbage."

"Are we almost done here?" Vandergris asked, fixing the pair with an impatient glare. "I'd like to report back to Brisk and be done with this mission before nightfall."

"Why in such a hurry, Corporal?" Hesh asked.

"I don't know, Dargoh," the man snapped. "Perhaps I have better things to do than babysit mercenaries on a pointless patrol."

"If I were you, I'd learn to appreciate the quiet times, Van," Hesh advised. "We're securing the Thunder Trail. I wouldn't call that pointless."

"We're less than a day from Brisk Station," Vandergris replied said with a sigh. "There hasn't been a threat in this part of Iron Guard territory for years. This is a waste of my time."

"He's right, you know," Bilkaf replied. "Van is an Iron Guard corporal. You'd think they would have something more important for him to do."

"Thank you, Kyanite," Vandergris said with a relieved sigh.

"Makes me wonder how he screwed up badly enough to get stuck patrolling with us," she added. Hesh grinned despite himself.

Vandergris' scowl deepened. "On second thought, save your words for the insects, entomancer," he said sharply. "They, at least, want to hear what you have to say."

Bilkaf's face went red.

"She has a point, Van," Hesh said, cutting off the faerkin's scathing retort. "I confess, I am curious. What did you do?"

"Disagreement with a superior officer," he replied, not meeting Hesh's gaze. "I questioned our current patrol tactics. My captain told me I needed more field experience before my opinion was worthy of merit. And here I am."

Hesh grinned. "There, you see, Bili?" the ferran said. "He's insubordinate. I knew there was a reason I liked him."

The corporal frowned in irritation. Before he could answer, an explosion resounded in the barren forest to the north.

"What was that?" Vandergris asked. He drew a short-barreled pistol and snatched his halberd from where it leaned against a fallen log.

"Lightning," Hesh replied. He rose and sniffed the air. "Nothing burns quite like lightning."

"Where did it come from?" Bilkaf asked. She glanced up at the clear sky with a concerned frown.

"We should return to Brisk Station immediately and report this," Vandergris said.

"We should investigate," Hesh countered.

"We don't have orders to enter that area," Vandergris replied. "It's not our responsibility. We shouldn't take foolish risks."

"Someone may need our help, Van," Hesh said softly.

"We're going, Corporal," Bilkaf added. "With or without you. Though we'd rather have your help."

The Iron Guardsman scowled in irritation. For a moment, he looked back the way they had come. Then he turned back to the north and nodded. "Fine," he said. "Let's go. But carefully."

The trio moved into the forest. Hesh led the way, his keen ferran senses following the sharp scent of ozone. Vandergris followed closely, pistol held at the ready. Bilkaf brought up the rear. She held no weapons but kept her hands open at her sides, ready to call upon her magic. Soon enough, the smell of smoke was obvious to all of them. The dead forest was on fire.

Before too long, the sound of steel ringing against steel echoed through the dead wood. Hesh drew the massive mechanized warhammer from its sling across his back and increased his pace. They burst out onto a small path winding through the ragged wood. A large steamwagon rested at an awkward angle nearby, one of its wheels crushed beneath it. The bodies of several men and women lay on the ground around it, killed in combat with one another.

Only three remained alive. Two stood just beside the wrecked wagon, a tall man in plain grey armor and an elderly woman in nondescript grey robes. The man held a rifle, pointed at the other survivor - a girl, barely out of her teens. She knelt thirty feet away near a semicircle of burning trees. She wore weathered red and green lamellar armor and rested on one knee, clutching a savage burn on her left arm. Her long black hair hung ragged around a face worn with exhaustion. She fixed the rifleman with an expression of fearless contempt. A dozen bodies lay on the ground around the area, wearing a motley assortment of robes and armor.

"In the name of Lord Urbane and the Iron Guard, lower your weapon," Vandergris commanded. Hesh stood beside the corporal, hammer at the ready. Bilkaf quietly picked her way through the trees, unnoticed as she made her way toward the kneeling woman.

The rifleman turned to face them with a pleasant smile. "It's all right, soldier," the man said calmly. "We just had a run-in with some bandits. We do not require assistance."

"I'll be the judge of that," Vandergris said, aiming the pistol at the man. "Drop your weapon and we'll get this sorted, friend."

The tall man sighed and laughed. His expression suddenly hardened and he whirled to aim his rifle at them.

"Van, look out!" Hesh tried to call out, but his words were cut off by a sudden, terrifying explosion.

The rifleman staggered back against the steamwagon, staring down at the bleeding wound in his chest. The rifle dropped from his lifeless arms. Smoke curled from the barrel of Vandergris' pistol.

"I warned him," Vandergris said.

"Look out!" the kneeling woman shouted.

What happened next almost defied explanation. There was a sense of time slowing down, a decelerating ripple that spread from the woman on the far side of the path. As it expanded, so did a vision of lightning

erupting from the robed woman's hands, a bolt of searing death that tore through the space where Vandergris and Hesh now stood. It lasted only for a moment, but that moment was long enough for Hesh and Van to dive to either side before the actual surge of electricity lanced through the forest where they had been standing just an instant before.

"By the Sixteen!" Van cursed.

"Sorcerer!" Hesh shouted, rising to his feet. The ferran charged toward the steamwagon.

The old woman spat out another spell as she retreated into the vehicle. The scattered corpses staggered to their feet with a chorus of pained moans, moving to block Hesh's path.

Bilkaf hurried from the bushes toward the fallen woman's side. She whispered a healing spell as she cupped her hands near her burns. The girl flinched at first, but stopped when she realized the faerkin's intent.

"It's all right," Bilkaf said. "We're here to help. My name's Bilkaf, but you can call me Bili. That's nice armor - is it Vanoran?"

"You have to stop her," the girl said. "She will call for aid."

"Looks like she already did," Bilkaf said. "Don't worry, Hesh and Van can handle a few zombies and a rogue sorceress."

"That's not what I mean," the Vanoran girl replied urgently. "She is an agent of the Darkfall."

Bilkaf glanced back toward her friends with an uneasy expression.

Down the trail, Hesh and Vandergris collided with the undead host. The Iron Guardsman's halberd cut a broad arc, its broad head slicing the legs from beneath the two nearest zombies. Hesh charged in with less finesse but a great deal more power; his hammer smashing several of the creatures apart before their claws could reach him. More rushed in to fill the gaps, pressing in toward the two warriors with no regard for themselves. The old sorceress stepped out of the wagon and cackled as she summoned the energy for another spell - but the words died on her lips as a squirming mass of slugs and spiders swarmed around her, crawling into her mouth and smothering the spell before she could complete it.

"Entomancy is revolting," Van remarked, sneering in disgust as he struck down another zombie.

"Just be glad she's on your side," Hesh replied. "Thanks, Bili! Can you deal with the fire before it spreads?" She gestured with both hands and faced the burning trees. A light drizzle of water began to fall, drenching the parched wood but doing little to slow the blaze. Bilkaf frowned and concentrated more intently.

"Sure, I'll just do everything," Bilkaf said, allowing herself a little grin.

Hesh struck down the last of the undead and rushed toward the steamwagon. He dropped his hammer and seized the old sorceress, spinning her around and locking her arms behind her back with a pair of manacles while she continued to choke on Bilkaf's summoned vermin.

"Gag her," Van ordered. "With her magic, she's too dangerous to question. We'll bring her back to Brisk Station and let the Eye deal with her."

Hesh nodded. He tore a scrap from the dead rifleman's cloak and tied it around the old woman's mouth. The Vanoran girl retrieved a thin-bladed katana from the ground nearby and strode toward the manacled sorceress. "She won't tell you anything," the girl said, her words underscored with a harsh Vanoran accent. "There's nothing your inquisitors can do that she fears more than the one she serves. Best to kill her and be done with it."

Corporal Vandergris finished reloading his pistol and aimed it at her calmly.

"Not so fast, miss," he said.

"We cannot remain here," the girl replied. "I can explain everything, but we must kill her, take her cargo, and be gone from here. I am not your enemy."

"Then prove it and drop your weapon," Van replied.

"Don't be rude, Van," Bilkaf said, returning from the steaming husks of the charred trees. "I think she's on our side."



"Then perhaps she wouldn't mind telling us what happened here?" Hesh suggested.

The Vanoran girl hesitated for a moment then nodded. She dropped her katana in the dead grass. "I am Wei Fong of House Xien," she said. "The woman you hold is called Lakoshi. She is an agent of Vosh Nakrama."

"I've heard of Nakrama," Hesh said with a grim frown. "He's wanted by the Eye. Word has it he and his cultists almost wiped out Shard Village as part of some crazy ritual three months back. Took three platoons of Iron Guardsmen to chase him into the wilderness. Half of them died doing it. What would his agents be doing so close to Brisk Station? That's practically begging to get caught by the Iron Guard."

"Unless the Iron Guard think they're too good for patrols," Bilkaf said dryly. "Wouldn't that be weird?"

Van rolled his eyes. "I have a better question, Dargoh," he said. He gave Xien a pointed look. "How do you know who this woman is, Wei Fong?"

The Vanoran glanced away uneasily. "Because I am a seer," she said. "My master, Wayan, foresaw a great danger if we did not prevent Lakoshi's cargo from reaching its destination."

"The seers are dead," Van replied. "The Darkfall killed them."

"Most of us," Wei Fong replied. "We few who survived have learned to avoid attention. My master had been gathering those he could. Wayan... me... six others... As far as I know, I am the only seer left now." She glanced at the fallen bodies, her expression numb. "I told Wayan that we should seek aid... He refused to trust anyone. We were unprepared or Lakoshi's strength."

"So why tell us the truth now?" Hesh asked.

"Secrecy killed my friends and my master," Wei Fong replied. "The truth is all I have left."

"Do you think it's true, Van?" Bilkaf asked. "Could she really be a seer?"

Corporal Vandergris frowned. Since the Darkfall, countless hucksters and charlatans had stepped forward claiming to be seers. His training told him not to believe... But he couldn't forget the warning Wei Fong had shouted when Lakoshi had tried to kill them - that strange, timeless moment when he had witnessed his own death.

"Let's secure the steamwagon's cargo and get back to Brisk Station," Van said. "Then we'll figure out what to do. Pick up your sword, Wei Fong."

The Vanoran girl smiled faintly in relief and retrieved her weapon. As they moved toward the steamwagon, however, the ground erupted before them. An enormous serpent rose from the earth, its torso as thick as a wagon's wheel. The creature lashed out with terrifying speed, snatching Lakoshi in its jaws. Hesh dodged away from it, snatching his thunderhammer as he did.

"A nocturnal!" the ferran shouted.

"By the Sixteen," Van cursed again.

"I warned you that Lakoshi would call for aid," Xien Wei Fong said, readying her katana and turning to face the beast. "Nakrama has sent one of his guardians."

The nocturnal thrashed back and forth, shaking the sorceress violently before flinging her body into the trunk of a nearby tree with a wet thud. The serpent threw back its head and unleashed a terrifying metallic shriek, threads of sizzling green ichor dripping from its fangs.

"Nakrama has a strange way of helping its friends," Bilkaf remarked.

"Then let's be grateful he's an enemy," Corporal Vandergris replied. He raised his pistol and fired it into the snake's rippling torso. Its flesh tore away, revealing a skin of warped and dented steel beneath. Van's eyes widened.

"Don't worry, Corporal," Hesh said. He lifted his hammer high. A cloud of steam hissed from the machinery in its shaft. "If we survive this, you'll finally have some field experience to tell your captain about."

The serpent lunged.

THE THUNDER TRAINS OF URBANA

Called by some the embodiments of the current age, the Thunder Trains are easily the largest and arguably the most advanced technological devices in existence anywhere in Aden. The precise methods of their creation are perhaps the most jealously guarded secrets in all the Known Lands, and it is said that perhaps less than one hundred living souls are familiar with the entirety of the mechemagical devices that power the massive transports along on their inexorable route.



The History of Railways in Aden

Although few remember them with any detail or clarity, railway trains existed in Aden long before the Darkfall. They were, in fact, the inspiration behind Lord Urbane's commissioning the Thunder Trains. Locomotive technology has existed in Aden for centuries, even prior to the development of mechemagic. Railways were never particularly common, existing predominantly in Columbey and the Concordance of Le'Ciel. In Columbey, the railways were considered an opportunity for the wealthy nobility to indulge in excess, whereas in Le'Ciel, the all-powerful Exarchs considered technology an interesting diversion that gave their lower castes something that they could be involved in without challenging the Exarchs' monopoly on magic studies.

Pre-Darkfall trains were conventional in every sense of the word, operating with engines that used simple steam engine boilers to pull a varying number of cars, and which ran upon previously established rails that fell along the most well-traveled trade routes. Passenger transport was a secondary purpose of the railways, but by far their primary function was to transport trade goods between population centers.

There are a number of reasons that traditional railroads never found purchase in more nations. Prior to the Darkfall, operating the trains required large amounts of coal or other similar fuel sources, which many nations lacked in any significant quantity and had little desire to initiate mining operations solely to expand into railway operation. The rails themselves were difficult to maintain, for even during Aden's Golden Age there was no shortage of dangerous wildlife that could and frequently did damage the rails. A group of pre-Thunder Scout individuals made their living patrolling and repairing the rails, but this was only an additional expense that made maintaining a railway less cost effective.


By the time the Darkfall occurred, there were very few functioning railways anywhere in Aden. A handful of routes were maintained by eccentric nobles in Columbey, and at least one of the Exarchs in Le'Ciel found the practice interesting enough to maintain numerous railways around the small island nation, but beyond this, the only trace of the once-larger railway systems was a decaying network of rails in those two nations.

Columbey

The first Thunder Train was unveiled only two years after the Darkfall, making them a relatively recent technological advancement. However, these legendary vehicles were not a sudden innovation. They were the result of centuries of incremental advancement. The earliest such vehicles were first seen in the nation of Columbey, predecessor to Urbana.

With the discovery of manite in the ninth century, the Age of Thunder began in earnest. The new science of mechemagic began to revolutionize Aden. When prospectors discovered extensive veins of manite throughout the lands of Columbey, mechemages throughout the world descended on the nation in hopes of plying their arts. Unfortunately, the Tarello kings of Columbey were wary of the negative effects of manite





refinement upon both living creatures and the environment and imposed rigid limits upon all such research.

A secret conspiracy between the Mithral Consortium merchant house and the mechemages of Aramyst's Celestial College soon saw the overthrow of the Tarello Dynasty and the rise of their successors, the Warrains. The Warrain kings were much more amenable to the idea of manite refinement, not surprisingly, and soon Columbey stood at the forefront of mechemagical advancement.

Necessity, of course, is the mother of invention. The merchants and mechemages soon realized the need to quickly and efficiently transport manite ore from remote locations such as Smult to large cities in other parts of Columbey. The answer came in the form of the first steam-powered trains. These vehicles all bore powerful manite engines and were helmed by powerful mechemage engineers. These primitive trains barely resembled the legendary thunder trains - they were a mere fraction of the size of a true Thunder Train, bore no weapons or defenses, and operated on a fixed track. Despite their many limitations, they performed their jobs admirably, and established many of the technological concepts used in later mechemagical vehicles.

When the Darkfall came, the old train network quickly fell into disuse. Their fixed track system proved far too vulnerable, and was quickly mangled beyond repair by nocturnal saboteurs. However, Urbane saw great promise in the idea of these trains. It is said that no more than a day after retaking the city of Tarello (and dubbing it Mekanus), Lord Urbane charged his mechemages and steamwrights with creating a more powerful form of the train - one that could defend itself from attack and required no fixed tracks with which to operate.

The Thunder Trains were the result.

Aramyst

Aramyst's Celestial College played an important role in the development of Columbey's first trains. As mechemagic was a new science and the mages of Aramyst were uncertain of its long-term effects they were content, at first, to allow Columbey to serve as a testing ground for their experiments. In the years just prior to the Darkfall, the College apparently judged the experiment a success and began construction of a new railroad network in Aramyst.

Unfortunately, this great venture was never completed. When the Darkfall destroyed Aramyst, those who worked on the railroads were numbered among the victims. The remains of this great venture can still be found throughout the ruined kingdom. Stretches of intact train tracks still sprawl across the burning lands. Several train stations - some of them with intact engines - still stand. Many of them have become homes to nocturnals or desperate refugees.

Can the Thunder Train Stop in...

You may be asking yourself if the Thunder Train could make scheduled stops in settlements other than those listed here in this rough description of the Thunder Trail. Well of course it can! If the trains only stopped in the cities specifically mentioned, it would be difficult for them to conduct sufficient trade to keep the various nations afloat. The cities specifically mentioned in the following section are the cities that are home to a Thunder Station. These are the stops that a train makes every time it travels the Thunder Trail, but there are numerous other settlements that a train can and will stop at, depending upon the nature of the cargo that it carries, the time of year, and the whims of the Iron Guard commander in charge of that particular run. Stops in other settlements are not uncommon, although they are not regularly scheduled and tend to be short in duration, often only a few hours at most. In Mekanus and Arasteen in particular, impromptu stopovers are more common due to the aggressive nature of trade between the two nations, and because trade and distribution of goods within Mekanus is an exceptionally important aspect of the Thunder Trains' function.

Le'Ciel

The Exarches of Le'Ciel watched the development of these trains with jealous interest. Though impressed by the accomplishments of their Aramystian rivals, they also scoffed at the limitations imposed by what they felt was excessive caution. In the late 10th century, the Exarches bribed several prominent Columbey mechemages to sell their secrets to the Concordance. The Cielans added a few of their own innovations to these stolen designs. Within a few years, a massive train network spread throughout the subcontinent of Le'Ciel. Unlike the Columbey network, the Cielan railroads were not limited to industrial use. They were used as public transportation by Le'Ciel's elite upper class.

As Le'Ciel was spared much of the destruction of the Darkfall, its railroads remain intact and operation to this day. With the disappearance of the Exarches, the Magisters have wisely decided to make the trains accessible to members of all social classes.



The Thunder Trail

The single most important trade route in the entirety of the Known Lands, the Thunder Trail is the name given to the route by which the Thunder Trains make their way across the continent to restore commerce after it essentially ground to a halt in the wake of the Darkfall. Originally, the trail connected the cities of Mekanus and Balaquim, but in recent years it has been expanded to include Bulgrak and there are rumors that it may be expanded yet again in the near future. Any attempt to describe the trail precisely is doomed to failure, however, because each route varies slightly depending upon a number of factors, including but not limited to the weather, the presence of nocturnals, changes in the topography, and once again, the whims of the Iron Guard commander in charge of a particular run.

The Thunder Trail begins in Mekanus, the largest city in Aden and the capital of Urbana as well as the home of the factories where the Thunder Trains were produced in the first place. The factories include massive berths where the trains are stationed upon their return from a trip throughout the land. Vast crews of steamwrights and mechemages descend upon a train upon its return to Mekanus to inspect every inch of its mechanisms and repair it as necessary. Typically this process takes a few weeks, a bit longer for the massive Pride of Mekanus, and then the train proceeds back out onto the trail once again as soon as it is loaded with trade goods.

From Mekanus, the Thunder Trail follows the coastline north until it reaches Redbeach within the borders of Arasteen. Originally Urbane wished to construct his Thunder Station within Sea Reach, the capital, but King Corben flatly refused. Urbane was enraged and threatened to cut Arasteen off from the Thunder Trail completely, but it was an empty threat; Urbana desperately needs the foods that their northern neighbors trade to them in order to feed its hungry populace. From Redbeach the trail travels west-southwest until it reaches the city of Rose. Here, depending upon the season, a train may veer north back into Arasteen to hit a number of different settlements for agricultural trade, or it may continue westward toward Respite and either south into Urbana's more distant reaches or travel onward to Burcham's Pass and out of the nation proper. Shortly thereafter, they reach the town of Tee, a settlement constructed since the Darkfall to serve as a center of commerce in the Sundered Desert and home to another Thunder Station.

From Tee, the Thunder Trail splits into two separate directions. The original trail heads south and passes through Razir and Midvale before the long trek to the southernmost tip of the mainland at Balaquim, the busiest port in Aden. The trains usually spend twice as long in Balaquim as in any other thunder station as the merchants that serve the Iron Tyrant make extensive trades for the various goods that have been accumulated throughout the run. Then the trains depart and follow the route backwards until they reach Mekanus again, inevitably fully loaded with goods and coins earned through sales and trades all across the land.

From Tee, the trail also extends to the east, where the more recently blazed section of the Thunder Trail first connects to Pas, then Farpoint, both within the Rhanate. Once it crosses out of the Rhanate, the Thunder

Trail continues to Sentinel in Carraway, then up into the High Steppes where it ends its route at Bulgrak, the capital city of that barbarous realm. From there, the trains on this route, typically the *Dominant* and the *Scouring Eye*, head back toward Tee and then on to Mekanus.

Every stop along the Thunder Trail contains a specially constructed Thunder Station to ensure that the trains can be accommodated properly. These stations are built to careful specifications supplied by Urbana when a city is selected for a stop on the Thunder Trail. These stations can be quite expensive to construct, but as of yet no city chosen to host one has declined to do so; the economic and commercial boon to having a Thunder Train stop in a settlement is significant enough to bolster an entire nation. There is currently a movement underway to convince Lord Urbane to expand the Thunder Trail to include a third route that would visit both Vanora and Aramyst, specifically the cities of Shang and Refuge. The Emperor of Vanora is known to be an admirer of Lord Urbane's, and their cordial relationship may well help make the former a reality. Urbane has nothing but disdain for the ruins of Aramyst, however, and the likelihood of a Thunder Station being constructed in Refuge, even if the refugees there could afford such a thing, is extremely low.

Riding the Trains

The Thunder Trains are, first and foremost, designed to transport trade goods throughout Aden. Sanctioned merchants can transport their goods on the Thunder Trains free of charge. These individuals are exclusively representatives of the Urbanan government or foreign allies with whom Urbana has brokered trade agreements. Within Urbana itself, the trains are also used to transport Shadow Army soldiers or other military assets wherever they are needed.

Though it is not technically their purpose, the Thunder Trains are also famous throughout Aden as passenger vehicles. The *Pride of Mekanus* is the only train with a permanent passenger barge, but when possible, the other trains also include one, if only to accommodate merchants travelling with their goods. These barges are always located in the rear of the train, as their protection is considered a secondary priority. If faced with no other option, Thunder Trains engineers are instructed to cut their losses and abandon the passenger barges to their own devices - though this has never occurred. Given the presence of the Iron Guard and the formidable defenses of these vehicles, a journey by Thunder Train is the safest mode of long-distance travel in all of Aden.

This security comes at a premium. Travel by Thunder Train is expensive, five times the cost of hiring a wagon or carriage before the Darkfall. For many private merchants, nobles, and adventurers a ticket is well worth the expense, but most common citizens find passage on the trains to be well beyond their means. Current and former members of the Urbanan military can purchase passage for themselves and any personal cargo for half the normal cost simply by providing proof of their identity and enlistment (dishonorably discharged soldiers do not receive this benefit).

Passenger cabins are small and cramped, usually shared among several passengers. Each cabin is equipped with fold-out beds and travel costs include food and drink. The fare aboard the Thunder Trains is notoriously bland - and has been the butt of many jokes among the Iron Guard and other travelers - but it is nutritious enough. Passengers are allowed to take only whatever cargo they can carry with them, though additional cargo space can be purchased.

Luxury tickets are available in limited number and at great expense. A luxury spot aboard the trains guarantees a spacious personal cabin, a real bed, high-quality food and drink, and entertainment provided by on-board musicians. Luxury is still a relative term, however, and the noise of the train, not to mention the invasive stench of its many, many engines, is still something that must be borne stoically.

For the poor, there is also travel aboard the common cars. These are any cargo barges for which a given train failed to sell space. Rather than go to the trouble of removing these barges at the last minute, the trains sell this space to desperate travelers. These barges are crowded and offer no beds, food, or other amenities. Located in the rear of the train, these common cars are only lightly patrolled by the train's Iron Guard security. Violent incidents and crime are common among those who dare to ride the Trail in this manner.

Prices for various types of passage on the Thunder Trains are given in the Sidebar: Thunder Train Costs. Keep in mind that these are an estimate. Depending on the time of year, the popularity of a given route, and the dangers the train expects to face, tickets could be much more expensive or just unavailable. Passage upon the Boundless, the swiftest of the trains, can cost up to ten times as much as passage on a normal train - when it is available to the public at all. Trips that venture beyond Urbana and Arasteen are at least ten percent more expensive due to the potential danger of such journeys.

The Pride of Mekanus



Thunder Train Costs

Type of Passage	Cost (gp)
Common Car	5 cp/mile
Passenger Ticket, standard	15 cp/mile
Passenger Ticket, luxury	6 sp/mile
Cargo, Large	25 cp/mile
Cargo, Huge	4 sp/mile
Living Cargo (fees in addition to normal cargo fees)	+50 gp/500 miles

Passage from Mekanus

Here are a few examples of typical prices and travel time for a ticket from Mekanus Central Station to various prominent cities in Aden. These prices can fluctuate wildly and are often unavailable, but should never drop below these minimums. Prices listed are for standard passage, and should be increased or decreased proportionately for other forms of passage. (As per the previous sidebar, common cars cost one third as much and luxury tickets cost four times as much.)

Distance does not only indicate distance from Mekanus, but rather the estimated distance that the train must actually travel as it passes through way stations, avoids impassable terrain, and circumvents known dangerous areas.

City	Distance	Travel Time	Cost
Sea Reach (Arasteen)	1950 miles (3100 km)	7 days	292 gp
Sentinel (Carraway)	3000 miles (4800 km)	14 days	471 gp
Bulgrak (High Steppes)	3225 miles (5200 km)	16 days	509 gp
Tanto (Vanora)	3525 miles (5675 km)	18 days	558 gp
Balaquim (Yzeem)	2900 miles (4600 km)	12 days	456 gp
Tee (Rhanate)	1850 miles (3000 km)	8 days	282 gp

Thunder Trains & Unique Enchantments

It goes without saying that the Thunder Trains are incredible complex and valuable devices. The degree of labor and resources that goes into their creation is completely unparalleled, enough that entire cities could be created with less effort than these massive constructions. Early in their development, many whispered that Lord Urbane was mad for even suggesting their construction, much less insisting upon it. Time has proven the Iron Tyrant correct, however, and it is almost exclusively because of the Thunder Trains that Aden has a functional economy once more.

All this is a means of explaining how anyone could justify the astronomical expense creating the unique weapons and enchantments that the Thunder Trains possess. Indeed, these benefits were designed without thought of the cost that such things would incur in accordance with the Pathfinder rule system, because if Lord Urbane ordered that money was no object, we certainly are not going to challenge him on it.

Travel Speeds

Under optimal conditions, a Thunder Train moves at a speed of roughly 12 miles/hour (19 km/hour or 120 feet per turn). A Thunder Train cannot use the rush action available to normal vehicles. Thunder trains are self-sufficient and piloted by teams of engineers who rotate their duties regularly, allowing them to travel directly to their destination without stopping for rest. The only time a Thunder Train purposefully stops is when it arrives at a train station (and even then, it rarely stops any longer than it takes to load/unload and perform necessary maintenance).

In Urbana, Arasteen, and Yzeem, the Thunder Trail is well maintained and travels through flat, even ground, allowing the trains to cover 288 miles (463 km) per day. In Yzeem, Carraway, and Vanora the Trail covers slightly more treacherous terrain, reducing average progress to about 216 miles (347 km) per day. The vast deserts of the Rhanate are notoriously treacherous to Thunder Train engines, reducing passage through such areas to half normal - 144 miles (231 km) per day.

The Boundless is much faster than other Thunder Trains, and can reach speeds of up to 60 miles/hour (96 km/hour or 600 feet per turn). Much of the time, due to terrain and safety issues, the Boundless is forced to move at a much slower pace. While it can maintain its full speed where the Thunder Trails are well-maintained (Urbana and Arasteen) it is only, on average, twice as fast as a normal Thunder Train in other areas.

The Remoras

For those who cannot afford passage on the Thunder Trains there is another option. While much of Aden can be hazardous, many travelers have learned that frequent patrols by the Iron Guard and other national military have made the Thunder Trails safer than most areas. Obviously the best way to be safe is to travel on a train itself, but when that's impossible, traveling near the trains can be almost as good. Traveling in front of a train is highly dangerous as the Iron Guard soldiers are trained to interpret any obstacle in their path as a potential threat. (This is without considering the dangers of being crushed under the train itself if your speed should falter.) Likewise, traveling beside the trains is not advised - vehicles that attempt to do so will be ordered to withdraw or treated as potential boarders. Traveling *behind* the Thunder Trains, however, is grudgingly tolerated so long as you keep your distance.

This has led to a small subculture of travelers known as the remoras. These are gangs of wanderers, usually piloting steamwagons or other mechemagical vehicles that can keep up with a thunder train's relentless pace. The remoras cling to the wake of safety created by the Thunder Trains, following them wherever they lead. While most remoras are temporary, simply shadowing a particular train until it reaches a specific destination, there are also professional remoras. These individuals (usually working in pairs or small groups, to share driving duties) haunt Thunder Train stations, offering their services to those who cannot obtain passage on the trains.

The price of riding with a remora can be quite a bit cheaper than riding on a Thunder Train, but it is not without risk. Many remoras are dishonest bandits looking only to rob their passengers and abandon them in the wasteland. Even for those who are reliable, the Thunder Trail can be a dangerous place. Thunder Trains do, occasionally, fall under attack by nocturnals or other dangers. Those that are inevitably repulsed by the Iron Guard sometimes turn their fury upon the remoras before retreating. The Iron Guard policy is to leave remoras to their fate - only the train and its contents are their responsibility. (In practice, most Iron Guardsmen are at least compassionate enough to fire a few parting shots to aid a remora under attack.)

Note that there are no requirements to join the remoras. If the player characters wish to travel as remoras, all they need is a vehicle that can keep up with a Thunder Train. This is not an issue for any party with a thunder scout, whose signature vehicles are much faster than most Thunder Trains.

THE FOUR IRON GIANTS

The Dominant

The first Thunder Train to be completed, the *Dominant* is accordingly the least advanced and one of the smallest of the four completed trains to date. It was finished and operational while the second train, the *Pride of Mekanus*, was still in the early stages of construction. Although the *Dominant* was easily the largest man-made vehicle in recorded history, it is said that Lord Urbane was not content with it, and ordered that the second train in development be doubled in size. This added nearly six months to its construction, during which time the *Dominant* was active on limited trade runs throughout Urbana. These were hard-fought months, with nocturnal attacks against the train being incredibly common, as were the mechanical difficulties experienced by the new technology. In addition to restoring order to numerous small villages that were barely surviving in the wake of the Darkfall, this tour of duty also served to highlight numerous difficulties with the Thunder Train workings that were corrected before any other trains were completed, although the *Dominant* had to be refitted frequently in order to overcome these shortcomings.

After the Thunder Trail between Mekanus and Balaquim was well worn and had proven an enormous success, Lord Urbane began to contemplate the possibility of sending the trains farther east, toward the High Steppes. Two additional Thunder Trains were commissioned to be built for this purpose, and Lord Urbane ordered the *Dominant* to undergo its most extensive refit yet, deeming its configuration at that time unsuitable for blazing a new Thunder Trail to the east. Well aware of the challenging landscape and rock formations that would bar the *Dominant*'s path, Lord Urbane's men refitted it so that the engine housed the largest storm cannon ever created, possessing enough firepower to blast entire hills flat to facilitate its trek to the east. It is not a weapon that can be fired quickly or easily, of course; in order for it to be fired the engine has to be stationary and reloading can take up to half an hour depending upon the crew size. Thus armed, it was the *Dominant* that first forged the Thunder Trail to Bulgrak in the High Steppes, and it remains the train with the most miles traveled by a wide margin.

In its original configuration, the *Dominant*'s engine car pulled behind it eight barges of equal size. At each end of every car was one pair of massive ballista. Added to this, the engine and the final car of the train's length also had a single storm cannon. When added to this the personal arsenal of the Iron Guard, the best equipped military unit in all of Urbana, and the *Dominant* was exceptionally well defended without even taking into account its considerable defensive enchantments as well as the mechamages that served as part of its crew contingent. Shortly after it entered service, the *Dominant*'s compliment of cargo cars was increased to twelve.

Since its reconfiguration, the *Dominant* largely retains its original formation save for the engine, which has been re-outfitted to house a siege weapon of truly astonishing proportions. This storm cannon, referred to by the Iron Guard as the Great Storm, runs three quarters the length of the engine itself and has a barrel that is ten feet across. It fires not a single projectile, but a massive host of traditionally sized cannon ammunition in a quantity never before utilized. Literally nothing that the Great Storm has ever been fired upon has been able to withstand its onslaught for more than two shots at the very most before crumbling into rubble and scrap. Living beings caught within its area of effect when it is fired seem to cease to exist, torn asunder by explosive forces such as no living creature can hope to withstand. The Great Storm is not without cost, however; the weight of the weapon and its supplies necessitated the reduction of the *Dominant* to effectively eleven cargo barges instead of twelve, as one barge is completely occupied with the

cannon's ammunition and spare parts. Additionally, many of those who have the misfortune of firing the Great Storm have been permanently deafened by the experience.

The Pride of Mekanus

The *Pride of Mekanus* was the second Thunder Train completed, and it remains by far the largest of the four existing trains. Its engine is double the size of the *Dominant*'s, the first train, and it pulls a mind-numbing thirty-six barges. Its crew and armaments are the most significant as well, as is fitting to safeguard cargo of such size that it would require an entire fleet of traditional shipping vessels to transport. Because of its sheer size, the *Pride of Mekanus* rarely operates at completely full capacity, and as a result one of its cars has been permanently assigned for passengers.

Since it was first deployed many years ago, the *Pride of Mekanus* has never remained in port for maintenance for more than six weeks at the most. Of all the trains, it has spent the most time on the trail, second only to the *Dominant* in terms of sheer distance traveled during the course of its service. Its only route is the one between Mekanus and Balaquim, which it executes faithfully and on schedule despite any number of attacks that it has experienced over the course of its years of service. Even among the elite ranks of the Iron Guard, those who serve aboard the *Pride* are known to be a cut above the rest, and are widely regarded as battle-hardened veterans that fear nothing, but whom should in turn be feared by all.

The *Pride of Mekanus*'s first and most effective weapon is its sheer size. Rare are the nocturnals who can pose a physical threat to the other Thunder Trains, and thus far no such creatures have ever been documented with regard to the *Pride*. Nevertheless, creatures of all shapes and size have made the attempt, but few have survived. The Iron Guardsmen who serve aboard the *Pride* are the most experienced and proficient in all of Urbana, and they are afforded the finest weapons as a result. The *Pride* is bristling with ballista, storm cannons, and various other experimental weaponry that the steamwrights in the service of the Iron Tyrant wish to try out under battle conditions.

The Boundless

After the completion of *Pride of Mekanus*, it was obvious that Lord Urbane had a vehicle that could take literally anything he wished across the face of Aden and bring it to whatever port he chose. The only drawback to his mightiest creation was that its enormous size rendered it very ponderous, and the round trip from Mekanus to Balaquim took months to complete. Although he had no interest in intrigue, the Iron Tyrant eventually acknowledged that there would be times when he would require high priority items to be transported quickly, and thus he permitted the construction of the Boundless to take its eventual form.

The *Boundless* is the smallest of the Thunder Trains, and is capable of pulling only a meager two cargo barges. However, it is also by far the fastest of the trains, and moves at a rate of nearly three times the next fastest train. Because of its relatively limited capacity, the train sees less use than others. While the *Pride of Mekanus* has been operating on the trail between Mekanus and Balaquim nonstop for almost eight years, and the *Dominant* and the *Scouring Eye* have been blazing trails between Mekanus and Bulgrak, the *Boundless* makes much more limited runs. It periodically is deployed to Balaquim to ensure that there is regular trade between that port city and Urbana's capital when the *Pride* is along its ponderous schedule, and it has also been deployed to Bulgrak on more than one occasion when the *Scouring Eye* was required for the regular Mekanus-Balaquim route. It often remains in Mekanus for use in the event of emergencies or high priority cargo requirements.

Although it is unknown to all save the highest levels of Urbane's trusted advisors, and of course to the crew that serves aboard the *Boundless*, this train has the most expensive and complex system of enchantments of any of the four existing Thunder Trains. Through truly spectacular expense, the *Boundless* has been enchanted to be able to



Thunder Train Statistics

Train	Length	Barges	Armament
The Dominant	840 feet	12 barges	The Great Storm (Unique storm cannon)
The Pride of Mekanus	1,680 feet	36 barges	4 storm cannons, 2 ballista
The Boundless	615 feet	2 barges	2 storm cannons, 4 ballista
The Scourging Eye	840 feet	12 barges	Arcane Matrix (Unique magical weapon)
Cargo Barge	840 feet		4 ballista

render its entire form incorporeal for brief periods of time, allowing it to pass through solid obstacles without difficulty. Even more amazing, the entire train can be shunted into another plane, allowing it to traverse significant distances in the physical realm by traveling through a corresponding plane. The process requires a large number of arcanists, many of whom are not mechamages but fully trained wizards, and is generally regarded as extremely dangerous. During such periods of transit, the trains are completely shuttered and all crew members are specifically ordered not to look outside or venture away from the interior for any reason. Although the cause of these restrictions is not known even to the Iron Guards that serve aboard the *Boundless*, the horrifying sounds that emanate from outside the train are more than enough to prevent them from breaking these particular rules.

The Scourging Eye

The *Scourging Eye* is the newest and perhaps most fearsome of the existing Thunder Trains. Its construction was overseen by many loyal and devoted men who would go on to become high-ranking Inquisitors of the Eye, and the train has a vastly more arcane focus than any of the others. A large number of Inquisitors are permanently stationed as crew of the *Scourging Eye*, working alongside the Iron Guard who oversee its more mundane functions. The train's most unique feature is the so-called Arcane Matrix. This unique creation is a large, coursing ball of arcane energy contained in a mechamagical aperture in the train's towering central stack. The Arcane Matrix can be used via a ritual that has to be conducted by no less than three ranking Inquisitors, the result of which is to unleash an incredibly powerful, steady stream of magical energy that is as powerful as a spell by the most skilled and venerable of all wizards. Like the *Dominant*, the *Scourging Eye* can use this weapon to blast obstacles from its path, but unlike its fellow train, the *Eye* can utilize its weapon as the train is moving and can change its direction as the beam is maintained. It is said that even the nocturnals fear the *Scourging Eye*, and they certainly have very good reason to do so.

THUNDER TRAIN EQUIPMENT

Arcane Matrix: The arcane matrix of the *Scourging Eye* is a unique weapon that can unleash unprecedented amounts of arcane energy in a devastating blast against anything that stands against the train's progress. The matrix can be directed up to sixty degrees away from the front in either direction. The matrix functions as the *stormbolts* spell with a range of 1,000 feet, and can be maintained for up to five rounds in a row once per hour, recharging a single use of the spell per twelve minutes of rest.

Ballista: These rather simple but deadly weapons are essentially very large crossbows that use mundane bolts to target enemies. Every car contains an airtight chamber near the ballista that contains, among other

things, resin-soaked wood chips that can be attached to the bolts so that they can be set aflame before firing.

The Great Storm: Quite possibly the single largest cannon ever constructed, the so-called Great Storm is a massive storm cannon that runs nearly the entire length of the *Dominant's* engine car. It is the only one of its kind, primarily because attempts to create stationary versions of it have resulted in failure; the force of its discharge is such that successfully reinforcing it to keep it from damaging itself during firing makes it incapable of changing direction, essentially rendering it useless. It has essentially the same statistics as a traditional storm cannon, but has increased damage (20d10), range (1,000 feet), area of effect (50' by 50'), and weight (10 tons). The cost of such a weapon is, of course, incalculable.

Storm Cannons: Storm cannons are, in many ways, the archetypal weapon of Urbana, and as such it is no surprise to find them deployed on the Thunder Trains. Statistics and information on storm cannons can be found in Chapter 9 of the *Thunderscape: the World of Aden Campaign Setting*.

The Sentinels

In addition to a Thunder Train's complement of Iron Guard soldiers and potent defensive weaponry, each of these vehicles is also protected by extraordinary mechamagical constructs known as the Sentinels. These mighty golems are linked directly to the enchantments that drive their Thunder Train. They exist solely to protect the vehicle under their charge.

The engineer currently serving as a Thunder Train's helmsman can mentally communicate with the train's Sentinels at all times. A Sentinel always acts to protect its Thunder Train unless commanded otherwise by the train's helmsman. Commanding a Sentinel is no easy task. Though all Sentinels can speak, they accept only mental commands. By design, their minds are programmed to communicate only via a complex mental code, equivalent in complexity to any language, to prevent the Sentinels from being commanded by enemies of the Iron Guard.

At the beginning of each journey, the helmsman's first act is to mentally inform each of the train's Sentinels of the train's intended route. Any deviation from this route will be interpreted by the Sentinels as a threat to the train. Unless informed of the reasons for the change, they will immediately act to incapacitate the train's helmsman and protect the train until it can be reclaimed by a member of the Shadow Army.

The secret of the Sentinels' creation is a well-kept secret, known only to a handful of Urbana's trusted engineers. Like many advanced constructs, these creatures are infused with a spark of life essence. Whereas in many golems, this takes the form of an elemental spirit or outsider, the Sentinels rely upon the fragmented life essences of mortal souls.

The very first Sentinel souls were acquired from condemned prisoners. Once the process was perfected, Urbana ceased to rely on such a dangerous source and instead offered Sentinel conversion to be performed only upon volunteers. These individuals are almost exclusively soldiers too grievously injured for golemoid conversion, or gole-

moid soldiers who have begun to exhibit symptoms of the Wasting. The process of extracting a soul and bonding it to a Sentinel is excruciating and leaves the resulting Sentinel with absolutely no memory or awareness of its former life.

Though they have proven to be powerful weapons, Lord Urbane remains wary that these creatures might one day turn against him. He creates only enough Sentinels to protect the Thunder Trains and uses them for no other purpose. He also carries a specially crafted control rod that allows him to command or deactivate any Sentinel he can see - just in case.

Sentinels are far more intelligent than most golems and even develop personalities over time. They are capable of analyzing situations and flexibly formulating new strategies. Some of the older Sentinels have even formed friendships with the Iron Guard soldiers that serve on their trains.

There are some among the Iron Guard who find the Sentinels' advanced intelligence and personalities disturbing. Though there is no indication that the Sentinels possess any memory of their former lives, the fact that they possess rational thought and personalities makes them seem more like living beings than constructs. Many ferrans have noticed the similarities between their race's origin as a magical slave race and that of these intelligent golems.

Sentinel creators argue that their creations are completely dependent on the magical energies of a Thunder Train for their existence, so it's not as if these creatures have any choice but to protect the trains. In reality, the Sentinels are not truly dependent on the trains. The bond that causes them to shut down if they wander too far from the trains has nothing to do with the magic that animates them, but is merely another failsafe intended to prevent the Sentinels from becoming independent.



A massive figure smoothly assembles itself from the Thunder Train's hull. A moment ago, it seemed like nothing more than part of the massive vehicle's machinery. Now it looms above you, a powerful sentinel constructed of gleaming silver metal. Its eyes burn with an intense orange light as it coldly discerns whether you are friend or foe.

Sentinel CR 15

XP 51,200

LN Large construct

Init +7; Senses darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; Perception +20

Defense

AC 32, touch 16, flat-footed 25 (+7 Dex, +16 natural, -1 size)

hp 150 (20d10+40)

Fort +6, Ref +13, Will +6

DR 15/adamantine; Immune construct traits, magic

Offense

Speed 30 ft., fly 100 ft. (poor)

Melee +1 thunderhammer +28/+23/+18/+13 (1d12+9 / 19-20/X3), +1 magmaxe +28/+23/+18 (1d12+10 / 19-20/X3, half of damage counts as fire damage)

Ranged 2 thunder rays +27 ranged touch (2d10 sonic)

Special Attacks powerful charge (thunderhammer +32, 3d12+8 / 19-20/X3)

Statistics

Str 28, Dex 25, Con -, Int 11, Wis 10, Cha 9

Base Atk +20; CMB +30; CMD 47

Feats Double Slice, Greater Two-Weapon Fighting, Improved Critical (magmaxe), Improved Critical (thunderhammer), Improved Two-Weapon Fighting, Magma Eruption, Power Attack, Thunder Reckoning, Two-Weapon Fighting, Two-Weapon Rend

Skills Fly +11, Perception +20, Stealth +13

Special Abilities

♦ **Immunity to Magic (Ex)** A Sentinel is immune to any spell or spell-like ability that allows spell resistance, with the exception of spells and spell-like abilities that specifically affect constructs, which affect it normally. In addition, certain spells and effects function differently against the creature, as noted below.

♦ **Thunder Ray (Su)** A Sentinel can fire a beam of pure sonic energy from its mouth at a maximum range of 100 feet twice per round as a single standard action. Enemies struck by these rays must make a Fortitude save (DC 20) or fall prone and be staggered for one round. These rays may be directed at the same target or multiple targets.

♦ **Steamreaver Mastery (Su)** Sentinels possess proficiency with all steamreaver weapons and can dual wield 2-handed steamreaver weapons designed for Medium sized creatures as if they were light weapons. These weapons are considered +1 weapons and are always powered when wielded by a Sentinel. A Sentinel receives two free steam points per turn which it can utilize for weapon abilities or steamreaver feats. The default Sentinel described in this stat block wields a thunderhammer and a magmaxe, but these constructs are known to wield all varieties of steamreaver weapons. Feel free to vary their weapons and feats appropriately.

♦ **Camouflage (Ex)** While aboard the Thunder Train to which they are bound, a Sentinel may blend into the train's machinery as part of a Stealth check. This grants the Sentinel a +10 circumstance bonus to Stealth checks while aboard its train. Sentinels always use this ability prior to engaging restoration mode.

♦ **Restoration Mode (Su)** While aboard the Thunder Train to which they are bound, a Sentinel can bond itself to the train's machinery as a standard action, allowing it to draw upon the magic that empowers the Thunder Train to heal itself. While so engaged, the Sentinel gains fast healing 30 but is considered helpless. It can disengage from the train once more as a standard action.

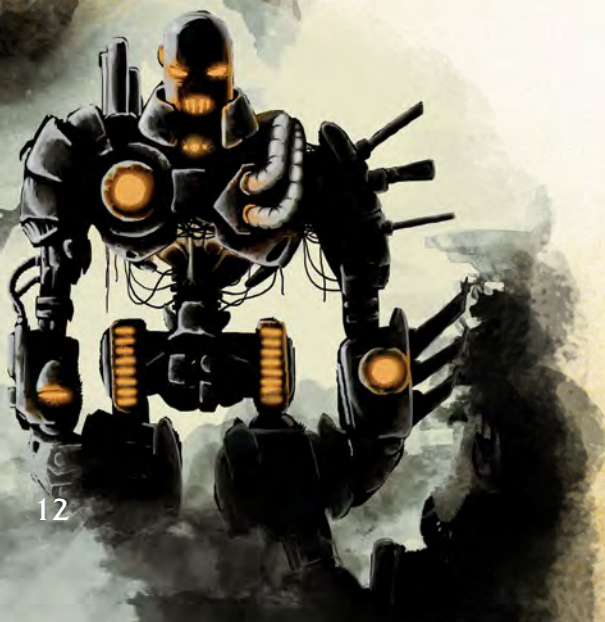
♦ **Engine-Bound (Ex)** Every Sentinel is bound to a specific Thunder Train. They can innately sense the location of their Thunder Train and its distance from themselves at all times. While they can leave their train at will, they immediately become inert and dormant if they move more than a mile away. An inert Sentinel immediately awakens once more if it moves back into range of its train.

Ecology

Environment any Thunder Train

Organization solitary or small patrol (2-4)

Treasure magmaxe, thunderhammer



Rogue Sentinels

The idea that a Sentinel might gain independence and go rogue is decried as impossible by the mechemages that create them. Most GM's are probably already wondering if there might be exceptions to that rule. Of course there are. Here's one example.

Early in Sentinel development, Urbane's mechemages used political prisoners and condemned criminals as their subjects. Though the resulting Sentinels displayed no memory of their past life, there was one soul, in particular, with which Urbane refused to take chances.

This bound soul was never fashioned into a finished golem, but was merely sealed within a golem's heart as proof that the magic that would one day create the Sentinels was possible. Urbane would have destroyed the heart, but he feared that if he freed the bound soul, his enemies might find some way to restore it to life using powerful magic. The manite heart was as good a prison as any.

This heart was later stolen by a foolish young mechemage who did not realize what he had discovered. It was then used to complete the war golem the mechemage had been secretly constructing. When the heart was placed in the golem's chest, the bound soul was suffused by the power of the Darkfall. It killed its creator and immediately fled into the Lost Ghetto, where it now reins as Terablix the Autonomous.

THE AIRSHIPS OF YZEEM AND ARASTEEN

The races of Aden have always looked to the sky with longing and envy. There have been instances of men and women throughout history who have managed to achieve that most elusive gift, the gift of flight, but they have been very few and far between. The majority have been high-level spellcasters with the ability to use magic to escape the bonds of gravity, albeit for very short periods of time. Before the end of the War of Beasts, there was a branch of the ferran race that were avian in nature, many of whom possessed the gift of flight; those individuals were devastated by a magical malady created by the Celestial College of Aramyst in an attempt to kill the ferran rebel leader, a raven-ferran.

After the Peace of the Rose, when the city of Balaquim in Yzeem began to transform into the center of trade for the continent, the shipping trade and the wealth that was afforded to many within the city began to give rise to experimentation in an attempt to achieve previously impossible tasks. One among these was flight. While magical means of flight were easy to acquire for especially experienced spellcasters, those who lacked such abilities also had great aspirations, including both scholars and fledgling steamwrights. It was through their efforts that a more mundane means of flight was first discovered in the form of hot air balloons and, much later, primitive blimps.

The primitive airships developed in Yzeem are present throughout Aden, although very few other nations have chosen to employ them in any significant numbers. That inclination has recently begun to change due to a significant advancement on the part of airship technology that has taken place within Arasteen. A number of Yzeemite immigrants working with representatives from the Radiant Order refitted an old naval ship, the *Dauntless*, and added extensive mechemagical augmentations. The result was the first true mechemagical airship. The *Dauntless* is, in many ways, the flagship of the Radiant Order and of the Arastinian navy. Obviously it sees a great deal of use that is far from the sea, and has most often been used to transport agents on important business across the face of the continent. Arastinian transplants in the

Thunder Trains of the Sea

The only comparable counterpart to the Thunder Trains, the massive ironclad Annihilators are the scourge of the seas all around the western nations of Aden. Created by Urbane largely as an experiment, these large ships patrol Urbana's coasts to the south and even north near Arasteen, making occasionally "diplomatic" trips to Ionara. Once these devastating gunboats were in service, it only took a handful of encounters for the pirates of Rook's Roost in nearby Yzeem to decide that Urbana's waters were not worth their lives. Of late, the annihilators have been deployed from Respite and Blackport and have been seen testing the waters near the Urbana-Kyan border.

capitals of many eastern nations maintain facilities where the *Dauntless* can be serviced, including the nations of the Rhanate, Vanora, Aramyst, and the High Steppes. Until recently, there were similar interests in Carraway, but the degenerating condition of relations between the two nations have caused King Corben to instruct that the *Dauntless* not make landfall within Carraway's borders until further notice.

While airships are not yet common in Aden, it is not uncommon to see them on occasion when traveling along the Thunder Trail. This is because there are portions of the trail running parallel to massive currents of wind far above the ground. These currents are known to airship captains in modern Aden as the "rivers of the sky," but before the Darkfall there were some who referred to them as the "thunder trails," because storms frequently followed along the same path. It is unknown whether or not this name was deliberately chosen by Lord Urbane when naming the paths the Thunder Trains would take, but it is a rather unusual coincidence if not.

Mechemages often hold Yzeemite airships in great disdain because of their limited application of science or technology. Although most are based in the foundations of basic technological principles as might be expected, they are operated almost entirely by magic, and there are few captains of such vessels who are not skilled arcanists of one form or another. For their part, the captains of these vessels consider scoffing mechemages to be hypocrites of the first order.



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The Thunder Trail

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Many consider them the greatest creations mankind has ever wrought, while others believe they are a blight upon Aden. Regardless, even their most ardent detractors have no choice but to admit that these mechemagical monstrosities have restored trade to Aden in the wake of the Darkfal, something that no one else was able to accomplish. Villages, cities, even entire nations depend upon the Thunder Trains to survive, but in the process their coin lines the purse of the Iron Tyrant.

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