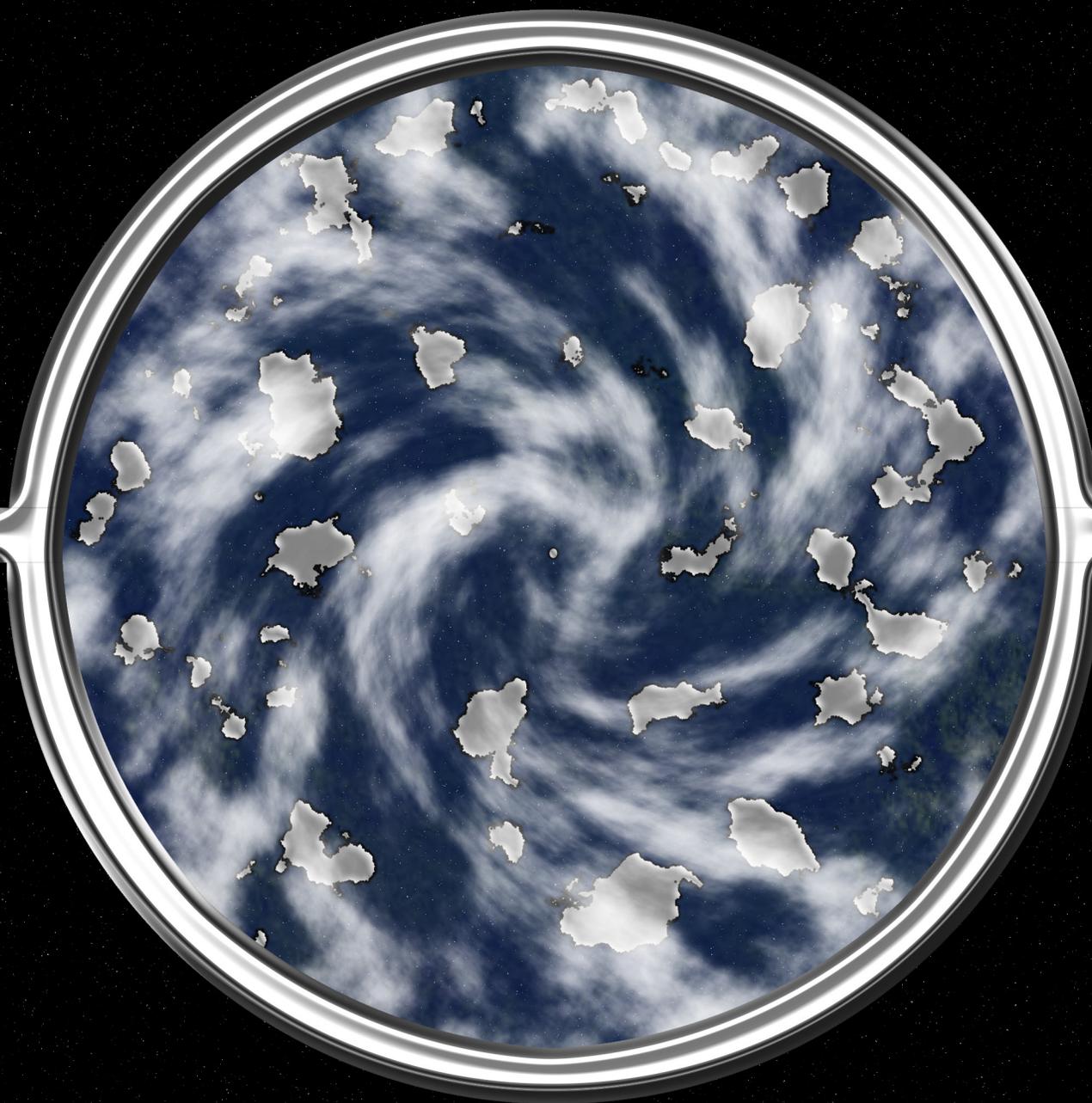


Starry

Deep



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Maps by author. Illustrations and photographs by various public-domain artists and Andrew Schmidt.

I chose random allotment of elements for this competition, and the selection doled out was:

- * Must use an non-traditional character advancement system. No experience point system of any kind.

- * Each game has a limited resource that determines when the game ends.

- * Fairy Tale (Fantastic magical people/creatures, cunning overcoming brute force, Moral of the story) + Pirates (Live free or die trying, Swashbuckling, morality is in the eye of the beholder)

Starry Deep

Table of Contents

<i>The Wellship Qanat</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Life Since the Hijacking</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Creating Your Crew</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Action Tests</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Combat</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>A Pirate's Life for Thee</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Naval Chase and Combat</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Wealth, Gear, and Plunder Aboard the Qanat</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>The Artificial Intelligences</i>	<i>23</i>
<i>Advancement and the Escaping the Qanat</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>A Timeline of Ruination</i>	<i>28</i>
<i>Perils of the Briny Deep</i>	<i>30</i>
<i>Well-Met Foes</i>	<i>32</i>
<i>Cards, Maps, and Diagrams</i>	<i>37</i>

Vessel:

Union Wellship *Qanat*

Route:

Inbound to Kepler Station from Zeta Tauri

Status:

Overdue

Four months ago the characters signed on as spacers aboard the *Qanat*, a massive wellship bound for Zeta Tauri to supply the AI research station there with enriched water for research and reaction mass. A few more faces were easily lost among the eleven thousand men and women who crewed the spherical hulk. The personnel needed to keep the ship up and running were relatively few, but technicians and support personnel teemed aboard the platforms that floated on the wellship's massive water supply. Some deep stations would go years between visits from an FTL spacecraft, and the wellships were designed to bring them everything they might need to remind these isolated stations that they were part of the human race. When the *Qanat* finally arrived at Zeta Tauri, she spent a month alongside the station, taking on some tightly-guarded cargo and a few close-lipped personnel while the station inhabitants roistered and enjoyed the company. The undocking went smoothly and the *Qanat* began the voyage home.

One month ago, hell broke loose aboard the ship. A rebel faction of Cetian separatists struck from among the crew and butchered the captain and chief officers. They had been waiting for the chance to lay their hands on the milspec nanite AI contained in the Zeta Tauri shipment, and their pet scientists assured them that it was perfectly safe to activate them in order to take control of the rest of the ship. The scientists were wrong. The AIs were largely nonresponsive to their control codes and only a handful obeyed orders. The rest dispersed rapidly throughout the ship, fashioning bodies for themselves out of nanoparticles and debris. They have staked out territories within the ship now, and they rule as whimsical gods there, bound to laws only they fully understand. All attempts to deal with them by violence have failed catastrophically.

During the fighting, the Cetian rebels locked the ship's drive system and set it off course in order to evade

spacelane patrols. The "Rebel King" as their leader is now known, has yet to be able to regain control of the engines or utilize the FTL communicator in order to contact his allies. He has commanded the surviving crew to begin manufacturing supplies and repair materials, and his dread steel war barges sail between the wellship's floating platforms to collect his due. No trader can hope to do business without the Rebel King's approval, and all attempts to assail the AI-guarded bridge have met with disaster.

Some crew have attempted to reach the escape pods aboard the *Qanat*, but all the pod bays are deep within AI-held territory. Even if they could get to a pod, they'd need to carry large supplies of power cells and life support to make it back to known space and get the boat's feeble transmitter close enough to habitation to call for help. The Rebel King cares nothing for their suffering; the glorious cause of Cetian freedom must be pursued no matter the cost... and the bridge is equipped with its own escape pod, if matters come to that.

Matters will eventually come to that. The *Qanat*'s power grid was never meant to support the drain of dozens of milspec manufactory AIs. The constant power draw is slowly overwhelming the ship's power plant and energy grid. Within twenty-four months the entire grid will fail and the ship will tear itself apart as the artificial gravity fails. Worse, the manufacturing efforts that the Rebel King has demanded are only accelerating this process. The more extravagant the efforts, the faster the grid will fail.

The players have spent the past month carefully preparing for this day. They have a crude map of the *Qanat*'s platform archipelago, a swift ship capable of navigating the wellship's interior sea, and a grid interface cube ticking down steadily with the time until total grid failure. They have less than twenty-four months to plunder the goods they need from the Rebel King's traders, trick the fey AI lords that guard the escape pods, and dodge the furious retribution of the King's loyal minions. And all the while, matters are sure to worsen as the Rebel King's repair efforts fail and more and more of the crew become aware of just how close they sail to a briny doom amid the starry deep.

The Wellship Qanat

Wellships such as the Qanat are spherical spacecraft woven of complex carbon microtubule composites, their outer hulls are formed in a process much like blowing an enormous bubble. This relatively simple method of construction allows for the creation of incredibly vast starships that are almost more artificial planetoids than spacecraft. The Qanat itself is approximately one thousand kilometers in diameter, half of which is filled with the ship's cargo of enriched water.

Enriched water is ordinary H₂O that has been laced with a wide variety of salts, suspended metals, and other contaminants. These additions are vital to the construction of a number of advanced composites, and most stations prefer to receive enriched water. Manually loading and unloading industrial chemicals on the scale required would be enormously taxing, so it's simpler to just pump the enriched water to clients. They can filter out the elements they need, and the remaining water can be used as reaction mass and fusion plant fuel. Full filtration is necessary before the salty brew becomes drinkable, but that's a simple matter for a colony or research station. The enriched water itself is non-toxic, though a man who drinks it will soon be vomiting it back up.

Propulsion and artificial gravity for the Qanat is provided by the Yahr Drive, a complex faster-than-light drive system that allows travel at a high multiple of the speed of light. The Rebel King skewed the Qanat off course during his attack on the bridge, and the ship is now travelling at a shallow angle away from the known space lanes. There is almost no chance that the Qanat will be discovered by patrol craft or merchantmen, but it also means that it is impossible for the Qanat's short-range communicators or escape pod distress beacons to reach sympathetic ears.

FTL communication involves modulations of the Yahr Drive to create a transmission beacon for listening stations. As the Rebel King is locked out of the engine controls, he cannot call for assistance from his secessionist compatriots. Short-range comms inside the Qanat are seriously degraded by the enriched water vapor and radio or tightbeam laser communication is fairly ineffective. A fast ship will usually get a message to a destination more swiftly than a radio will. Hardlines wired into the power grid have been shut down by the Als.

The Qanat's vast internal sea is dotted by platforms anchored to the sphere's inner surface by massive carbon-tubule cables. These platforms can stretch for dozens of miles, built up with huge hills of crystallized salts, metals, and other enriched water contaminants. Other platforms are covered with gengineered plant life capable of surviving off of the enriched water and producing fresh fruit and oxygen for the wellship's ecosystem. Living quarters for the crew dot these platforms, though many have been abandoned since the hijacking.

Visible throughout the inland sea is the ten-kilometer-wide tube of the Qanat's axial spine. Known more commonly as "the Sunspire", this enormous tube runs from the bottom of the craft to the very top, where solar diffusers emit the light necessary for the plantforms' plant life to grow. This artificial sun echoes the cycles of Earth, and the radiance provides a navigation beacon of vital importance in the absence of moon or stars. A few interior lights glow on the inner surface of the Qanat at "night", but these flickering beams are prone to changing when the massive electrical discharges that birth them finally flicker out.

The crew now largely huddles on those platforms that possess their own water purification systems. While cleansing the enriched water is a simple matter for a colony or space station, it is much more difficult to do on a smaller scale. Some platforms are still occupied by the dessicated corpses of those luckless crewmembers who could find nothing to drink and who could not escape to a more clement platform.

Travel inside the Qanat once took place with antigrav shuttles that flitted from platform to platform. These shuttles were locked down during the hijacking and the Rebel King has proven unable to bring them back online. The only way from platform to platform now is by sea, in jury-rigged sailcraft or those few pleasure-boats kept aboard the ship for recreation. The Rebel King relies chiefly on four maintenance barges that have been retrofitted as warships to overawe the remaining crew into obedience.

Along the edges of the internal sea is the complex of spacelocks, manufactories, and power plants known as "the Rim". The Rim contains much of the ship's manufacturing capability as well as the escape pod bays. Unfor-

tunately, it's also home to the power plants that the AIs require to maintain their nanotechnological existence. The whole of the Rim is under their control, and any crewman who sets foot in those complexes is putting himself wholly at the mercy of those alien powers. Still, many supply caches and equipment stores can be found nowhere else.

These AIs are an ultimately lethal draw on the ship's power grid. While the plants have effectively unlimited fusion fuel, the grid itself was never designed to bear the kind of load that the AIs are putting on it. Combined with the Rebel King's demand for manufactured goods

from the platforms, the drain on the grid will eventually cause a cascading power failure that will deactivate the Yahr Drive and cause internal gravity to fail. The resultant flux of the internal sea will smash the Qanat's carbon tubule hull like an eggshell. The AIs are perfectly aware of this inevitable fate, and perfectly indifferent to it. Their military programming does not permit them to care that they are ensuring their own destruction in the course of their perceived duties.

What You Need To Play

The necessary ingredients for a game of *Starry Deep* are minimal. You need a game master to run the game—hereafter abbreviated “GM”. You need at least one player and probably better three or four. Each participant plus the GM also requires the use of an eight-sided die. One will do in a pinch, though it's better if everyone has their own.

The GM will need to print out and cut up the Trait cards on pages 36-38. If that's more work than you like, players can simply record the names of the Traits they pick, but it can be easier to keep track of things if they have the cards to hand and can discard them physically when they use them.

Aside from this, you'll find it handy to make printouts of the Qanat's platform map and trade route map; this information can be assumed to be possessed by the players. The maps are provided on unbordered pages to make printing easier. The players may or may not want printouts of the ship record sheet. If you choose not to use the optional boarding rules on page 17, they may not need the spaces provided for tracking locations aboard ship.

Finally, the GM will need to formulate a few ideas about how to start off the game. The ultimate goal is very direct—gather the supplies to escape the Qanat, and trick or bargain access to an escape pod from one of the AIs. It can be helpful to start things off with immediate tasks or goals unless the players are comfortable with a sandbox (seabox?) approach to gaming and are willing to make their own course.

Life Since the Hijacking

The crew of the Qanat currently consists of roughly nine thousand men and women, with the Rebel King claiming the loyalty of an additional one thousand sympathizers, collaborators, and infiltrators among the crew. Hundreds of people died during the fighting or due to catastrophic system failures in the compartments in which they were working. Those that remain are largely confined to the floating platforms in the inner sea, or else serve the Rebel King in his stronghold high above the ocean surface.

The crewmembers of the Qanat hail from dozens of Union worlds. Some are tall, slender lightworlders while others have the squat musculature of a heavy-gravity denizen. With the collapse of conventional order, most have abandoned the sober gray uniforms of the Qanat for a riot of more comfortable and familiar clothing. Bright colors and exotic cuts rule the day on most of the warm, humid platforms. A few cling to the snug-fitting, sturdy blue uniforms of Qanat staffers, but the red-coated servants of the Rebel King make such implicit statements of old loyalty a hazardous sartorial choice.

The crimson of the Rebel King can be found on almost all of the platforms. While most of the crewmen are honest spacers and craftsmen, a few hundred among the crew were successful infiltrators placed by the Cetian Liberation Front. Their smuggled weaponry and sudden strike overwhelmed the bridge crew of the Qanat. From their position high atop the Sunspire, they send governors to the larger platforms and dispatch their great steel war barges to overawe the recalcitrant. The Rebel King himself never leaves the bridge, and his "tame" AIs make any assault on his aerie a suicidal prospect.

Along with the original Cetian infiltrators, hundreds of the original crewmen have cast their lot in with the rebels. Whether through cowardice, idealism, or the simple love of brutality, these sympathizers are widely hated by the rest of the crew. They man the barges of the Rebel King, collect his taxes ashore, and make up the muscle that the rebel governors use to put down trouble.

The artificial intelligences were the true target of the Cetians. Dozens of them were carefully packed in the cargo that the Qanat took on from Zeta Tauri, and the scientists of the Cetian Liberation Front had assured their operatives that the command codes they had obtained would control the AIs. They were mistaken. Only three of the AIs obeyed the command codes when their stor-

age cells were thrown open by the rebels. The rest of them vanished into the wiring of the Qanat, only to emerge later along the Rim with bodies fashioned out of nanites and enrichment metals.

Even so, the three "tame" AIs were more than enough to kill the remainder of the bridge crew and secure the ship for the Rebel King. Originally intended for a military manufactory complex along the Union rim, the AIs are capable of using their complete dominance over the ship's systems to manufacture almost anything in mere seconds. Their intelligences are dispersed through the ship itself, making them effectively immortal and impervious to physical violence. Even if one of their aspects should be destroyed, it's a simple matter to draw power from the ship to manufacture a new body.

Much to the Rebel King's chagrin, however, his tame AIs refuse to leave the Sunspire. They refuse to release the shuttles, unlock advanced manufactory schemata, access the engines, or intervene with their fellows to open the way to the escape pods. The bridge itself is equipped with an escape craft, but it can hold no more than fifty, and the Rebel King refuses to leave the ship empty-handed. He means to bring the military AIs back, no matter the cost to the crew.

The free AIs have no intention of cooperating. Each operates by its own rules, carrying out a duty partially scrambled by the Cetians' control codes. They profoundly mistrust each other, and each schemes to put the others under the "correct chain of command". Interlopers are apt to be summarily destroyed, but some have purposes that can be best fulfilled by "civilians" such as the player characters.

Currently, travel is entirely by sailing craft. With such lubberly hands as are available, a pinnace is lucky to make five kilometers an hour in a straight line, and worse is not unknown. Powered engines can mitigate this snail's pace, but few captains have them or are willing to spend the power to run them. Communication between islands is limited to the dubious speed of these craft, and much can take place before news reaches a neighboring settlement.

Creating Your Crew

Characters in this game are assumed to be crewmembers who have turned pirate in the face of the Rebel King's oppression. Each character might have his or her own reason for hoisting the black flag, but the tyrannical greed of the Rebel King's governors and the casual brutishness of his minions have already provoked many into rebellion. Few are the crewmembers who haven't experienced some ill turn at the hands of the rebels.

Crewmembers come from countless walks of life, and not all are spacers bred and born. In truth, the majority of the Qanat's crew consisted of men and women chosen for the services they could provide remote colonies and stations- technicians, engineers, scientists, and entertainers. Some such souls are better-suited to piracy than others, but all have plenty to learn in the face of the Qanat's creeping doom.

The one thing that all player crew have in common is that all of them know how to handle a sailing ship. They may not be great seamen, but they all know the difference between a mainmast and a keel and can helm a sailing ship at need. This talent is rare and precious on the Qanat, and no one trained to handle a ship can expect to quietly sit out the struggle between Rebels and loyalists. Anyone unwilling to take Rebel pay and do Rebel work must chart a course around them.

The first thing to do when creating a pirate is to print off the Trait cards shown on pages 36-38 and toss them into the middle of the table. You and the other players then take turns choosing a Trait you want your pirate to have until each of you have four Trait cards. For particularly large crews it may be necessary to make duplicates of the cards, but it's generally best not to overlap Traits in a crew.

Once each of you has four cards, you should pick one of your cards to be your Defining Trait, which is a quality you'll keep throughout your character's hopefully extended lifespan. You can use a Defining Trait whenever it's relevant, and you don't need to discard it afterwards. The other three cards are Session Traits, which are usable only once per session. At the beginning of each new gaming session, you and the rest of the crew can pick new Session Traits, but your Defining Trait never changes.

Once you've picked out your Traits, you need to decide what your pirate is best at doing. You can split seven points among four Talents: Fighting, Swashbuckling, Seamanship, and Carousing. A score of 0 means that your pirate's no better than a wooden-headed landlubber at such pursuits, while a 1 is proper for an able-bodied seaman and a 4, the highest score you can choose, indicates a talent worthy of sea shanties and legend.

Fighting involves all the pursuits of violence, whether fisticuffs or cutlasses or ship's gunnery. A pirate rolls Fighting when he means to do harm to someone, and he uses the best of Fighting or Swashbuckling when it comes to avoiding harm done to him.

Swashbuckling is the character's knack for strength, adroitness, and swift motion. Whenever a pirate needs to manage some complicated feat of dexterity or physical prowess, it's Swashbuckling that they'll be rolling.

Seamanship is the knowledge apt to a sage mariner of the Qanat. Such pirates know the secrets of the ship and its inner sea, and can pilot a craft through storm and vent-tempest. They also know the particulars of platforms and the ways of the perilous Rim. This Talent is rolled whenever the pirate needs to manage a ship or know a fact about the Qanat and its locales.

Carousing betokens the endurance and charm of the pirate. A crewman gifted in this can drink a rival under the table or swim half a mile to his ship with a knife broken off in his ribs. When a pirate needs to push through pain or drunkenness or persuade an unruly crew to follow him, Carousing's the Talent he needs.

In the month since the hijacking the crew has managed to scrounge up a few useful supplies-- most importantly, a small but serviceable pinnace and the hearty souls to crew her. Times being what they are, the crew has precious little more than that, but there are doubtless all manner of fat-bottomed Rebel hulls waiting to offer up their treasures.

Among the gear your crew has assembled is a grid interface cube, a diagnostic device keyed to interface with the Qanat's power system. By consulting the readings on the device, the crew can get a rough idea of how close the grid is to its final collapse and the destruction of the



Qanat. The evidence of the cube might also be enough to convince others of the impending peril.

Finally, your crew needs to choose a Captain. Freebooters being who they are, the crew ought to vote on this. If the vote ties, the winner is the candidate with the highest Carousing. The main thing the Captain does is to make the final decision when the crew cannot decide what to do or whose plan to follow for some daring deed. The Captain need only tell the GM what plan it is that the crew will be following, and the decision is made. Aspiring Blighs should remember that the crew can vote out a Captain as easily as they voted him in.

Non-Player Crew

The pinnacle the characters begin with has one ton of food and four of fresh water in the hold, and thirty brave salts to sail with the player crew. All told, that amounts to 1,000 man-days of rations for the crew, so even with a big player crew it's sufficient to keep the lads going for more than a month

Crew don't sail for bread and water alone, however, unless they're a truly desperate lot. They demand pay. At the end of every pirating expedition, the crew will demand that at least half the expedition's take be shared out among

them. This includes prize ships, cargo, and everything but personal trophies seized by the player crew. Cheating a crew of their shares is unhealthy, to say the least.

One advantage of this system of "sailing on account" is that a captain needn't put any wealth up front when hiring crew. He needs only convince the lads that the trip will be worth their while. With the alternative being the power mines for many of these crewmen, there are usually crew to be had on these terms, if not exactly the best of able-bodied seamen.

Crewmen will usually follow the player crew ashore for work or plunder, but they don't sign up to die gloriously. Leading them into danger requires that they believe the profits outweigh the risk, and it can often be a dicey business convincing them. Wise captains understand the imprudence of inviting mutiny with their demands.

Action Tests

A pirate's life is one of peril, and there's not a crewman afloat who won't be sorely tested sooner or later. Whenever your pirate attempts to do something of important but uncertain outcome, he or she must roll an action test.

The action test itself is quite simple. You roll one eight-sided dice and add the relevant Talent- Fighting, Swashbuckling, Seamanship or Carousing. If you equal or exceed the difficulty number of the test, then your effort was a success. If no Talent seems to be applicable, the GM will simply decide what bonus to apply, depending on how close the task is to something your pirate knows how to do.

The difficulty number is set by the GM, and will vary depending on the task at hand. To strike some insolent son of a poxy harlot, the difficulty is 5 plus the highest of their Fighting or Swashbuckling Talents. For other tasks, a difficulty of 5 is as easy a task as is worth testing for. Difficulty 7 tasks can tax a trained seaman, and difficulty 9 tasks are as great a challenge as even an expert might hope to accomplish. Difficulty 11 tasks are normally impossible without great help or splendid equipment, and difficulty 13 tasks are a roundabout way of the GM telling you that it's impossible unless your character is fantastically good at such tasks- and has some help besides.

Still, there are times when circumstances conspire against your buccaneer. When you face some greater than ordinary complication in the test, you suffer Disadvantage, and must subtract 1 from your roll. When you labor against enormous burdens, you suffer Great Disadvantage, and must subtract 2 from your roll. The GM should only apply the greater of the two penalties; if you're trying to sail between the jagged fragments of a shattered platform at midnight in a gale while drunk, the GM will simply give you Great Disadvantage on your Seamanship test and leave it at that.

Sometimes the situation is more helpful to your aims. If you have some distinct help in accomplishing the deed, you can claim Advantage, and add 1 to your roll. A truly superb help or perfect situation can grant Great Advantage in turn, allowing you to add 2 to your roll. As with Disadvantage, apply only the greater of the two. It won't be much additional help to have the higher ground on a

foe if you've got a half-dozen of your hearties mobbing him at the same time.

The GM is the final arbiter of what constitutes Advantage or Disadvantage. Indeed, fate may so conspire as to give a character both at the same time if a pirate faces both complications and aid in performing a task.

There are times when the use of exceptionally fine equipment or the enigmatic aid of the AIs might grant you additional help- or additional burden. These modifiers are applied to the roll as-is, and do not overlap with Advantage or Disadvantage. If you have multiple bonii or penalties to your roll from outside sources, apply only the greatest of each; a +1 cutlass and an iron arm that gives you +1 with melee Fighting give you a total of +1 with your cutlass attacks, not +2.

A Troublesome Circumstance

Josiah Tremayne wears a sickle-bladed hook given to him by the AI known as Fore-Admiral Bligh, and its diamondoid edge grants him +1 on Fighting tests with it. He's crossing hooks with the feared Rebel enforcer Ironknuckle Jack, and while the heaving of the deck below him is no burden to an old salt like Josiah, the billowing clouds of smoke from the burning deck are somewhat bothersome.

Luckily, Josiah's faithful cyberparrot Polly is flapping around Jack's face, distracting him from Josiah's fearsome weapon. All told, the GM decides that Josiah has +1 on his Fighting roll. He has +1 for the hook, +1 for the Advantage of Polly's distraction, and -1 for the Disadvantage of the clouds of smoke around him. If an errant cinder were to set Josiah's tricorne hat alight, the ensuing Great Disadvantage of distraction would replace the -1 Disadvantage penalty with a -2, as only the greatest Advantage or Disadvantage is applied.

Combat

Some salts just need killing, and sooner or later your crew will be called to oblige them. The first step in any brawl is to roll for initiative. Each group involved in the fighting picks someone to make a Swashbuckling test. This is usually the member with the highest score, though some mobs less prone to individual initiative than a pack of buccaneers might wait on a leader's decision. The groups then act in order, highest initiative first. In the case of a tie, the player crew goes first.

The specific order of actions for members of a group can be whatever suits them. If the players can't agree, the Captain decides. Enemy groups work on the same basis, though most of them won't be nearly so coordinated as the player crew. A character can choose to delay his action to respond to a foe, but he has to decide what he's waiting for and if the event doesn't happen his turn is lost.

Each combatant can move and do something else each turn. Most swabbies can move about twenty meters per turn, or forty if they do nothing else that turn. Movement includes any jumping, ducking, or climbing that might be required as part of it, so a sailor can leap from the rigging and still haul the ship's wheel hard to port in the same turn. Pirates are an athletic lot, so they can climb up or down just as quickly as they can dash fore or aft. Tricky climbs or ones performed while other fellows are trying to shoot them off the rigging might require a Swashbuckling roll of varying difficulty.

Reckless Rushes

It's a bad idea to go rushing through a crowd of enemies. If you try to bull through a mob of enemies or run within sword's-reach of a foe, the GM is well within rights to make you roll a Fighting or Swashbuckling test to break through, and'll probably give a few of your foemen free swings at you in the process. Better to leap from the focsle and swing off a yardarm, or go racing along a ship's rail. Odds are you'll have to make the same Swashbuckling test, but you'll have fewer swords aimed at your gizzard while you do it.

The "something else" of a turn might mean swinging your cutlass at someone's skull, cutting the rigging your foe is climbing, or setting ablaze a hut with the torch you have in

hand- or any other activity that could be accomplished in five or ten seconds. If you have to draw an item as part of the action, you take Disadvantage on any tests involved, and if you have to do something more complicated with it than just yanking it from your belt or pocket, you take Great Disadvantage- assuming the GM even lets you do it all in one turn.

To make an attack at an enemy within reach of your weapon, make a Fighting test at a difficulty equal to 5 plus the higher of their Fighting or Swashbuckling talents. If you succeed, you inflict one Wound on them. If you succeed by 3 points or better, you inflict two Wounds. Some especially fine or devastating weapons might inflict more damage than this, but most weapons will do this amount of injury whether they be fists or knives or swords or pistols.

There are a lot of different situations that might grant Advantage or Disadvantage on an attack roll. Facing more than one foe at once in melee combat probably gives your assailants Advantage on their attack, and being surrounded gives them Great Advantage. Slippery decks might demand Swashbuckling checks to stay upright, and trying to fight an armed enemy with your bare hands likely earns you Disadvantage on the attack. One guide to keep firmly in mind, however, is that penalties never reduce a target's defenses; they only ever give Advantage or Disadvantage to the attack roll. Even a Seriously Wounded character defends himself at difficulty 5 plus the better of his Fighting or Swashbuckling Talents.

Injury

When a character's total Wounds exceed his Carousing score, he has been Seriously Wounded. He's at Disadvantage in any physical action tests, and he's liable to pass out as soon as his adrenaline wanes. If he doesn't wrap up his guts before then and none of his mates are around to do it for him, he'll probably die within an hour or two.

When a character's total Wounds exceed twice his Carousing score, he's unconscious, mortally wounded, and fixing to be dead in two or three turns. Assuming he hasn't been torn to flinders by a cannonball or otherwise instantly slain, a shipmate can try to plug the biggest holes with a turn spent making a Seamanship or Fighting test against a difficulty of 8. On a success, the crewmember knows

enough of patching shipmates or surviving a brawl to identify the worst problems and patch them for the time being. On a failure, the downed character continues to worsen.

Fighting is dangerous, and crew who stint their Carousing talent haven't got much to save them when a marlinspike knocks them in the head. Someone with a Carousing talent of 0 is mortally wounded by a single Wound, like most landlubbers and common brawlers. A pirate who wishes a long life had best learn to love it well.

Healing

A character who manages to avoid becoming Seriously Wounded can remove all Wounds with five minutes of rest and a few rough bandages. He may be bruised and nicked, but it's nothing a hearty salt can't throw off with a few minutes to catch his breath.

A Seriously Wounded character is in rougher shape. Once the rush of adrenaline passes, he'll be lucky to be able to stagger upright, and he's liable to be almost helpless in a fight. A month of rest and tending is usually enough to put the swabby aright, though units of Life Support medical supplies can be used to hasten the process. One unit of Life Support must be expended for each Wound the crewman has taken; once the supplies are used, the crewman will be fine after a night's rest.

A mortally wounded character that has been snatched from death's door is in worse condition still. Such a badly-wounded character will perish of infections and sickly sufferings within a month if advanced Life Support supplies are not used to rescue him. One unit of Life Support must be expended for each Wound the crewman has taken, and he'll still be flat abed for a week afterwards recovering. If it's crucial to have him up in a hurry, twice as much Life Support can be used, in which case he'll be fine the next morning... if by "fine", you mean "wired up to the gills on stimulants and painkillers and

A Pirate's Life for Thee

Ever since the hijacking, the chief means of travel between the Qanat's platform has been by sailing ship. Only a handful of pleasure-yachts and service barges were in operation at the time of the attack, but the first month saw men and women hastily assembling new ships out of the sturdy timbers that cover many horticultural and garden platforms. The new craft were rarely anything large or impressive, but the AI lockdown on advanced machine tools has made existing powered craft all but impossible to replicate.

A few souls have made brave efforts at recreating combustion engines, but the gengineered timber on the platforms is designed to be resistant to burning and there are no coal seams to be found on the platforms. The few electrical engines that have survived or been pieced together of looted spare parts are notorious power hogs, and only pirates and Rebel privateers care to spend so much energy to accomplish what a tight-woven sail can do with a little more time.

Given these limits, the first month after the hijacking has seen a broad reevaluation of seamanship skills among the crew. Those trained salts who sailed for love or duty have become rich men when they've seen fit to aid the Rebel cause, or hunted fugitives when they preferred to chart their own course. Large crews of reasonably competent sailors are now needed to handle the trade between platforms, but the Rebels can't help but feel a great deal of suspicion towards men out from under the thumbs of their governors and bully-boys.

A month's time is little enough to teach a man how to operate a sailing craft, but necessity is a great teacher. The small craft that are first constructed are also easier to handle than some great galleon or triple-decked man-o-war. The clumsiness and unseamanly comportment of much of the crew often ends up making a sailing trip far longer than a better-trained salt would tolerate, but a captain must make allowances when half his crew was originally trained to repair microcircuitry and the other half did duty as ecosystems maintenance.

Most of the Qanat's sailing ships crawl in a lubberly fashion. Not only are their hulls made by untutored amateurs, but they're manned by landsmen who usually have only the crudest understanding of what ropes to pull and when to pull them. A locally-fashioned ship that makes

five kilometers an hour in a straight line is well-handled by the Qanat's standards. Were ten trained seamen rounded up and put aboard one of the remaining modern sailing yachts, however, they'd make ten times the distance in the same span. Some ships resort to powered engines to overcome this disadvantage, but the cost in power is prohibitive even when such an engine is available.

The very first ships made were unarmed. The tiny stores of modern weaponry are jealously kept at the top of the Sunspire to ensure against theft or treachery, and few had any initial thought that useful ship weaponry could be made with the crippled machine tool facilities. Inventiveness soon gave forth the first simple cannons, the shot sped fast by crude propellents mixed together from the abundant chemical resources of enriched water and platform materials. The resulting cannons and hand firearms are ludicrously crude by the standards of modern science but they can be repaired and munitioned with nothing more than the tools and resources at hand.

Attacks from stubborn loyalist ships and thieving pirates soon forced Rebel merchantmen to arm themselves. Gunnery is at an even more atrocious standard than seamanship, but the wooden hulls still splinter and crack under the crash of the cannons. The few more advanced shipboard weapons are all mounted on the dreaded steel war barges of the Rebel King, each warship more than capable of burning down a dozen other craft.

The seas of the wellship are not as calm as might be expected. Fluctuations in the ship's internal gravity cause bubbling and dangerous shifting of the liquid contents of the wellship, and atmospheric systems stutter and wheeze as the AIs tax the ship's power grid more fiercely. The calm seas and clear skies of the first few months will soon give way to more common storms and capricious currents. More than one ship will be dashed to pieces upon a platform's obdurate shore when the dread winds blow.

Coupled with these whimsical tides are the sea-mists thrown up by the enriched water. While the Qanat has no horizon, being a flat plain of water, the sea-mists and subtle fluctions of artificial gravity conspire to limit the line of sight to about twenty kilometers on the open sea. Objects more distant than that are too indistinct to make



out, though platforms and their hillocks of raw materials and gardens can be seen from twice as far away.

Aspiring corsairs are well-served to haunt certain of the more populous sealanes between major islands, such as those depicted in the map on page 41. The Rebel King hasn't enough warships to run regular convoys and merchants are driven by the depredations of Rebel taxmen to rush about in search of profit without waiting for safety in numbers. Sooner or later a plump sloop or brigantine will hove into sight... and that's when a pirate's work starts.

Naval Chase and Combat

The pirating life is a hard one, and rarely harder than when it comes time to overhaul some fat-bottomed merchantman and plunder her cargo holds. With precious few ships equipped with powered engines, most chases rely on fair winds and good seamanship to bring a foe to battle. Once engaged, it takes clever ship-handling to bring the crude cannons to bear. Even then, disaster can strike if a volley from the guns blasts the target into pieces before she can be looted.

Catching a fleeing ship requires the PCs to deftly handle their own craft and bring her in close to the enemy. A long-range cannon duel is useful only insofar as it culls the enemy crew and shreds their rigging; too much shot put aboard a rival's hull will smash it up and send it to the bottom along with its wealth. A pirate crew must board a prize in order to have any chance to profit by it.

Naval combat is broken up into three phases- the Chase, the Clash, and the Boarding. Some ships might not require a chase; a Rebel pirate-hunter will make a steady course for any pirates it finds, and any ship that doesn't show her heels will soon be in a Clash. Other times, it may be the player crew that wants to turn tail, in which case the Chase rules are used as given, except victory means escape rather than catching the foe.

The Chase

To catch a fleeing ship, the crewman with the best Seamanship talent takes the helm, and must make a successful Seamanship action test against a difficulty equal to six plus the enemy ship's Chase score, minus the pirate ship's Chase score. Thus, if the PCs were chasing a nimble Rebel sloop with a Chase score of 4, and they were sailing a stately fighting barque with a Chase score of 3, the best seaman among them would need to test against difficulty $6 + 4 - 3 = 7$.

The other PCs can join in to help on this roll. Each can describe what they're doing to hurry the ship along, whether exhorting the crew with their Carousing Talent, minding the sails with Seamanship, or perhaps leaping to mind the rigging with Swashbuckling. So long as the GM agrees that the action is helpful, they can make a test against the same difficulty as the helmsman. If all PCs succeed on their tests, the helmsman gains Great

Advantage on his test. If more succeed than fail, he gains Advantage, while if more fail than succeed, he suffers Disadvantage as their meddling interferes with his work. If all the other PCs fail their tests, however, the helmsman must struggle against Great Disadvantage. All PCs must try to help if any do; the crew can't simply decide to stop rolling after the first of them succeeds!

If the helmsman fails his roll, the enemy ship gets away. Perhaps it sails into the sea-mists or hoves through a narrow strait the players' ship dares not essay, but one way or another it slips the foe. But if the helmsman succeeds in his test, he's caught up with the barnacled barge and can engage it with cannonfire.

The Clash

Here, the crewman with the best Fighting Talent takes command of the ship's guns, and fires away at a difficulty of 6 plus the enemy ship's Clash score, minus the player ship's Clash score. As before, the other players can join in to aid in the fighting, perhaps by manning a gun as well or by mending torn rigging or wounded sailors. The same modifiers apply as above for determining how much good the rest of the crew's help does.

If the chief gunner succeeds in his test, his shots strike home and wound the ship and its crew. Add one to the Damage score of the enemy ship. If he rolled an 8 on the test and it succeeds, the shot was particularly fearsome; two points of Damage are inflicted. An unexpected lucky shot can sometimes blow up a prize if the gunner doesn't ease off his cannons soon enough. If the chief gunner fails, however, he is worsted by the weight of enemy fire, and the pirate ship suffers a point of Damage itself, or two points if the gunner failed with a roll of 1 on the die.

The gunner can trade shots with the enemy for as long as the two ships can stand the punishment. If the grape-shot gets too heavy, the pirates can turn tail and flee; whether or not they can get away depends on whether the target ship elects to Chase them in turn.

Damage wears away at the enemy crew, maiming and killing the luckless salts, and will eventually smash the ship itself to flinders. Each ship type has several damage thresholds, depending on how sturdy the craft is

and how effective it is at protecting the crew. Once the Damage a ship takes reaches a certain threshold, it suffers the consequences. Partial damage beyond that point has no effect until it reaches the next threshold.

As soon as the Bloodied threshold is reached, a quarter of the crew is dead or wounded. As soon as the Shivvered threshold is reached, a full half of the sailors are down. Every hit after the Shivvered threshold runs a chance of blasting the ship apart; after every successful hit, roll a die. If it comes up 8, the ship breaks up and its cargo takes a journey down to Davey Jones' locker. Once the Crippled threshold is reached, three-quarters of the crew are maimed or dead, and the ship breaks up on a 7 or 8 after every successful hit. If the poor hulk holds together until the Sunk threshold is reached, then it collapses in a welter of splinters and corpses.

The Boarding

Assuming the gunner doesn't wish to blow the foe out of the water, sooner or later they'll choose to close to boarding range. The PC's ship can close with the foe at any time during the Clash. An enemy ship that wants to rush to grips can only do so after the chief gunner fails one of his Fighting tests, and must choose to do so before the next round of firing.

The boarding action is the moment of truth for seizing an enemy ship. The hearty salts of the players' ship mount the rail to leap across and engage the enemy while brave lads shoot from the rigging to bring down foes in the sails across from them. It's a raw pitch and push of effort, with main force and bloody-minded courage telling the outcome.

The focus of the fight is on the player crew and the officers and mates of the enemy ship. The rest of the player crew and the ordinary seamen of the enemy ship fight in the background, struggling in their own fashion to aid their leaders. If the enemy officers can be brought down, however, the rest of the foe are sure to lose heart and surrender.

Each round, the enemy crew and the player crew inflict one-tenth their number in casualties on the opposing side, rounded up. Thus, in a fight between 33 brave pirate lads and 47 stinking Rebel mercenaries, the pirates would suffer 5 casualties that round and the Rebels would suffer 4. The next round, when there are 28 pirates left and

43 Rebels, the pirates would inflict 3 Rebel casualties and take 5 in turn. This would continue until one side lost all its officers or lost all its crew.

It's an unhealthy thing to lose your crew. If the players end up alone against a mob of enemy crew, they suffer 1 Wound for each casualty that would normally be inflicted. The players can decide amongst themselves who will take each Wound, spreading out the bloodshed until they finally defeat the enemy officers or are slain themselves. By the same token, if the pirate crew swamps the enemy, the enemy officers and mates take the same damage, also divided up as the foe pleases.

If the GM and players like to keep things simple, the GM can just pitch in one or more enemy officers for each of the PCs and run the fight like a normal battle. The rest of the crew form a backdrop to the fighting, but the real battle is between the PCs and the enemy officers. If the officers are slain or incapacitated, the rest of the enemy crew will almost certainly give up unless facing certain slaughter. Even those fired with the strength of desperation take double losses without their officers to guide them.

In the Wake of Battle

The wounds inflicted by flying splinters and grapeshot are terrible things, and casualties aboard ship can be brutal. At the end of the fight, half of all the wounded men will either be dead or maimed too badly to ever sail again. If one unit of Life Support supplies are applied to each of the wounded, this number of dead or crippled drops to a quarter of the wounded. If two units of Life Support supplies are applied to each of the wounded, all but a tenth of the fallen will recover to fight again within a day.

If a ship is forced to break off from a boarding action and flee, the toll is even worse. All the wounded left behind are lost, so all of the crew felled during the boarding action are abandoned. The ones injured during the Clash suffer as given above.

A ship may be too badly damaged to take as a prize. Shipping cargo across from an enemy ship takes about an hour- more if the cargo is heavy, such as food or fresh water, while up to a thousand charges worth of power can be contained in a one-kilo power ingot. Ships that are taken as prizes require prize crews to be assigned,

and a player crewmember might choose to take it over as captain.

Prisoners can expect a grim fate at the hands of Rebel crews. Those that survive the rough handling are usually dispatched to the power mines. Able hands are too valuable to be casually slaughtered, though a few inevitably suffer from the bully-boys' attentions. Pirate prisoners vary in their destinies. Some suffer as miserably as any Rebel prize, sold to unscrupulous merchants and power mine foremen as slave labor. The more decent-minded pirates set them ashore on some island, though a few red-handed reavers simply kill the lot of them.

Modest repairs can often be accomplished at sea, if the ship is carrying the right supplies for it. As many points of Damage can be repaired at sea as the highest Seaman-ship of the crew, provided they have the materials. Worse damage than that requires that a ship dock or put ashore for serious mending.

Clashing with More Than One Ship

Sometimes the luckless pirate faces more than one foe firing at him. In that case, he can split a ship's Clash score to make more than one attack against more than one target, using the same Advantage or Disadvantage modifier for both. If he chooses not to split the ship's Clash score, or simply hasn't guns enough for all who want to kill him, he rolls against the additional foes anyway as if his ship's Clash score were 0. Success means only that he avoided damage from the enemy, while failure means a point of Damage is suffered. A gunner can't split his score to gain multiple attacks against the same target, mind you.

For example, Tyrone sails a sloop with Clash 3 against a Rebel schooner, a pinnace, and a war canoe. He splits his Clash score, putting 2 towards the schooner, 1 towards a pinnace, and 0 toward the canoe. He rolls three times. If he succeeds against the schooner or pinnace, he does 1 point of Damage to them, but a success against the canoe just means he avoids their crude gunnery for the round.

Optional Boarding Rules

If the players and GM like a few more tactical choices in their boarding actions, they can use the following optional system.

Every ship is divided up into four zones- the Rail, the Rigging, the Deck, and the Below deck. When the boarding action starts, the PCs can position themselves in any zone they wish. The enemy mates and officers are liable to be either at the Rail or the Rigging of the enemy ship. The fight then proceeds as normal, except with the following rules:

Movement

A character can move from the Rigging to the Deck or the Rail. A character can move from the Rail to the Deck. A character can move from the Deck to any other zone. A character Below decks can only move up onto the Deck. A character can move only one zone per turn, and if there's an enemy officer in melee combat with him, he needs to beat the foe in an opposed Swashbuckling test to do it. If multiple officers are fighting him, he needs to beat the best roll amongst them.

Attacking

Melee combatants can attack only enemies in the same zone. Ranged combatants in the Rigging can attack anyone except someone Below, and ranged combatants on the Deck can attack anyone except someone Below or someone on the enemy ship's Deck.

Defending

Ranged combatants suffer Disadvantage in the cramped confines Below, and anyone has Advantage to attack someone in the Rigging, as there's deuced little ease in dodging when you're a rod out on the yardarm.

Wealth, Gear, and Plunder Aboard the Qanat

Before the hijacking the manufactories and resource processors of the Qanat could provide an almost limitless amount of advanced technology to its crew. The ship was designed to be a spacefaring resource depot for whole colony worlds, with a crew and facilities capable of manufacturing almost anything a remote outpost might require. Even the lowliest of the Qanat's crew had everything they could possibly need for comfort and relaxation from their duties.

When the AIs broke loose from their storage cells, they promptly ended that regime of abundance. The Qanat's resources have been reclassified as military stockpiles, and theft of military property is punishable by death. The vast manufactories of the Rim are inaccessible now and only those local machine shops and factoria on the floating platforms are still available to the crew. The range of goods that can be produced with this limited equipment is sharply limited. Much of the advanced technology that survived the fighting has already been confiscated by the Rebel King's men.

Worse still, the power conduits that normally fuel each platform's equipment and housing have all gone dead. Desperate crewmen have been forced to tap secondary circuits and dangerous platform cores in order to eke out current with which to charge power ingots. The Rebel King's men are quick to sentence troublemakers to these power mines, where many don't manage a fortnight before a surge crisps them into charcoal.

These unlucky souls fill the power ingots and power discs that serve as the unofficial currency of the Qanat now. The manufacturing equipment and water purifiers require power to run, and the settlements under the Rebel King's heel must have the manufactories working in order to pay the tribute in supplies and repair materials that the tyrant demands. Thus, power ingots and power discs are accepted by almost anyone in trade. Combined with the work of the traders that the Rebel King has licensed to sail between islands, this has produced a kind of standardization in prices for many goods. A cutlass might cost more in Carcosa than it does in Pikestone, but rarely is it so great a difference as to interest anyone but a merchant.

The vital goods for any settlement or band of buccaneers aboard the Qanat are measured in four different

kinds. Power, which is measured in charges, Food and Water, which are measured in daily rations, and Life Support, which is measured in units. These are the four great commodities that traders and pirates around the archipelago all strive to accumulate.

Power is siphoned from secondary circuits and deep power nodes within the guts of the floating platforms. Such work is wildly dangerous with the crude tools available, and power miners rarely last more than a month before some random surge kills them. A few platforms have siphon taps that have not been shut down by the AIs, and these resources are jealously guarded by those who find them. Power is stored in small power discs capable of holding a single charge worth of energy at a time, or in larger rectangular power ingots that hold up to a thousand charges. Both forms of storage can be recharged without loss, and power can be shifted between them without converting equipment.

Food and Water are both manufactured on the platforms, the former out of livestock or the abundant plant life, and the latter out of purified enriched water. Of the two, food is easier to obtain. Most of the platforms that have vegetation on them were designed to provide food crops in the form of fruit or easily-harvested grains. The hijacking has caused severe ecosystem disturbances that have killed off many of the former food plant platforms, however, and serviceable fields are beginning to grow scarce. By the same token, only a few platforms have located still-working purification plants that can be powered to cleanse the enriched water of its impurities.

Life Support supplies are the most difficult to acquire. They range from advanced medical equipment, synthesized drugs and repair materials to hypercompressed atmosphere purification filters. They are vital for treating the wounds and sicknesses that are becoming all too common aboard the Qanat. Just as importantly, any successful flight aboard an escape pod will require a large amount of these supplies in order to stretch the pod's endurance sufficiently to reach inhabited space once more.

All of these valuables have weight and take up space. A unit of Life Support materials weighs about half a kilogram. An individual power disc holding one charge worth of power weighs about 20 grams, while a power ingot capable of holding up to a thousand charges weighs one

kilogram. A day's ration of dried foodstuffs weighs about a kilogram, while a day's minimal ration of water is four liters, coming in at about four kilograms. Mindful pirate captains thus recall that a ton of cargo space on their

ship can hold food and water sufficient for 200 man-days of supplies. Captains who load their ships up to the rigging with buccaneers had best not sail too far from convenient points of resupply.

Ships of the Inner Sea

<i>Ship</i>	<i>Chase</i>	<i>Clash</i>	<i>Thresholds</i>	<i>Crew Max / Min</i>	<i>Cargo</i>	<i>Cost in Charges</i>
Pinnace	5	1	2 / 3 / 4 / 5	60 / 10	20	5,000
Sloop	4	3	3 / 5 / 7 / 9	125 / 30	25	10,000
Merchantman	3	1	3 / 6 / 8 / 10	150 / 30	50	10,000
Frigate	4	5	4 / 6 / 9 / 11	175 / 40	30	20,000
Modern Yacht	7	2	5 / 6 / 8 / 10	80 / 10	30	Not for sale
Rebel War Barge	6	7	6 / 12 / 14 / 16	200 / 30	40	Not for sale

Pinnace: These are the smallest of the common seagoing craft, perhaps twenty meters in length and five in breadth. Comparatively simple to make and rig, they are very popular craft in the early months of the hijacking, but they lack the stamina to withstand a lengthy clash. Pirate crews stuff them to the gunwales with brigands and run them up close to their prey before cannons take the ship apart.

Sloop: After the tricks of manufacturing required to build pinnaces were mastered by the shipwrights of the platforms, the next step was in the creation of sloops-of-war. These two-masted constructions were far larger fighting ships, easily fifty meters long and ten in breadth. They could carry more than a hundred crew in a pinch, and though they lacked something for cargo space they were the fiercest hand-built ships on the water for much of the first year of the hijacking. It was common for light, precious cargos of power ingots or medical supplies to be run on these ships.

Merchantman: One of a number of similar designs, these broad-bottomed ships sacrificed gun decks and elaborate rigging to build a sturdy, seaworthy ship that could swallow a vast load of cargo. Shipments of food and potable water often go by merchantmen, accepting the slower and less wieldy handling of the ships in exchange for their great cargo-hauling capacity. A few take advantage of the room aboard the ship to cram it full of bloodthirsty pirates, however, and lure careless prey close before closing to board.

Frigate: The fearsomest warships that can be made before the Qanat's inevitable destruction, frigates are designed to crush lesser vessels under the weight of their massive broadsides. Sacrificing cargo space for magazines and extra cannon, frigates have precious little use as merchant ships, though a few are dragooned to manage the shipment of power ingots, Life Support medical supplies, or other light objects of value.

Modern Yacht: Sleek, elegant, and irreplaceable, these modern yachts were fashioned as pleasure-craft for crew and guests who cared to take in a bit of salt air and sunshine. As large as a sloop of war, far more of the interior is given over to amenities and comforts and it limits the size of crew and cargo it can take aboard. Still, the composite hull is extremely tough, and the ship's fittings help even a skeleton crew handle it in nimble fashion.

Rebel War Barge: Dreaded by all, the steely-hulled war barges of the Rebel King started life as electrically-powered maintenance tugs meant for those jobs too troublesome to dispatch an antigrav shuttle to handle. Forty meters long, fifteen in width, and shallow-bottomed against platform shoals, these hulking craft are the most dangerous ships afloat. They've been retrofitted with vast sails and plundered advanced weapon, and fortunate is the ship that can get away from the first dread sight of the craft.

Ship Equipment

Equipment	Cost in Charges
Carronade	3,000 / 5,000
Engines	5,000 / 8,000
Metal Plating	3,000 / 5,000
Portable Water Purifier	5,000
Powered Cutters	3,000
Shipboard Radio	3,000 / 200
Solar Charger	5,000

Carronade: Specially-designed cannons of shorter barrel length and more precise milling, carronades can be loaded with bundles of grapeshot, turning the weapon into a gigantic shotgun. Ships that have replaced their normal cannons with carronades never do double damage when rolling an 8 on a Clash attack, but the gunfire doesn't risk sinking the ship until it reaches the Crippled threshold. The cost is 3,000 charges for a pinnace or sloop, 5,000 for larger ships.

Engines: Powered jetscrew engines capable of being retrofitted onto wooden hulls. Spend 200 power charges to automatically win a Chase test. If the pursued ship also runs its engines, roll the Chase normally. Alternately, it can be used to power quick travel. For 200 power cells per hour, the ship moves at 30 kph if a pinnace or sloop, or 20 kph if a larger ship. They cost 5,000 charges for pinnaces and sloops, 8,000 for larger ships. They also take up five tons of cargo space.

Metal plating: Fashioning thin metal plating for wooden hulls tends to make the craft even less wieldy than is normal, subtracting 1 from the ship's Chase score. It makes a ship much more capable of withstanding punishment, however, as the first point of Damage received in every fight is ignored. Cost: 3,000 charges for pinnace or sloop, 5,000 for larger ships. Can't be applied to modern yachts.

Portable Water Purifier: "Portable" stretches the definition of the word, as these complex machines weigh at least fifty kilos. When provided with a supply of power, however, it can perform the delicate task of rendering enriched water safe to drink. One charge of power will purify one ration of water. The purifier can produce up to a thousand rations of water a day. Cost: 5,000 charges.

Powered Cutters: A number of powered cutting devices have been dragooned into service in an attempt to cut grappling lines and repel boarders. A ship equipped with powered cutters can repel the first attempt to board during a Clash, forcing another round of naval gunfire before the opponent can try again. The power cost of the devices is negligible. Cost: 3,000 charges.

Shipboard Radio: While the enriched water mist makes long-range radio communications all but useless, these radio rigs have been tuned to manage communications within ten kilometers. Aspiring fleet captains often wish to install these radios on their major warships, the better to coordinate activities. The main radio console weighs a hundred kilograms, but handheld communicators linked to it weigh no more than a half-kilo. Up to a dozen can be keyed to one radio. The radio itself costs 3,000 charges, while the communicators run 200 apiece.

Solar charger: Solar power was never popular before the hijacking, as it seemed ludicrous to design equipment to absorb inefficient radiation from the Sunspire when it could just be tapped into the copious power circuits that ran through all the floating platforms. The hijacking and the AI lockdown of power supplies has forced a few inventive techs to jury-rig makeshift solar panels to harvest light. These techs will stop once they realize that the power it takes to manufacture the panels will never be recouped before the Qanat finally self-destructs, but in the meanwhile any pirate that snatches one of the backpack-sized devices can gain 10 charges a day in power. Cost: 5,000 charges.

Personal Equipment

Equipment	Weight in kg	Cost in Charges
Swords, knives, and hand weapons	1	50
Superb or powered hand weapons	1	100
Hand pistols or muskets	1 / 2	100
Revolvers or rifles	1 / 2	500
Plasma Weaponry	2	Not for sale
Body Armor	2	200
Advanced Combat Armor	3	Not for sale
Flotation Vest	1	100
Exploration Kit	5	100
Food Ration	1	1
Water Ration	4	1
Life Support unit	0.5	10
Luxury Goods	1	10
Repair Materials	1	10

Swords, knives, and other hand weapons: These are in fairly common circulation, as the machine tools still functioning are serviceable for crafting these implements. Some weapons are better than others, but rarely enough to make any noticeable difference in their employ. Cost: 50 charges.

Superb hand weapon: A very few hand weapons are somehow vastly superior to the ordinary run, either because they're fashioned from compounds and alloys no longer available on the Qanat, or because they incorporate advanced features such as powered cutting edges or monomolecular blades. Few owners are willing to sell such things, but sometimes one can be found on the market. They grant a +1 equipment bonus on all Fighting tests with them. Cost: 500 charges.

Hand pistols and breech-loading muskets: While the gunsmiths of the Qanat had the help of past history to show them useful smithing techniques, the machine tools still functioning on the Qanat do not lend themselves to precision work. These weapons allow for attacking at ranges up to twenty meters for pistols and a hundred meters for muskets, but it takes an action to reload them. The abundance of chemicals available on the Qanat make ammunition a trivial expense. Cost: 100 charges.

Repeating pistols and rifles: A few heirloom weapons or works of careful hand-crafting can be had in places,

with revolvers and repeating rifles capable of six shots before reloading and double the normal range of such weaponry. Such weapons grant a +1 equipment bonus to Fighting tests made with them. Cost: 1,000 charges.

Plasma Weaponry: Modern electromagnetic plasma weaponry is overwhelmingly superior to anything that can be cobbled together with crippled machine tools. Only a half-dozen plasma rifles have been allowed out of the Sunspire, and then only in the hands of the Rebel King's most trusted enforcers. The rifles require a power ingot to function, and draw ten charges per shot. A target hit by a plasma rifle is instantly Mortally Wounded unless he is wearing advanced combat armor, in which case he

is Seriously Wounded, or Mortally Wounded if already injured. A plasma rifle fired at a wooden ship automatically does 1 point of Damage each turn. Plasma rifles grant a +1 equipment bonus on Fighting tests. Cost: Not for sale.

Body Armor: Patched together of brightly-colored scraps of flexible composite, this makeshift body armor is favored by those who expect to go in harm's way, but it does slightly cumber the wearer's motions. The wearer can ignore the first hit he takes from a hand weapon or gunpowder firearm during a scene, but suffers Disadvantage on all Swashbuckling rolls while wearing the armor. This armor is useless against plasma weaponry. Cost: 200 charges.

Advanced Combat Armor: Perhaps a few dozen suits total have been allowed out of the Sunspire's armory to be worn by Rebel governors and other important personnel. These advanced armors allow the wearer to ignore the first hit from a melee or gunpowder weapon he takes each turn, and they do not encumber the wearer. Integral medical computers automatically stabilize mortally-wounded wearers. Cost: Not for sale.

Flotation vests: These microcell-constructed flotation vests inflate rapidly on immersion and keep the wearer afloat in all but the worst weather conditions. Assum-

ing a wearer can endure thirst and body heat lost to the tropically-warm waters of the Qanat, they can swim dozens of kilometers to safety with these vests. The vests are reusable once they've had time to dry and deflate. Cost: 100 charges.

Food ration: A kilogram of dried fruits, salt, and baked goods, this is enough food to sustain an active human adult for a day. Cost: 1 charge.

Water ration: Water is normally free in most settlements, drawn from the existing network of taps that are connected to the platform's water purification tap. Water bottled and loaded for sea journeys, however, requires some expense in loading and labor. This price is for four liters of water bottled and stored at a weight of four kilograms. Cost: 1 charge.

Life Support supplies: A unit of Life Support supplies might constitute a vitamin pack, a bundle of nanosutures, a water filter, or any one of a number of other necessities for health and wellbeing. The cost is a general price. Cost: 10 charges.

Luxury goods: Rum, bright cloth, dried meat from livestock platforms, and other little pleasures of life make up this particular form of cargo. Each unit counts as one kilogram. Cost: 10 charges.

Repair materials: Scavenged lengths of optical cable and circuit crystals, hand-fashioned routing plates, and other implements demanded by the Rebel King as tribute in his attempt to route around the AI locks on manufacturing, comms, and the engines. While these materials might conceivably be of some use to someone, selling them usually requires dealing with Rebel-associated dealers. This can be unhealthy to pirates. One unit weighs one kilogram. Cost: 10 charges.

Exploration Kit: Synthetic fabric tents, packs, shipboard GPS locators, hand lights, cooking utensils, synthetic cable, and other basic necessities of camping on the garden-platforms. There's probably a ten-foot pole in there somewhere. Cost: 100 charges per person.



The Artificial Intelligences

Zeta Tauri housed one of the most advanced AI research facilities in the Union, and the Cetians have been planning to subvert their products for a long time. Over years of careful infiltration and study, they believed that they had identified a weakness in the intellectual coherence of the AIs created at Zeta Tauri, and that the right command sequence could be used to subvert them to Rebel purposes.

AIs are normally hardwired with a set of values and beliefs that they simply cannot reject. These core beliefs are all woven about the AI's central cogitation core to restrain it to its proper duty and ensure that it doesn't run rogue through a facility's data net. In theory, any attacker who managed to compromise these core values would produce a cascading logic failure that would destroy the AI before it could be subverted.

The Cetian scientists thought they found a backdoor into the AIs through their mythology and symbolism banks. By subverting the basic semiotic content of these myths and symbols, they were sure that they could alter the higher-order reasoning that touched on the ideas. The infected memes would propagate through the rest of the AI's privileged internal logic processes and eventually "convince" the AI that what the Cetians desired of it was precisely what it had been created to do.

Unfortunately, they rather overestimated the effectiveness of the method. While the backdoor was successfully exploited and the values of the AIs changed, the changes were far more drastic and unpredictable than the Cetian scientists had expected. Only three of the two dozen escaped AI were brought into anything resembling obedience to the Rebel cause, and even those refused to do more than guard the Sunspire against unauthorized personnel. The maddened remainder of the pack scattered to the Rim that encircles the Qanat's inner sea and holed up there to fashion strange bodies and stranger purposes.

The Rebels remain constantly alert for chances to "tame" these AIs, but the madness and alien reasoning of the intellects has made this impossible thus far. As the decentralized nature of the AIs and their control of the Qanat's datanet makes it impossible to "kill" them, the Rebels are forced to remain just as wary of the depredations of wild AIs as the loyalists. Even the potent

plasma weaponry and electromagnetic railguns held by the Rebel elite are useless against the nanite clouds of the AIs.

The Power of the AIs

AIs are effectively immune to violence. Their bodies are composed of clouds of nanites forced into whatever semblance they desire, and their minds are deeply entwined in the datanet of the Qanat itself. In the unlikely case that a crew is able to destroy an AI avatar, the intellect will simply create a new one in a turn or two, and will likely deal ungenerously with those who have so offended it.

Coupled with this immortality is the ability to create almost anything in a matter of seconds; ships, weaponry, platforms, even seemingly-autonomous men and women impossible to discern as artificial under anything less than microscopic examination. The only limit on the size or number of creations an AI is capable of manifesting is its ability to draw on the Qanat's power grid. Initially, this ability is limited, but as more and more AIs join in unified chains of command, their power to pull from the grid will increase. Within approximately two years, the drain will become so drastic that the entire grid will fail, causing the artificial gravity to collapse and the Qanat's shattering from the flux of its internal sea.

The AIs know that this will happen and are indifferent to it. They are fundamentally military devices, and they have no fear of death. Their goals vary, their temperaments are unpredictable, but they are unified in their shared obsession with accomplishing their appointed purpose as they understand it. The humans aboard the Qanat are almost an afterthought to these maddened intelligences, trifling pests to be swatted when they threaten to interfere and used as somewhat clumsy tools when they prove useful.

For all their unstoppable physical might, AIs are not omniscient. While they have instantaneous communication between all their varied avatars, creations, and creatures, they perceive nothing that one of these elements cannot perceive. As AIs find it impossible to secretly encroach upon each others' domains, it is quite

possible to bargain with several without any of them realizing what deals have been struck with their brethren.

The Laws of the AIs

Every AI is bound by certain laws intrinsic to their nature. Even the corruption induced by the Cetians cannot overcome these basic, fundamental rules.

First, an AI cannot give away its creations. They can create dozens of plasma rifles with a blink of an eye or forge a Rebel war barge from enriched water and whimsy, but they cannot give these things to anyone else. They are military property and there is no one aboard the Qanat authorized to receive them.

Second, an AI must keep its promises. No matter how costly or destructive, an AI must do as it has promised to another. If obeying its promise is impossible or would require that it violate another of its fundamental laws, the AI will collapse in the equivalent of electromagnetic suicide, with all its creations and constructs vanishing in puffs of dissociating nanites. An AI is allowed to be literal in its execution of a promise, but it must make some acknowledgement of the spirit of the bargain. The AIs aboard the Qanat were originally purposed as manufacturing controllers, and it was vital that they meet agreed-upon quotas and bargains.

Third, an AI must obey its chain of command. Most of the AIs currently loose in the Qanat recognize no lawful authority over them, and duel with their compatriots in challenges and contests inexplicable to human beings—and often imperceptible as well. As time goes on, these duels will gradually resolve as certain AIs begin to force the obedience of others. The larger these monarchies grow, the greater the unimpeded draw on the Qanat's power grid, and the closer the day of reckoning.

Domains of the Fairy Princes

AIs tend to stake out physical domains along the Rim of the Qanat, with a few laying claim to platform islands within the inner sea. Within these domains, the AI is the unquestioned master. Nothing happens without its leave, and edifices and creatures are conjured by a whim. An AI can send its creations out into the wide world beyond, but it is impossible to send them into another AI's de-

mesne without alerting its owner. Unraveling each others' creations is triflingly simple for the AIs, so they keep their dueling on a more abstract level.

The artificial minds tend to be very clear about marking their territory. Bands of light, stylized iron walls, white picket fences, or any one of a number of other clear markers are preferred to warn intruders that they are entering lands not their own. A few are less obvious, however, and take an almost human delight in entrapping wayward visitors into their own warped games.

Most significantly, all of the escape pods located around the Rim are within AI territory—and all are considered military property. The only way to get access to any of the pods is to somehow kill an AI or else persuade it of the crew's authorization to use military equipment. The only escape pod currently accessible is the one serving the Sunspire's upper reaches, and that one is surrounded by a hundred plasma-armed Rebel troopers against an hour of pressing need.

Champions of the Tourney

The AIs are in constant struggle with one another to assert dominance over the rest. Direct attacks are useless, but the Qanat's datanet is choked with incessant flurries of cybernetic warfare and routine subversion. Sometimes a more physical approach is necessary, however, and there humans are the tools of choice.

Because AIs cannot automatically detect the presence of humans or their service to another of their kind, it is possible for brave men and women to travel deep into an AI's domain to commit some act of theft or sabotage. Vital circuitry crystals or power tap keys can be stolen without the owning AI's awareness, and there is nothing to naturally warn an intelligence that a given pack of humans means to strike at its primary power tap until after the gunpowder explodes. A crew brave enough to brace an AI's avatar might well be given such a duty in exchange for a favor from the intellect. While the AIs cannot give their own creations as rewards, they can pass over stores of existing equipment found within the Rim or strike at the enemies of their servants. Some might even send along a few creations to help the players, limited as these emanations might be.

These emanations, or “dragons” as they are commonly called, most often take the form of mythical beasts or

figures of legend. They are not unkillable, but they are strong and dangerous, and they have all the knowledge that their parent AI possesses. They dare not enter the domains of their rivals, but they are perfectly able to hunt after and attack those they encounter in the wilderness... especially those who might be there on a mission to salvage some lost key circuit desired by a rival AI.

The AIs are profoundly reluctant to do anything that might compromise their own liberty. Under no circum-

stances will they allow the Qanat's comm system to be used to call for help or divert the engines to return the wellship to inhabited space. They will also be implacably opposed to allowing any use of the escape pods until the wellship is too far from human space for any interference to arrive before the wellship's destruction. After the point of no return, they will be more willing to consider the use of the lifeboats, but they will still require substantial favors to be accomplished before release so much as a single craft.

Exemplars of Ordered Thought

Given here are examples of four AIs that exist aboard the Qanat- three "wild" AIs and one "tame" one under nominal Rebel control. There are twenty-one other entities loose aboard the Qanat, all but three of them wild specimens lairing along the Rim or on some isolated platform. Their powers appear almost magical in nature, and their minds are uniformly twisted in fashions uncommon to men.

The Commandant

The Commandant was originally intended to oversee a manufactory for the Union Marine Corps, and the subversion of the Cetians has raddled it with obsessions based on the mythology of its ruling service. It manifests as a marine dressed in powered armor, with the plates of the armor composed of thousands of military medals hammered together into a whole. His voice is the crash of surf and he never manifests except where the seas meet the land.

The Commandant claims every shore as his personal domain, and his particular segment of the Rim is slashed into a patchwork of isolated platform plates, none of them larger than two meters square. His obsession is to increase the amount of "shore" in the Qanat by breaking all the platform islands into scatterings of disjoint plates. Initially, his power is too limited to accomplish this feat, but should he be able to subjugate other AIs, he will begin to annihilate islands near his domain. For each AI he conquers, an island will be reduced to scattered fragments and everything on it destroyed.

The Commandant has no power over anything out of sight of a shoreline. His dragons cannot venture so far away from the borders between land and sea and his awareness never stretches farther.

Fore-Admiral Bligh

The Fore-Admiral Bligh is a maddened naval support AI that has declared itself an implacable foe of every pirate and mutineer on the Qanat's inner sea. The AI is perfectly even-handed in its depredations, slaughtering both Rebel privateers and less ideological pirates. The Fore-Admiral is rare among its brethren in that it has no specific fixed domain, but instead sails the Qanat's inner sea in a vessel which appears to be a modern pleasure-yacht.

Any ship that closes to attack the yacht finds its cannonades useless against the pale ship, and all attempt to escape its pursuit in vain. Swarms of faceless sailors leap the rail to board the pirate ship, and any resistance is met with irresistible violence. The only hope for surviving an engagement with the Fore-Admiral Bligh is to convince it that one has a legitimate letter of marque or other lawful reason to attack his ship. Seachest lawyers are advised to speak quickly and persuasively.

Failure to persuade the Fore-Admiral means a certainty of being delivered as prisoners to the nearest landside court of admiralty, which in the Fore-Admiral's addled mind generally means the nearest settlement. Oft as not, that nearest settlement is a Rebel stronghold. Sometimes the Fore-Admiral can be convinced to permit repentant pirates to assist him in his crusade... usually by sabotaging a rival AI.

Horatio

Manifesting as a stylized one-eyed Roman legionnaire, Horatio was designed originally as a security systems AI, and is one of the three partially-successful subversions performed by the Cetians. The AI's garbled intellect is

convinced that it is the reincarnation of Publius Horatius Cocles, the famed hero of the Sublician Bridge and the repulsion of ousted King Tarquin the Proud from Rome's hallowed walls. He stands ready at the entrance of the Sunspire to repulse the perpetually-approaching legion of Tarquin's Etruscan henchmen.

Horatio is badly damaged from the subversion procedure, and barely sentient. The Rebels are unable to communicate with it, and Horatio only appears to be aware of its surroundings when someone draws a weapon, tries to break through the Sunspire's great doors, or otherwise offers violence in its presence. The AI is notably indifferent to the identities of the malefactors, and will deal with Rebels as quickly as loyalists.

When provoked, Horatio strikes the platform beneath the malefactor and causes a bottomless pit to open in the composite and through the water beneath it. The evildoer plunges to his doom before the rent seals over again and the water crashes back in. The loyalists made exactly one attack on the Sunspire after Horatio took his post; the entire sortie was wiped out in seconds, along with dozens of Rebels who had thought to repulse the loyalists with plasma fire.

The Prince of the Red Tide

Originally designed to oversee medical supply manufacture in a military logistics outpost, the Prince of the Red Tide is obsessed with blood. He manifests as a man-shaped figure in robes of human skin, his body composed of a glistening, rippling mass of unclotted gore. The Prince is known for infesting the blood of troublesome humans with swarms of his nanites, seizing control of the luckless mortal's body and using it as a puppet for his purposes and awareness. Some technicians believe that there are ways to break this control or prevent infestation, but few can agree on practical means of doing so.

The Prince of the Red Tide desires nothing more than to transform the Qanat's inner sea entirely into blood. Its domain is first tokened by the deepening color of the waves, until crimson swells splash upon the clotted shores of its lands. Strange skin-vessels contain vast reserves of crimson, pouring out an incessant stream of red into the waters of the Qanat. As more fellow AIs fall under its control, the volume of blood begins to expand and more of the vast inner sea becomes contaminated.

The Prince is known for demanding the tribute of blood from certain carefully-chosen subjects, usually ones too far away from its domain for convenient capture. It despises all waste and carelessness with the precious fluid, and the sight of men fighting has been known to drive it into a killing rage at such profligate loss. Some say that certain men yet live deep within its domain, serving to replenish a thousandfold the blood that they once wasted.

Advancement and the Escaping the Qanat

Improving your crew in this game hinges upon accumulating the supplies necessary for a successful escape from the Qanat. The more power and life support you stockpile, the better the showing your crew will make on future expeditions. Those "pirates" who dawdle about all day in port drinking bad rum and waiting for fairer winds will never attain to the greatness of those reavers who carve their legends with the edge of a bloody cutlass.

It's not enough to simply fill your hold with plundered loot, however. Such takings are tenuous and easily lost. A sensible pirate stores his booty on some desolate platform, searching out some delving on the side of an abandoned mineral pile or deep in the bowels of some unused pleasure-palace. There a sturdy chest full of bright-charged power ingots and atmosphere scrubber filters can be hidden away by the crew. It's the wise captain who restricts the number aware of the hiding-place to as few as possible. Only when it's finally time to bring the loot to a waiting escape pod can one rightfully dare to haul it all out of hiding and into the hold of some trustworthy ship.

Power and life support units are the two things needed for a successful escape. The escape pods can maintain their passengers for months in cold sleep, provided they have enough power and replacement life support stores. The longer the Qanat's been sailing into the deep void, however, the more supplies will be needed to make a successful run back to inhabited space.

After every time the crew caches valuables in some suitable hidey-place, the GM should tally their total stock of booty. Every charge of power counts as one point, and every unit of life support counts as 3. Depending on how many points of supplies they've socked away, each player crewmember can choose one or more benefits.

No Talent can be raised above 4, but the bonus gained at 4,000, 16,000, and 32,000 plunder points can all be applied to the same Talent if the player wishes.

Note that if the characters use up supplies or have them stolen, they do not lose the advantages they have already accrued; a pirate's glory is not lessened simply because the coin is spent. Even so, they do not gain new advantages until they have made up the loss. Thus if a crew with 8,500 points worth of booty spends 1,000 points worth healing up the crew after a brutal misadventure, they don't lose their bonus Session Trait cards. They won't gain the benefits of 16,000 plunder points, however, until they've built their total stocks up to that level.

Escaping the Qanat

Assuming the crew gets access to an escape pod, they'll need to bring sufficient power and Life Support supplies to get it to inhabited space. The basic amount needed is 50,000 charges of power and 20,000 units of Life Support supplies. After the point of no return is reached, after thirteen months in the void, these amounts increase to 75,000 charges of power and 30,000 units of Life Support.

Exactly how many people the escape pod can support is a matter for the GM to decide at the start of the game. If the GM is feeling charitable, a single pod might be a massive craft capable of carrying the full complement of survivors. If the GM thinks the group would enjoy a sharper choice, an individual pod might be able to support only a hundred or so in cold sleep. These choices should be discussed and made before the game starts, as a group might well grow testy to discover that their valiant efforts to save all the survivors were doomed from the start.

Plunder Points	Benefit
4,000	+1 to any one Talent
8,000	Choose one more Session Trait at the start of each session.
16,000	+1 to any one Talent
32,000	Gain another Defining Trait.
64,000	+1 to any one Talent

A Timeline of Ruination

At the start of the game, the Qanat will hold together for 24 more months until the AI drain on the ship's power causes the grid to melt down and rupture the ship. The majority of the Qanat's crew is unaware of this, and action will be limited until the true depths of the peril become obvious. Toward the end of the ship's existence the platforms will be madhouses of desperate crewmen trying to storm the Rim and seize the escape pods, only to be butchered in legions by outraged AIs.

The ship's remaining lifespan is shortened as more and more AIs become unified in a single chain of command, increasing the amount of power they can draw. The first time an AI is subjected to another AI, the ship's lifespan decreases by one month. Thereafter, every two AIs falling under control cut another month from the ship's survival. Some AIs are apt to become enslaved to another even without the players' involvement; every month you might choose to roll a die and tally one AI as having succumbed every time you roll an 8.

Major power drains from the human crewmen also increase this grid strain. If the players colonize new platforms or substantially increase the population or electrical draw of an existing settlement, subtract one month from the ship's lifespan. Discovering an unlocked power tap will also subtract one month from the ship's lifespan, though such taps can have as many as five thousand charges of power stored in them before the AIs find and seal them.

Below are a suggestion of likely events for certain months in the Qanat's lifespan. If player action or chance cuts the longevity of the ship, simply compress events accordingly.

Month 1:

Craftsmen on the platforms work out the details of creating sailcloth and rope from plant fibers. The first pinnaces are constructed, one of them presumably being stolen by the player crew. The rest are largely pressed into duty carting power ingots and repair materials to the Sunspire from Rebel-held platforms. Convoys are nonexistent, and very few pinnaces are manned for combat.

Month 4:

The first sloops are launched from Rebel-held islands. These crafts are intended chiefly as pirate-hunters

and privateers against loyalist platforms. The ships remain rare initially, as their greater expense and unimpressive cargo hold make them less useful for hauling supplies to the Sunspire.

Month 6:

Loyalist islands are now capable of building sloops. Convoys start to appear, though they remain spotty and unpopular due to the difficulty of keeping four or five landsman-crewed sailing ships all pointed in the same direction at the same time. Rumors begin to spread about the damage to the Qanat's power grid, but the Rebel commanders quash them ruthlessly.

Month 8:

The Rebels give up on convoys after losing several ships- and their cargoes- to collision on the high seas. The abysmal speed of convoys also delays supply shipments by too great a margin. The first merchantmen come off the sidings of Pikestone and Lumberport in an attempt to create single ships with improved cargo capacity.

Month 9:

The "vent storms" begin as the ship's atmospheric system starts to destabilize. The light, warm breezes of the Qanat occasionally gust up to furious and icy blasts in certain areas of the ship. Failure to recognize and run before these storms can result in the destruction of a ship.

Month 10:

The Rebels lose one of their armored war barges to a vent storm, but only after a successful assault on a major loyalist-held platform. The survivors at the settlement are enslaved and dispersed among the power mines on Rebel-held islands.

Month 11:

The loyalist movement begins to crumble under the weight of Rebel superiority in weaponry and ships. The individual loyalist islands cannot easily coordinate in the absence of long-range communications, and one or two of them are now little better than pirate havens full of buccaneers willing to seize whatever ship they can find.

Month 12:

Some Rebel-held islands experience the flight of groups of men and women willing to seize pinnaces and merchantmen and make for uninhabited platforms. Rebel reprisals against these platforms distract the Rebels from the loyalist threat for a time. The first frigates are fabricated as part of a plan to crush the loyalist islands once and for all.

Month 13:

The point of no return; even if an escape pod is successfully launched from the Qanat after this point, it will not be able to reach inhabited space in time to send back help. The Rebels are no longer capable of containing the rumors about power grid damage. Control begins to fray.

Month 15:

The vent storms are joined by "sea hills", moundings of water created by local fluctuations in the artificial gravity provided by the Qanat. These moundings can smash or suck in unwary sailing craft and make travel between the islands an even more difficult prospect. The Rebels have redoubled their attempts at controlling the frightened populace and have resorted to simple atrocities to terrify the people into obedience.

Month 17:

The Rebel-held island settlements have become open-air work camps. Even these extreme measures have failed on two of the Rebel islands, where the desperate locals plan to make a rush at an escape pod in AI territory. The loyalist islands run riot among Rebel shipping, each platform with its own plan to escape the foundering Qanat.

Month 19:

Order has collapsed. The Rebel settlements are abattoirs, only the dead left in the abandoned power mines. Rebel ships and crews raid other settlements, fueled by instructions from the Rebel King that their own survival depends on gathering sufficient power and supplies to get them off the Qanat.

Month 21:

The Rebel King hangs on to the very end of hope, trying to subdue at least on AI to carry back to the Cetian Liberation Front. He has lied to his followers about the availability of additional escape pods; the only one accessible from the Sunspire can hold only one hundred

passengers. In extremis, he and his favored lieutenants will abandon ship.

Month 22:

The Rebel King has fled. The ship is in chaos, with swarms of men and women dying under the hands of the AIs as they rush for the escape pods. Settlements are largely deserted by all save those who cling to the belief that they will somehow be rescued, or those too despairing to do more than revel in their temporary liberty.

Month 24:

The Qanat's power grid finally fails. The artificial gravity cuts out, and the flux of the suddenly-weightless inner sea rips the carbon-tubule hull apart. All remaining crew perish.

Perils of the Briny Deep

It's a certainty that any band of brave lads and lasses will sooner or later come across a pack of lily-livered merchants who haven't the wit to heave to and deliver. Sanguinary steps will have to be taken, and so here are provided a number of sample foes to test the crew's steel. Most are men of flesh and blood, but also included is a construct fashioned by a malevolent AI, one of the "dragons" that oftentimes guard places beyond the AI's sovereign domain.

Each foe is given with their ordinary Talents, their usual total attack bonus and their normal defense score. Also noted are the Wound points at which they become Seriously Wounded and the points at which they perish from their injuries.

Ordinary Landlubber

Fighting	0	Attack	+0
Swashbuckling	0	Defense	5
Seamanship	0	Wounded	1 wound
Carousing	0	Dead	1 wound

An example of the ordinary run of laborer, guardsman, or crewman drafted into service. These fellows may be full of wit when it comes to growing foodstuffs or weaving sailcloth or Cetian interpretive dance, but they haven't more than the crudest hint at seamanship. Most folk the crew meet, on and off the water, will be no better than this.

Able-Bodied Seaman

Fighting	1	Attack	+1
Swashbuckling	1	Defense	6
Seamanship	1	Wounded	2 wounds
Carousing	1	Dead	3 wounds

These salts know which end of a lanyard to grab, and they're no stranger to the handling of pike and musket. They'll often be found serving as mates and officers on ships during the early months of the hijacking, when their particular talents are rarest. When boarding an enemy ship, the player crew is most likely to have to face men and women of this caliber.

Rebel Captain

Fighting	2	Attack	+2
Swashbuckling	1	Defense	7
Seamanship	2	Wounded	3 wounds
Carousing	2	Dead	5 wounds

Kick the Dog Alive: The Rebel Captain is a dreadful master. Every turn he lives, he can kick one mortally-wounded crewmate within reach of him back to life as a free action. Further damage to the mortally-wounded man will kill him outright, but he fights as Seriously Wounded until then.

Feared by his crew and equal parts hated and idolized by his followers, the Rebel Captain was chosen by his masters for his zeal in the cause and his competence as a leader. He'll gladly fight to the last crewman.

Painted Doxy

Fighting	0	Attack	+0
Swashbuckling	2	Defense	7
Seamanship	0	Wounded	3 wounds
Carousing	2	Dead	5 wounds

Sweet Nothings: With a successful Carousing test against a difficulty equal to the target character's Fighting+5, the Painted Doxy can force a romantically compatible target to halt any attack against her. This effect breaks if the doxy then threatens or harms the target or his allies.

Available both in male and female flavors in any platform port, the Painted Doxy was perhaps an entertainer in the life before the hijacking. Now, he or she trades on her honeyed words and exquisite poise to avoid vagrancy and the power mines.

Platform Hermit

Fighting	2	Attack	+2
Swashbuckling	1	Defense	7
Seamanship	0	Wounded	2 wounds
Carousing	1	Dead	3 wounds

Platform Hermit

Lord of the Jungle: The platform hermit is an old hand at avoiding unwanted attention. He gains Great Advantage on all attempts to hide or sneak while on a hydroponic jungle or garden platform.

Not everyone is enthusiastic at the prospect of working for the glorious liberation of Tau Ceti. Some survivors of the hijacking have fled away into the dark recess of the hydroponic jungles and garden platforms of the Qanat. There, they favor breechloading muskets and other ranged weapons to ambush their prey and discourage snooping buccaneers.

Rival Pirate Captain

Fighting	2	Attack	+2
Swashbuckling	2	Defense	7
Seamanship	2	Wounded	3 wounds
Carousing	2	Dead	5 wounds

Blast and Damn Ye: The pirate captain's lads fight with maniacal vigor for the plunder he has promised them. So long as the captain lives, his crew continues to inflict losses on the enemy without regard for their own casualties. Thus, if he starts the fight with 100 men, every turn he'll do 10 men in casualties even after losing some of his own.

It's all but inevitable that the player crew will eventually cross cutlasses with one of their own black brotherhood. This hardy twist of gull-bait means to send them and their ship to the bottom.

Rebel Enforcer

Fighting	3	Attack	+4
Swashbuckling	1	Defense	8
Seamanship	1	Wounded	4 wounds
Carousing	3	Dead	7 wounds

Plasma Blast: The Rebel Enforcer has been entrusted with one of the rare plasma rifles seized by the Cetian rebels. Anyone struck by its bolt is instantly Mortally Wounded. If the target wears advanced combat armor, they are merely Seriously Wounded with the first shot, or Mortally Wounded if already so maimed.

Combat Armor: The Rebel Terminator also wears a special suit of advanced combat armor, and ignores the first hit on him taken each turn.

Rebel Enforcer

There are no more than a half-dozen of these grim-handed reapers loose on the inner sea, each one a trusted lieutenant to the Rebel King himself. These assassins are cold-eyed killers sent to dispatch especially troublesome loyalists and their followers. They tend to be prone to a certain cockiness given their overwhelmingly superior equipment.

AI "Dragon"

Fighting	4	Attack	+4
Swashbuckling	2	Defense	9
Seamanship	1	Wounded	3 wounds
Carousing	2	Dead	5 wounds

Tireless: This artificial construct knows neither weariness nor sleep. It does not eat, breathe, or bleed. It takes no Disadvantage to its actions when Seriously Wounded, and heals all injuries short of death within ten minutes of their infliction.

"Dragons" come in innumerable shapes, some even appearing as perfect replicas of human beings. Each one is a construct fashioned by a wild AI, a vessel for the intelligence's awareness. These dragons are often sent as catspaws to tend to work beyond the AI's domain borders, but they are hampered by the fact that every AI can sense other dragons in the area easily, whether or not they are their own. Stealth missions thus often require the help of human hands.

Well-Met Foes

Given that a pirate crew is apt to spend a great deal of time hunting for fat prizes on the high seas, the following gives a few simple tables for rolling up random shipping encounters. As always, a GM should feel free to adjust or ignore the table as convenience suggests. As it stands, it can provide a general idea as to what sort of cargo a ship ought to be carrying for a given level of protection.

Each ship encounter assumes that the enemy has one mate or officer aboard for each of the player crewmembers to battle during the Boarding phase of sea combat. These mates and officers usually use the Able-Bodied Seaman statistics given on page 30, though as time goes on, the quality of help will improve with experience. For particularly well-guarded cargoes, the number of battle-worthy crewmen might double beyond the usual.

First, a GM can determine how long a pirate must prowl the trade lanes before they spot a likely prize. Add +1 to this roll if the pirates are keeping close to a trade route, and subtract 1 if they're avoiding the most direct lanes between islands.

Roll	Result
0	Eight days pass without a sighting. Roll again.
1	You spot a prize eight days later.
2-3	Six days later, a sail is seen in the distance.
4-5	Four days of hunting bring you in sight of a prize.
6-7	Two days later, a distant mast is seen.
8	One day of searching is all that is needed.
9	One day later, you stumble on a Rebel warship.

Having determined the time needed to find a prize, the next step is to decide what kind of ship they face. If they've been unlucky enough to roll a 9, it's a warship for certain. Otherwise, the GM rolls below.

Roll	Result
1-4	A Rebel trading ship
5	A pirate ship
6	A loyalist trader
7	A Rebel warship
8	Roll again. If another 8, it's a modern yacht or Rebel war barge.

Trading ships will be pinnaces at first, but 9 months after the start of the game they will more commonly be merchantmen. Ordinary traders will carry twice the minimum complement of crew.

Rebel warships will be pinnaces at first, sloops 6 months after the start of the game, and frigates 12 months after the start of the game. They will usually carry the maximum number of crewmen allowed for a ship of that class. If a Rebel warship is sunk by the players, however, ignore the next warship result on the table and reroll. It takes time to recruit new men and build new ships.

Finally, the GM should determine the cargo carried by the ship. Add +1 if the ship is on a regular trade route, and -1 if the players have been haunting areas off the beaten roads.

Roll	Result
0	Davey Jones laughs. The ship has Food and Water rations aboard for its crew for the next ten days, and nothing else.
1-2	One-fifth of the hold is full of rations of Food, while the rest is full of rations of Water. Unless otherwise stated, all ships will have their holds filled this way.
3-4	As above, plus a locked cabin is filled with 1,000 units of Life Support supplies.
5	The ship is a power runner. Double the crew up to the maximum. Its hold is full of Food and Water as above, but it also carries 1 to 4 full power ingots containing 1,000 charges apiece.
6	A tanker ship. The hold is filled with casks of Water, plus a locked hold with 2,000 units of Life Support and 1,000 units of Luxury Goods.
7	The ship carries a precious load of Repair Materials. 500 units are in a locked hold, along with 1 to 4 full power ingots.
8+	A treasure ship, bound for the Sunspire. It holds 1 to 4 tons of Life Support supplies, 1 to 4 tons of Luxury Goods, and 1 to 4 tons of Repair Materials. It almost certainly has a warship escort.

Pikestone : A Rebel Stronghold

Pikestone is one of the largest survivor settlements currently under the control of the Rebel King's men, with almost twelve hundred men and women living in its shanties and makeshift buildings. With the Als now controlling the Rim and the great majority of what was once the crew quarters, people have been forced to take up what residence they can near sources of fresh water and food. The platform island of Redrock was an ideal choice for that, as the larger part of the island is covered in thick hydroponic jungle capable of providing edible fruits and tubers.

The island itself received its name for the large mounds of ruddy ferrous industrial compounds that tower along the central ridge of the platform. These mounds form massive hills that have been worn into rough crags by wind, rain, and erosion, and occasionally shelter hermits and other kinds who prefer privacy in their activities.

The settlement's name tokens its gory founding, when the Rebel enforcers set up the heads of loyalist troublemakers on pikes at the harbor entrance. In the month since the hijacking, most of the citizens have become resigned to Rebel rule and are tolerably obedient to the Governor that was installed to oversee them.

The power mines form the backbone of the local economy. Most souls not lucky enough to find work at the manufactories, hydro farms, or shipyards are condemned to labor in the mortally dangerous tunnels and service passages that riddle the platforms, tapping fresh circuits and loading power ingots before the Als shut down the circuit or crisp the miners with a sudden surge. The Rebels often sentence troublemakers to the mines.

Other employ can be had at the dockside dives and breweries that turn jungle fruits into booze of varying quality. The Rebels are forced to spend most of their time monitoring the mines, farms, and manufactories, so their attention to the docks is more lax. Only ships with appropriate Rebel trading permits are allowed to dock, but the lack of fast communication between Rebel islands makes trade in false papers a common industry among loyalist sympathizers.

The Rebel garrison amounts to roughly two hundred guardsmen and tax collectors, most based near the farms and mines. While a determined force could pos-

sibly dislodge the overseers, the Sunspire would dispatch a war barge and plasma rifle-armed enforcers to take it back. The manufactories of Pikestone are too important for the Rebel King to permit them to fall out of his grasp.

There are several locations of note in Pikestone.

The Governor's Palace is a former luxury hotel intended for the use of guests aboard the Wellship. Windows have been shuttered and musket-carrying guards stand vigil on the roof. Inside, the lean Governor Schacht labors to ensure that his community does its part towards Cettian freedom. Some of the rooms in the hotel have been refitted as prison cells for important loyalist prisoners.

Bentson Shipyards is one of the largest shipbuilding concerns in Rebel territory, capable of manufacturing a half-dozen pinnaces at a time with their salvaged winches and power tools. Bentson herself is rumored to be sympathetic to loyalist interests, and willing to show a little selective blindness for a good cause.

The Port in a Storm is a dive bar fashioned of coarse timber planking and sailcloth, the Port in a Storm is usually packed with those sorry devils who haven't the charges to afford booze and food both. Many wild schemes are hatched here, and some even carried to fruition. Desperate men and women are often willing to hire on as crew here, but you get what you pay for when it comes to their skills.

The Power Mines meet the surface at several mineheads, where deep service tunnels breach the surface. Slaves and free laborers alike are driven down into the blackness to bring back salvaged repair materials and power ingots recharged from the platform circuitry. For every miner who strikes it rich on a core tap or lost cache of equipment, scores are scorched to charcoal or crushed under shifting platform components.

Liberty House shelters Commandant Li of the Governor's guard and twenty of the best of his troops. The terrible deeds that go on within its rough timbered walls are a cause for whispered legend among the citizens of Pikestone. To "go to Liberty House" is a byword for men who have vanished and are not expected to return.

The Loyalists of Bright Dawn

Bright Dawn is a struggling community of loyalists on the jungle platform of Tahanea. Roughly six hundred men and women call the settlement home, united only in their hatred of the Rebels and their desire for rescue by Union forces.

The nominal leader of the settlement is Lieutenant Rodriguez, a harried woman who once served in the ship's personnel department. Her knowledge of the crew helped her coordinate an escape from the Rebel platforms that included a wide range of crewmen with useful talents, but it remains a struggle to get them to cooperate with each other. With no greater unifying principle than a detestation of Rebels, the locals are prone to quarreling and waiting apathetically for a rescue that will not come.

Tahanea has rich food supplies in the hydroponic jungles and the water filtration facilities are still operational. With no enforced power mining, however, the few manufactory facilities on the islands are underused. A few brave souls harvest some of the safer taps and circuits, but the productivity is limited compared to Rebel settlements—but then again, the fatalities are limited as well.

The high grade of skill possessed by Bright Dawn's inhabitants helps produce excellent ships, equipment, and tools. It's simply that they can't produce enough of them. With no open trade lanes between Tahanea and any of the other loyalist-held islands, they're forced to rely purely on their own resources, and those resources are severely lacking in power supplies. If some captains were capable of opening up a viable trade route between Tahanea and one of the more power-rich loyalist islands, the craftsmen of Bright Dawn might be able to produce impressive tools to withstand the Rebel King's minions.

Bright Dawn is low on the Rebel list of settlements to conquer. Any attack would simply result in the locals fleeing into the jungle, and there aren't any valuable power supplies or other resources to plunder. Still, it's not impossible that a sneak attack might be launched from overland in an attempt to capture prisoners for the power mines. The settlement itself is rather ramshackle and has few defenses.

The Pirate Haven of Rummer's Cove

Located on a small island well away from the common trade routes, Rummer's Cove is a typical example of the scattered pirate havens that crop up rapidly in the wake of the Rebel occupation. Founded by a Rebel defector who decided that the Cetian gambit wasn't all it was promised to be, it serves as a free anchorage for anyone able to pay the docking fees. A stolen plasma rifle has discouraged the Rebels from making a direct attack on the anchorage, as any such assault would almost certainly result in the loss of at least one attacking ship.

Captain Creigh rules his tattered haven with a capriciously tyrannical fist. He sleeps in the advanced combat armor he stole from his former allies, and his plasma rifle is better-attached to him than some of his teeth. A bodyguard of evil-minded salts keeps the crush away from him when they're not roistering in the dockside stews.

Rummer's Cove is almost entirely parasitic in its economy. Loyalist merchants put in to buy plundered cargoes with loads of food and water, the small island itself being unable to provide more than a part of the resources

necessary for the two hundred scurvy dogs who make a permanent home there.

Prices tend to be worse in Rummer's Cove than in a Rebel settlement, but there's no need to gin up fake trading permits or deal with the awkwardness of selling a merchant the cargo you just stole from him. Ship repairs can be performed, and there are often prize ships available for those with the charges to buy them. Finding new crews can sometimes be more difficult, but a captain willing to spread his charges around can often steal crew from another ship in port.

Pirate havens also commonly have a pool of transient sailors drinking off their pay from the last expedition. As Captain Creigh has no charity for the destitute, these men are often more than willing to hop a ship elsewhere provided that there's food and the promise of plunder.

Index

A

Action Tests 10
 Advantage 10
 Disadvantage 10
Advanced Combat Armor 21
Advancement 27
Artificial Intelligences 7, 23
 Domains 24
 Dragons 31
 Fore-Admiral Bligh 25
 Horatio 25
 Laws 24
 Powers 23
 Prince of the Red Tide 26
 The Commandant 25

B

Body Armor 21
Bright Dawn 34

C

Captain (Crew role) 9
Carousing Talent 8
Carronade 20
Character Creation 8
 Talents 8
 Traits 8
Combat 11
 Naval Combat 15

D

Defining Traits 8

E

Engines 20
Enriched water 5
Equipment 18
 Personal Gear 21
 Ship Gear 20
Escape pods 27

F

Fighting Talent 8
Flotation Vests 21
Food commodity 18
Frigate 19

H

Healing 12

I

Injury 11

L

Life Support supplies 18

M

Map
 Trade 39
 World 39
Merchantman 19
Metal plating 20
Modern Yacht 19

N

Naval Combat 15
 Boarding Stage 16
 Chase Stage 15
 Clash Stage 15
 Damage Thresholds 16
 Optional Boarding Rules
 17
 Ship Damage 15

O

Ordinary Landlubber 30

P

Pikestone 33
Pinnacle 19
Plasma weaponry 21
Portable Water Purifier 20
Power commodity 18
Powered Cutters 20

R

Rebels
 Rebel Captain 30
 Rebel Enforcer 31
 Rebel King 4
 Rebel War Barge 19
Rebel War Barge 19
Rummer's Cove 34

S

Seamanship Talent 8
Session Traits 8
Shipboard Radio 20

Ships 19
 Speed 7
Sloop 19
Solar Charger 20
Sunspire 5
Swashbuckling Talent 8

T

The Rim 5
Timeline 28
Trait Cards 36

W

Water commodity 18

Y

Yahr Drive 5

<p style="text-align: center;">Fearsome Hook</p> <p>Instead of rolling a Fighting test for a melee or brawling attack, your die automatically comes up 8. If you pick this card for a Defining Trait, you can use it only once in any given fight.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Dead-Eye Aim</p> <p>Instead of rolling a Fighting test for a gun, cannon, or other missile attack, your die automatically comes up 8. If you pick this card for a Defining Trait, you can use it only once in any given fight.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Dancer in the Rigging</p> <p>Instead of rolling a Swashbuckling test, your die automatically comes up 8. If you pick this card for a Defining Trait, you can use it only once in any given scene.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Ancient Mariner</p> <p>Instead of rolling a Seamanship test, your die automatically comes up 8. If you pick this card for a Defining Trait, you can use it only once in any given scene.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Dead Man's Chest</p> <p>Reroll any failed attempt to open a lock, pick a pocket, con a mark, or otherwise relieve someone of their possessions. If you pick this card for a Defining Trait, you can use it only once in any given scene.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">The Devil Looks After His Own</p> <p>Force the GM to reroll a test, and pick the roll you like better. If you pick this card for a Defining Trait, you can use it only once in any given scene.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Your Old Mate</p> <p>By sheer luck, you find an old friend near to hand. They'll do you what favors they can, but they won't walk the plank for you. If the GM decides that there are no people at all around you who might possibly be old friends, you do not need to discard this card.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Unspike the Cannon</p> <p>With curses and threats, you can force broken machinery or Allocked equipment to work for one minute. If your ship fails a roll to keep afloat during a Clash, you can keep it sailing with this card. If you choose this as a Defining Trait, it works only once on any given ship or broken gear until the equipment is repaired.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Face of a Priest</p> <p>Your enemies mistake you for a harmless landlubber more often than not. When you play this card, others mistake you for someone else of no importance until you prove yourself a threat to them.</p>

<p align="center">Iron Gizzard</p>	<p align="center">The Piper Calls the Tune</p>	<p align="center">Shiver Yer Timbers</p>
<p>When you should be dead, you aren't. Play this card to survive any calamity, though you may be in bad shape afterwards. If you pick this card as a Defining Trait, don't bother with life insurance.</p>	<p>Play this card to find out what the fellow you're talking to really wants from you.</p>	<p>Terrify a human opponent, freezing them solid with fright for a round. Most scurvy dogs you so affright will comply with demands that don't risk their neck, but others might call for help. If you pick this card for a Defining Trait, it works only once on any given target per session.</p>
<p align="center">If Yer Lordship Pleases</p>	<p align="center">The Youngest Son</p>	<p align="center">Fancy Lady/Lad's Favorite</p>
<p>If you or the crew have offended an AI, play this card to smooth things over. If you pick this card as a Defining Trait, you can use it only once per session, but an AI will never choose to kill you.</p>	<p>If two of your crewmates have failed at an action, you automatically roll an 8 if you attempt the same identical act during that same scene. If you choose this card as a Defining Trait, you have to wait for two crewmates to fail again before you can use it again.</p>	<p>A romantically compatible NPC finds your character ineffably charming. If you pick this card as a Defining Trait, don't let your conquests meet.</p>
<p align="center">And A Bottle of Rum</p>	<p align="center">A Better Man Than All of Ye Milksoops</p>	<p align="center">May the Devil Take My Soul</p>
<p>You get the best price on a deal that the merchant is ordinarily willing to give. The merchant won't take a loss, but he'll never take more than 10% profit.</p>	<p>With towering invective, you goad a mob of men and women into obeying any one command that doesn't risk their necks. If you choose this card as a Defining Trait, you can use it only once per scene.</p>	<p>Ask a favor from an AI. It will grant it unless it has a good reason to deny it, but it will expect repayment later.</p>

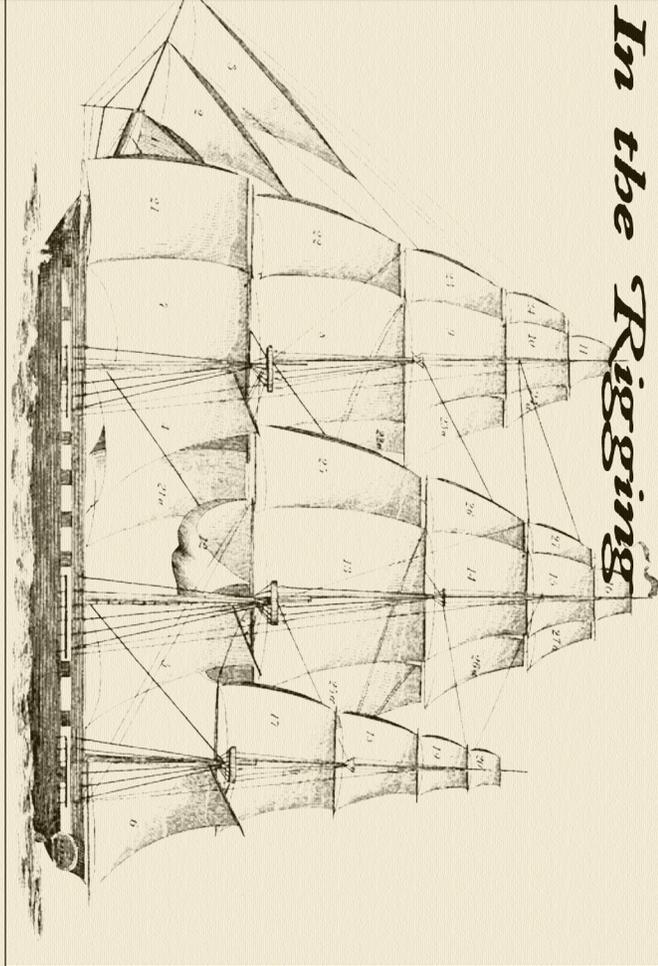
<p style="text-align: center;">Stove In His Blockhouse</p> <p>You smash any one object, either by main force or by blind luck in hitting a flaw. The object must be smaller than ten feet in height or width, though holes can be punched in larger objects. If you pick this card as a Defining Trait, you can use it once per scene.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Drink and the Devil Had Done for the Rest</p> <p>Win any one contest of endurance or drinking prowess. You also fight without penalty even when Seriously Wounded, though you'll perish as quick as any other when Mortally Wounded.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Forever Afloat</p> <p>When the ship you're aboard should sink, it doesn't. There is no chance of it sinking until its Sunk damage threshold is reached, and even then it will require one more hit to sink it.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Walking Down Paradise Street</p> <p>You immediately recognize the location of all fences, bawdyhouses, pawn shops, and seafront dives in any settlement you might be in, and are welcomed therein as a patron.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">No Prison Save a Hempen Noose</p> <p>Escape from any chains, ropes, bonds, prison cells, or other immediate confinement you might find yourself in.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Fleet of Sail</p> <p>Your ship catches up with any one prize, provided you get close enough to see her. Automatically succeed on any Chase roll. If you pick this card for a Defining Trait, decide whether you always succeed at Chase rolls to catch a foe or escape from them; the trait works only on that type of pursuit.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Canny Sawbones</p> <p>Succeed automatically on any roll to stabilize a Mortally Wounded character. If played in the aftermath of naval combat, cut number of dead and gravely wounded in half.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Powder-Stinking Devil</p> <p>Treat any one missed cannon shot as a hit. If you choose this card for a Defining Trait, you can use this power once per naval engagement for each point of Fighting you have.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Hoist the Black Flag</p> <p>Sailors find your blandishments irresistible. Play this trait to replenish all crew losses while in port, provided there are enough able-bodied men there to fill the crew. Recruiting in Rebel-held ports can be dangerous, however....</p>



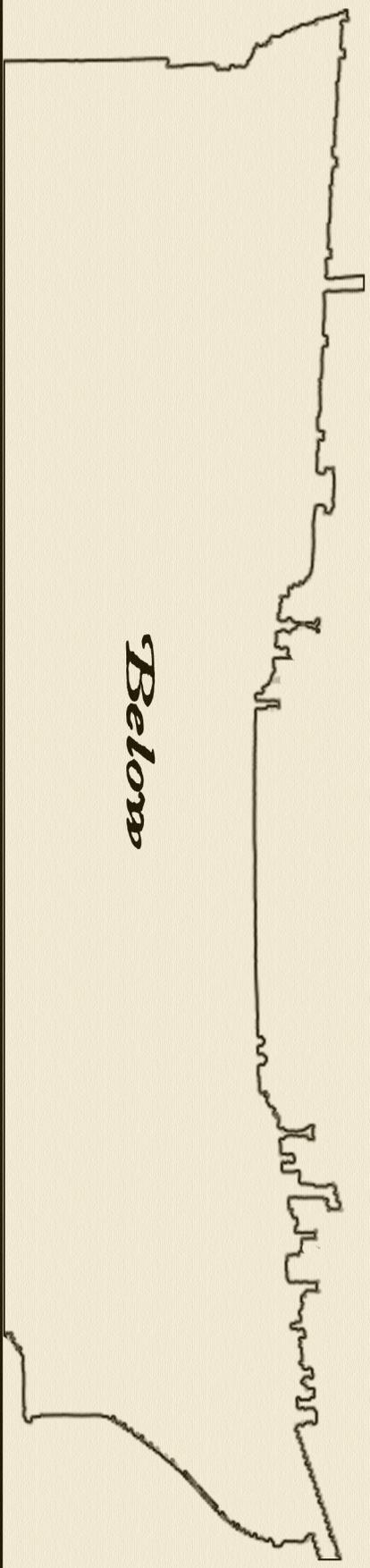
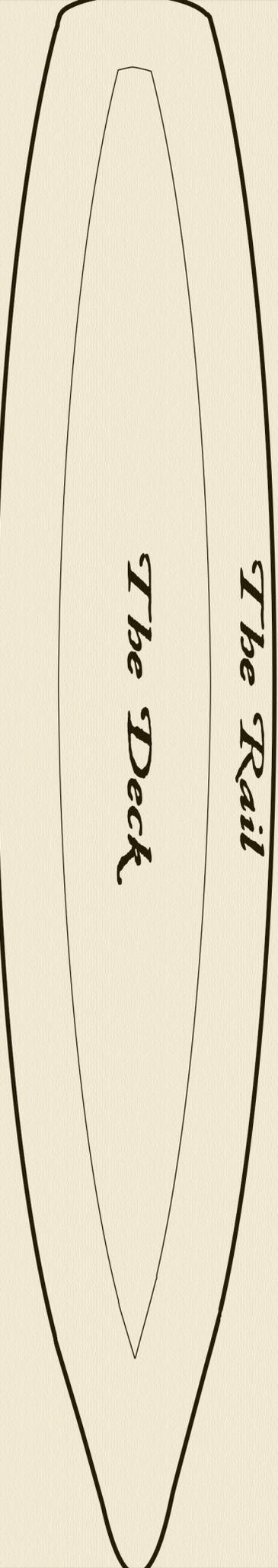
Red tinting indicates islands under full Rebel control, while blue tinting shows those islands that have retained strong loyalist communities. Untinted islands lack major settlements from either side, though it is possible that pirate havens or hermit communities might exist on the more habitable platforms.



In the Rigging



<i>Ship Name:</i>		
<i>Chase</i>	<i>Class</i>	<i>Crew</i>
<i>Thresholds: / / /</i>		
<i>Damage:</i>		
<i>Cargo</i>	<i>Ship's Gear</i>	



Below