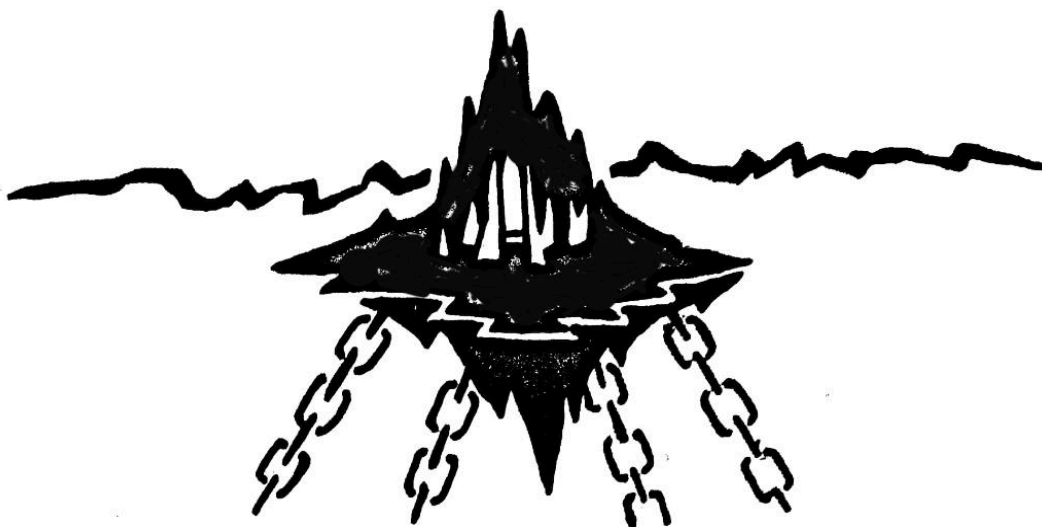


THERE ARE THREE THINGS YOU MUST KNOW.

1. The paracosm of human thought is a lattice that extends into the fabric of the waking world. When concepts and ideas become too large to exist only within the mind, they aggregate like dewdrops rolling off of a leaf into **Conduits**, physical totems that embody their respective egregores. The long-lost Endless Sands, for example, hold sway over the linear perception of time, and the First Fish over domestication. Those with a Conduit have in their hands near ultimate power over its domain, though most mortals lack the intuition to make great use of it.

2. The **Iodine Empire** is the greatest republic of this or any age, its right hand the **Church of Her Red Word** (or perhaps it's the other way around). The Empire possesses the **Periodic Table**, the most powerful Conduit of all, allowing them to manipulate the properties of elements and subjugate millions under their grasp. The Church worships mythopoetic saints whose names give the elements their monikers and their deeds its properties- their ranks boast Saint Copper One-Eye and Saint Gold the High Inquisitor.

3. Instead of a rolling, unbroken mass of patchwork ground, the landscape is created by suspended motes of eroded earth held downwards into place by massive chains made of an unknown metal set against an eternal moonless night. The motes hover above the **Æther**, a churning gaseous mass that glows faintly gray in which swirl unsightly eyes, tentacles, masses of color, and other inscrutable evidence of life vaster than humanity lurking in the luminescent depths. The conventional wisdom is that no one who descends into the Æther returns, not helped by the fact that Æther is oxygen-repellant.



THE RED WORD IS A LIE. DO NOT FEED THE INFERNAL ENGINES OF THE BLOATED BEAST.

SHAPE YOUR FLESH FROM MUD.

And Saint Carbon let out his breath, and drew fetal life from the quagmire, fragile and wide-eyed in its infancy.

1. **STATS.** You have six stats: **POWR** (Power; your ability to exert extreme physical force or strength of will), **FNES** (Finesse; your ability to perform feats of agility and pull off precise maneuvers), **VITL** (Vitality; your ability to cling onto what you have), **LORE** (Your ability to draw valuable nuggets of knowledge from your cognitive detritus), **WITS** (Your ability to use your intuitions and perceptions to figure things out), and **CHRM** (Charm; your ability to persuade, win over, and bend truth). Among them, you may assign a slate of +3, +2, +1, 0, 0, and -1. Alternatively, you can roll a d8 for each stat in order and leave your fate to the dice, though this method is less forgiving than the array.

1-2	-1
3-5	0
6	+1
7	+2
8	+3

2. **CLASS.** Create or choose a one- or two-word epithet; **DUELIST**, **ALCHEMIST**, **ORBSEEKER**, **CVRCVIS FR3AK**, **INQUISITOR ARCAN**E, **NECROMANT**, **LIGHTNING-ADDLED**, or the like. This is your Class, and you have **ADVANTAGE** on all rolls relating to it.

3. **HIT DICE.** Choose a d4, d6, d8, or d10 for your HD. You have max HP equal to the max roll of your HD, and whenever an attack of yours would inflict HP damage, you roll your HD to see how much. In addition, look to the table below to see how many Points (spent towards Abilities and POOL, see below) your choice of HD grants you.

d4	4
d6	3
d8	2
d10	1

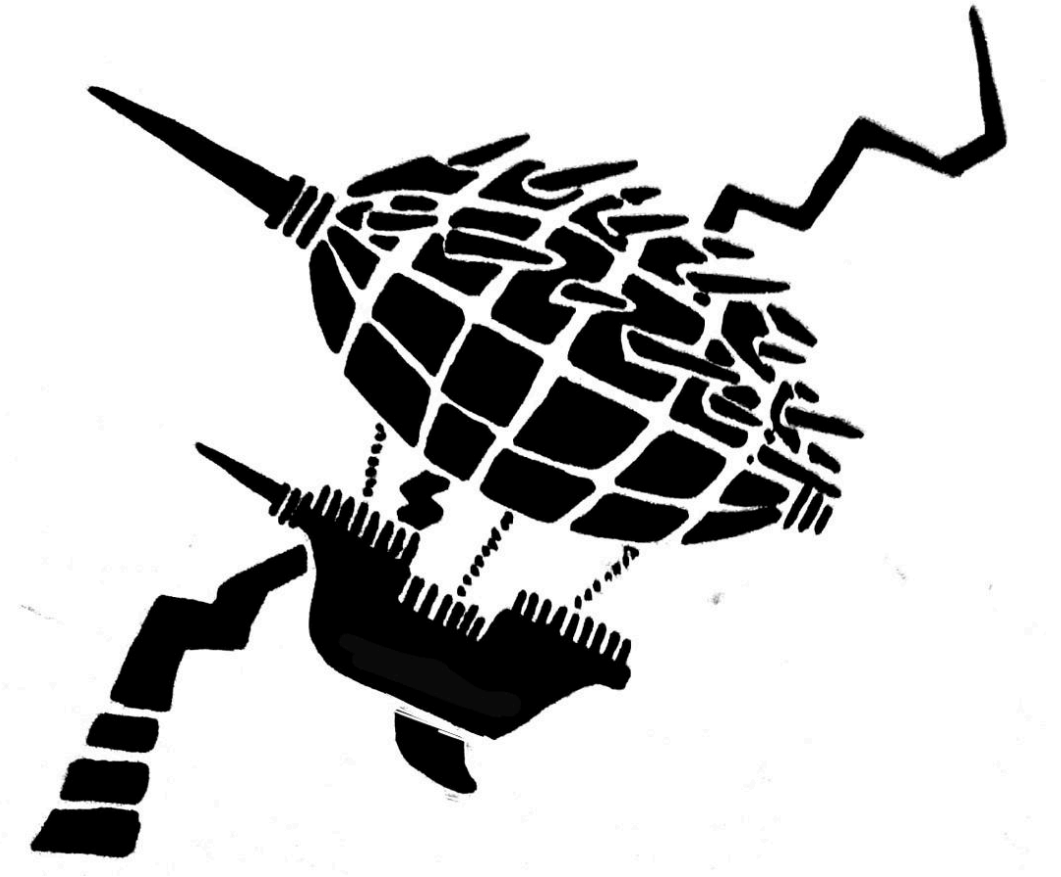
4. **ABILITIES.** Abilities are things you can do that set you apart from the hoi polloi, all of your myriad exceptional capabilities as an adventurer. An Ability can be anything from an elaborately laid-out wall of mechanical jargon to an evocative name whose capabilities can be negotiated at the table. You automatically start with one Ability, and can get more with Points, one to one.

5. **POOL.** It takes a special kind of crazy to push your body, mind, and spirit to the limit again and again. Some people are naturally more inclined to the monumental exertions of adventuring life, whether through practice or star-crossed talent. When an Ability needs to be activated, taxed, or have its capabilities bent, you must spend POOL to do it. You start with a POOL of 1, and can get more with Points, one to one.

6. **EQUIPMENT.** Choose no less than one and up to three physical artifacts to carry with you into the cold, cruel world. If you choose less than three, it doesn't mean you bear any less weight than your compatriots, but instead means you can create your yet-indeterminate chattel as it comes up on your escapades. Don't count arrows, rations, or ha'shillings. Light armor resists a single point of damage, heavy armor resists 2, but gives you DISADVANTAGE on rolls to sneak, swim, or maneuver.

INQUIRE NOT AS TO THE LETTER OF THE RED WORD, FOR IN ITS PERFECTION IT IS INEFFABLE. TURN YOUR HEAD ABOVE AND CRY TO THE SAINTS FOR YOUR JUDGEMENT IN ITS STEAD. LET THE STARS, RESTING IN THEIR BLACKENED THRONES ABOVE, LISTEN CLOSER AND GRANT WISER COUNSEL THAN YOUR PAPYRUS BAUBLES EVER COULD.

-Cardinal-turned-schwedentrunked heretic Dasz Iadolph Vinito



UNFETTERED INTO THE COSMOS, LIKE A BURNING SPARK.

THE ULTIMATE EDICT; FOR BETTER OR WORSE. Whenever the result of an action is uncertain, and both failure and success would be interesting, roll a d20 and add the appropriate stat versus a target of the DM's selection. One cannot roll twice to attempt the same action again in the same circumstances- the results of the initial roll carry forward for good or ill. If you have **ADVANTAGE**, roll twice and take the higher result. If you have **DISADVANTAGE**, roll twice and take the lesser.

EDICT THE SECOND; FOR RICHER OR POORER. CRITS double damage, inflict scars, and inspire legend. FUMBLES break items, backfire, and complicate maliciously. Hitting the target exactly gives you the choice between success at a cost and failure with a silver lining.

EDICT THE THIRD; FROM THIS DAY FORWARD. In dynamic and life-threatening situations, time is measured in **ROUNDS**. Each **ROUND** is 10-15 seconds, in which time everyone can take a **MOVEMENT**, **OFFENSIVE**, and **MANEUVER** (anything that doesn't directly harm anyone), or the same type of action twice.

EDICT THE FOURTH; IN SICKNESS. Whenever you have 0 or fewer HP, you go unconscious. Whenever you have negative HP, roll **VITL** each **ROUND**. If you fail, you die. Spend a **POOL** before rolling to automatically succeed.

EDICT THE FIFTH; AND IN HEALTH. When you have a night in safety to rest, refresh your **POOL** and roll your **HD** and recover that many HP. When you receive quality medical care in a dangerous location, only roll for HP regain. Amateur or hasty medical care heals a single HP.



SHOULD YOU TREAD THE WELL-LIT PATH, SHIELD YOUR HEART AND COME NO FURTHER.

IF YOU DO NOT PEN THE RED WORD, TURN AWAY. SHOULD YOU BE HER VESSEL, LEARN WELL OF HER
EDICTS, AND BEAR YOUR MISSION WITH GRAVITY, EXEMPLAR.

EDICT THE SIXTH; I AM THE ALPHA AND THE OMEGA. In each scene, set a universal difficulty between 8 (little danger or inherent difficulty) and 18 (good luck). Each roll attempted is made against this difficulty, though if it is EASY, subtract 3 from the difficulty, and add 3 if it is HARD. ADVANTAGE and DISADVANTAGE are used when the heroes bring something to the table, while EASY and HARD are used when the situation or scene would make something more or less difficult.

EDICT THE SEVENTH; EVERY CREATURE IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH. Monsters have **HP** (the amount of damage they can take before dying), **HD** (the amount of damage they deal with each strike), **BONUS** (the bonus they give to all rolls; if they would be inherently inept at something, they roll a straight die), **POWERS** (strange capabilities they have), and **IMPULSE** (their initial instinct). *X dX +X P: (insert here) I: (insert here)*

EDICT THE EIGHTH; HE WILL GUIDE THEM TO SPRINGS OF LIVING WATER. Whenever the heroes (or perhaps even a singular hero) secure a Conduit, deal a major blow to a sociopolitical institution, kill a legendary beast, or give name to something novel or unknown, they gain 2 additional max HP and another Point to spend as in character creation. Magic weapons always deal a d12 damage, and usually have **THREE WORD NAMES**.

EDICT THE NINTH; THEN I SAW A NEW HEAVEN AND A NEW EARTH. The Iodine Empire, centered on the Great City **Raz Haruungar**, is bordered by the **Golgothan Principalities** who worship the edifice upon which the first woman was drawn and made living, the **Churlian Tribes** who forge new technologies from antediluvian artifice littered across their sweeping grasses, the **Saccharine Dynasty** who live in towers of crystalline sugar and dye their flesh pastel hues, the **Bursingr Collective** who fish and pillage in the shadow of Zenith Mons, and the verminfolk from **the Husk** (why is something from the stars above shaped like a dragonfly?).

THE FINAL EDICT; WRITE THE THINGS WHICH THOU HAST SEEN. This world, and this game, exist at your table, and in your imagination. Use your intuitive mind to fill in the gaps recorded here, breathe life into the characters and world, and reveal the truths below the surface as slowly and painfully as possible. What swims below the Æther? What Conduits are the Church clandestinely using, and why do they find the Righteous Order so dangerous? Why does the rusted wreckage of other worlds litter fringe motes? **ONLY ONE WAY TO FIND OUT.**

THE SHACKLES LIVE IN YOUR MIND.

AS YOU DELVE IN STAR-LIT SHADOWS, FIND YOUR SPARK IN THE HALLOWED FIRE.

1	Gold	Inquisition
2	Oppression	Salt
3	Star	Cleric
4	Abomination	Bureaucrat
5	Neo-Romantic	Orb
6	Automaton	Undead
7	Lead	Hemlock
8	Velvet	Heretic
9	Thaumaturge	Iron
10	Betrayal	Rebellion
11	Scar	Mercury
12	Secret	Anomaly
13	Alien	Fear
14	Mask	Chain
15	Arcana	Ouroboros
16	Conduit	Technology
17	Brain	Crystal
18	Squamous	The Red Word
19	Lock	Thief
20	Zeppelin	Rune



THE MISTRESS OF THE CRUCIBLE (10)

In the year 537 A.S. (Age of Ships), in the depths of a small, secluded mote known as the Crucible, past massive iron doors and rivers of sluggish lava flowing to power Inquisition torture implements in the lowermost dungeons, Sister Iron rests upon an angular giftstol in an austere audience chamber, clad in red-iron coins and armed with **REPENT IN SILENCE**. She is in charge of a suicide squad of apostates and heretics, saved from a messy and likely lethal Inquisition so their capabilities and skillsets could be tested and catalogued. You are those poor souls, and you are at the Church's mercy.

To begin the adventure, ask each assembled hero what leverage the Church bears against them to force them into such a terrible arrangement, rolling a d6 on the following table if you need inspiration.

1 The Church has a loved one of yours in their grasp, and they know it.

2 You would have been executed for your heresies, but you have a "friend" in the clerical ranks.

3 This is the price for the Church allowing you one of the only copies of a banned book.

4 The Church killed a heretic close to you to intimidate you into your servitude.

5 The Church plucked you from inches above the Æther, lungs almost entirely devoid of oxygen

6 Your constitution is too weak to sustain Inquisition torture one more time.

WHAT SISTER IRON TELLS THEM

- "We've recently discovered the location of a Conduit known as the Endless Sands. Its full capabilities and domain are yet being researched."
- "A terrorist cell led by a living weapon known as the Chronon Bomb seeks the seizure, or potentially the destruction, of this Conduit. They are efficient, single-minded, and highly dangerous. They crew a zeppelin called the Red Eclipse."
- "Return triumphal and we may address your previous Inquisition records with a kinder eye. Should you fail, it would be in your best interests to avoid returning, for both of our sakes."

WHAT SISTER IRON KNOWS

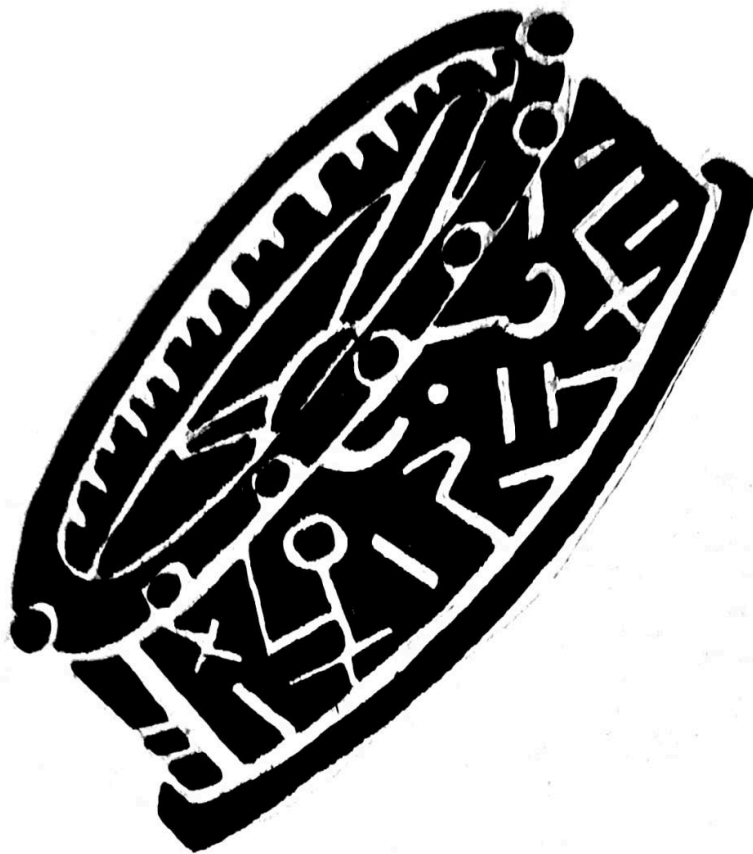
- Sister Iron isn't certain on the origins of the Chronon Bomb. She suspects it's the work of the rune-tinkers of Churlia. She is very wrong.
- Sister Iron knows the Sands have something to do with time, but the Conduit's specific domain is yet unknown. She wants the Sands in Church hands, come hell or high water.
- In terms of general knowledge, Sister Iron has wiped her mind of the heresies she must know as High Inquisitor, as a safeguard against enchantments. However, she may let slip that the Church originally made oxygen repel the Æther.

IF THE HEROES RESIST...

Two masked **Inquisitors** (8 d6 +2 P: *Impenetrable mind, gold manacles I: To bring heretics to justice*) clad in red and bearing iron staves enter the room and lock the doors behind them. **Sister Iron** (10 d6 +2 P: *Magnetic manipulation, heat immunity, REPENT IN SILENCE I: To appease the Church*) stands and kindly informs the squad of the name of her blade before putting it to use. The room target becomes **12**.

IF THE HEROES COOPERATE...

Sister Iron grants them a **thaumaturgic gnomon** and an **unchristened microdirigible**. The gnomon, a cross between a compass and a sextant, has two needles: one of neon-filled glass and the other of cobalt. The neon one points to the nearest source of magic, changing colors depending on the intensity of the magical effect, and the cobalt one ceaselessly points towards the Endless Sands. The microdirigible comes with a bottle of champagne and naming rights.



FLIGHT OF THE RED ECLIPSE (11)

After following the gnomon for **d6 hours**, the squad spots a crimson-ballooned **zeppelin** covered in spiky protrusions, gondola scuttling with ant-like verminfolk crewmembers. Have the **appointed captain** of the microdirigible make a FNES roll. If they succeed, the crew of the Red Eclipse isn't yet aware of their presence. If they fail, the Red Eclipse sees them, notices the Church insignia painted on the rise of their craft, and starts warming up the **Lightning Cannons**.

THE CREW

The crew of the Red Eclipse consists of:

- Lieutenant **Archibald Zilvestro**, a paranoid, bespectacled fellow with an immaculate curling mustache and goatee. He is clad in a skullcap and an ostentatious, mismatched plaid military uniform heavy with fake medals and poofing frills.
 - *5 d4 +1 P: Sense of direction, aura pince-nez I: To get paid on time*
 - Archibald wears a glittering necklace bearing a multifaceted, rune-bearing ruby. The Chronon Bomb wears a matching one. While two people wear these necklaces, an illusion makes them appear like each other.
- The **Chronon Bomb**, a figure cloaked in tattered black robes. Underneath, its (their?) flesh warps and shifts through time, forming a patchwork of ages across its body. Its ribcage houses a ticking wooden antique clock, and its eyes are burning violet.
 - *8 d4 +2 P: Automaton, Digit tools, Armor 1, Detonate (In d4 ROUNDS, annihilate everything in sight and carve a rift in time) I: To die in defiance of the Church*
 - Starts out using the necklace to disguise themselves as Archibald.
 - They lead any social interaction that begins. They are bitter and cynical, confusing their tenses often with a germanic whisper accentuated by clockwork ticks.
- Five **ant verminfolk** in matching kaftans busying themselves with crewing the Eclipse. Though their chitin has not yet started decomposition and looks intact, they are all undead, and filled with nothing but maggots and rotting sludge.
 - *3 d3 +1 P: Undead I: To serve the Chronon Bomb*
 - Sample names: Fiago, Dezzen, Tik Tik, Seven, Tsollivur, As The Serpent Stares

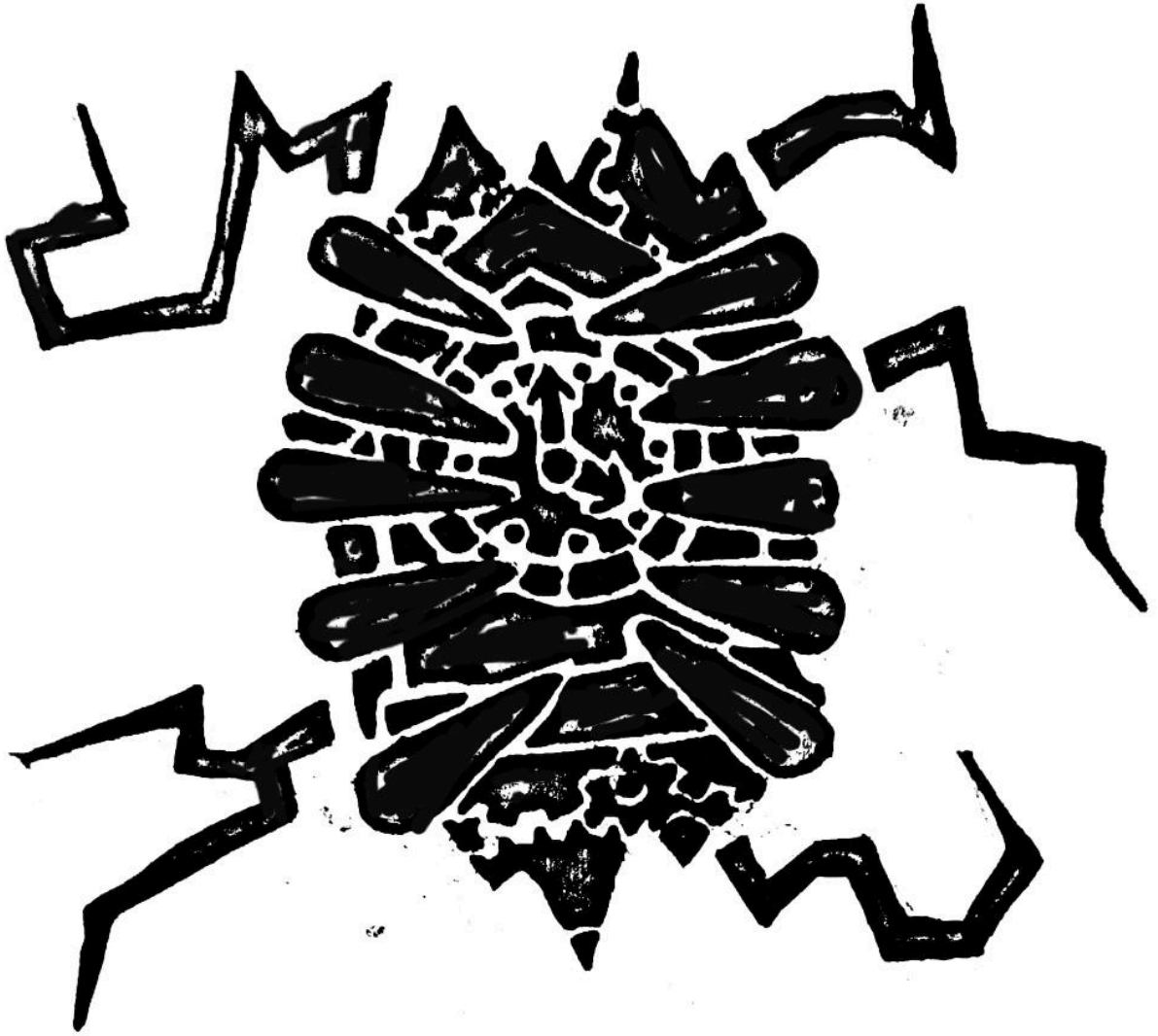
IF THE HEROES FIGHT...

The crew of the Red Eclipse are willing to use any nasty trick to get a leg up, including letting the Lightning Cannons loose and tossing people overboard into the Æther. The Red Eclipse seeks first and foremost to secure the Sands, and may see it fit to take hostages or let the heroes make a quick retreat. Archibald is the weakest link, and his cowardice could make him a surprising ally in a pinch. Those gunpowder barrels and coils of rope on deck might come in handy too...

IF THE HEROES TALK IT OUT...

The Chronon Bomb refuses to break disguise for or let up the assault on anyone they believe to be an agent of the Church. If the heroes convince them of their separation from the Church, which is no easy feat, they will drop their disguise and explain that they seek to destroy the Endless Sands to send a message to the Church, though they are open to better ideas. They claim to be part of a

wider network of anti-imperial operatives who dwell below the Æther- you could join them, if you could find a way to stop that pesky breathing.

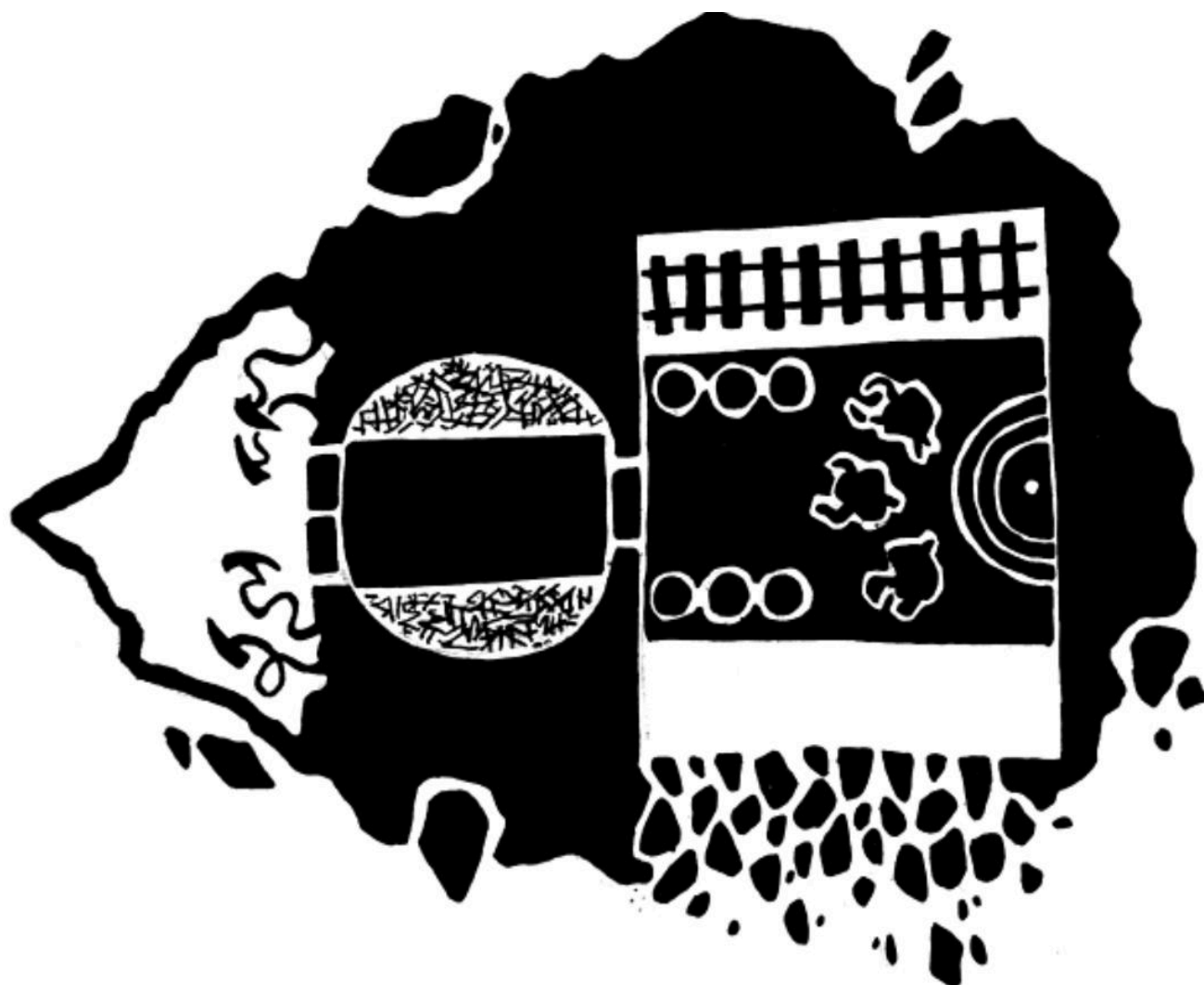


THE ANTICAUSAL EDIFICE (12)

The gnomon begins wobbling violently when this **basalt mote** comes into sightline, one side eroding at an accelerated pace and the other reconstituting itself with equal fervor. There is a balcony-like chunk carved out of the closest side, exposing a flat wall of basalt riddled with **warren-like pores** surrounding a **locked, rusting iron door**.

When someone gets close to the door, 3 **Reapers** (4, d4, +2, P: *Each HP of damage ages the target 5 years, Pyrophobia I: To feed on age*), scaly and maggot-ridden tentacles capped off by chitinous scythe-like implements, explode from the apertures in a puff of igneous dust and attack those closest to the door. Their reach extends about halfway across the balcony.

If the crew of the Red Eclipse weren't taken care of, they arrive **d4 hours** after the heroes do to seize the Sands. Be liberal with your assumptions as to how long the heroes take to do things, it'll make the time pressure more meaningful.



THE GAUNTLET OF DECAY (13)

The scent of rot and burn hits your nose as soon as the doors to this chamber are opened. A central causeway, bordered on either side by **pits of ash**, leads over to an **ancient iron door**, set into which is a plaque written in an archaic tongue.

Each ROUND someone or something is standing on the causeway, an **Ash Wight** (4 d4 +1 P: *Regeneration 1 (regeneration is not bound by max HP, and is stopped by burning)* I: *To get peace and quiet*) coagulates into skeletal form and attempts to clamber its way up to silence the disturbance, to a limit of 10 total Wights.

Buried in the first ash pit the heroes check is **NO MORE REGRET**, a magical chakram that can make itself invisible or appear as if it is wreathed in fire of the wielder's choice of color at will. Its handle is covered in gemstones colored to look like eyes, and its blade bears the inscription of roses without thorns.

The plaque on the far door takes a moment to translate from the old script- every MANEUVER spent reading and translating reveals a line. Saying the word **rust** makes the iron door crumble away in a burst of orange oxidization, revealing the darkened maw of the oncoming chamber. (Anyone familiar with the Church lore knows that Saint One-Eye is an epithet in reference to **Saint Copper**, who lost an eye while wrestling with the Bear, who became the first constellation after Copper imprisoned him.)

**CLOUD'S COLD GIFT BRINGS MY CRIMSON TOUCH
MY CONSUMPTION IS INEVITABLE, THOUGH CAN BE SLOWED
THE ONE-EYED SAINT CALLS ME CERULEAN
SAY MY NAME, AND I WILL OPEN YOUR PORTAL**



THE TEMPORAL CONCOURSE (14)

Three **crumbling pillars** on either side flank the entrance to this final, innermost chamber. The center of the room is raised up 6 feet, large channels on either side. The rightmost wall bears an ever-growing **network of cracks**, while the left channel has a set of **metal railroad tracks** running through them. The far side of the platform bears a semicircle of rune-scored stairs, **five steps tall**. Each step you climb ages you 5 years, you can climb 3 with one MOVEMENT. At the top, floating in the air, is an undulating mass of glass and black sand swirling against gravity's flow- the **Endless Sands**.

In front of the stairs are three towering, misshapen **masses of clay**.

- YESTERDAY's clay is yet wet. Killing it halts the erosion of the right wall (see below). 6 d8 +3 P: *Ensnaring flesh, Regeneration 1 I: To protect the Sands*
- TODAY's clay is hardened and polished. Killing it ends the aging effect on the stairs leading to the Sands. 10 d6 +3 P: *Haste of violence (two OFFENSES in a ROUND), Armor 1 I: To protect the Sands*
- TOMORROW's clay is cracked and crumbling. Killing it stops the subway from coming (see below). 10 d6 +3 P: *Magic stealer it can use any magic it sees once next ROUND) I: To protect the Sands*

When the heroes enter, roll 2d4. These are TIMER DICE- tick each one down after a ROUND, when they reach 0, bad things happen.

- One of them controls the **Ætherial fragmentation**; when it runs out, the right wall crumbles away and exposes the Æther, the sudden loss of mass making the mote tip on its chain towards the aperture- roll FNES or VITL, or come up with a good plan, to avoid falling.
- The other controls the **subway**; telegraphed by two burning lights appearing on the wall (which now looks strangely like a tunnel?) while the TIMER DICE is at a 1, a screaming subway car turns anyone on the tracks into red sludge.

IF THE CHRONON BOMB GETS THE SANDS...

Without better directive, the Chronon Bomb activates their detonation sequence, destroying the Sands and sending temporal perception into turmoil. Days start vanishing and being added to the calendar indiscriminately, people's circadian rhythms are thrown off, some people start experiencing time slower or faster- it's near-cataclysmic. Is there any way to create a new Conduit and set things right? The Hermit upon Zenith Mons might have a theory...

IF THE CHURCH GETS THE SANDS...

The Church would use the Sands as an Inquisitorial tactic (imagine living out a waterboarding where every second felt like five) and to erase the holy days and celebrations of anti-clerical dissidents. If the heroes willingly deliver it, Sister Iron pays them handsomely, gives them all the rank of Dark Bishops within the Inquisition, and are sent posthaste to the slums of Raz Haruungar to quell a rebellion. If the Church gets it through other means, the heroes are labeled enemies of state and hunted without mercy by the Inquisition.

IF THE HEROES KEEP THE SANDS...

Keeping the Sands in their possession is an option, but not only would the Church be very persistent and lethal in their efforts to retrieve it, many independent agents like the Oroborus Collective and the Righteous Order would seek control of a Conduit for their own ends, good or ill. Generally, openly carrying a Conduit is an invitation to no end of trouble. In the hands of a layman, the Sands can be used to speed or slow an individual's perception of time (up to half or double) and be used one to either wind back a minute (which burns the Sands out for a week) or travel to another point in time (which causes the Sands to relocate into a new haven, leaving you stranded). A skilled thaumaturgist used to working with Conduits, many but not all of which are employed by the Church, could tease out more of its infinite potential.

BASK IN THE ECSTASY OF BECOMING LOST IN THE DREAMING DARK

