

Steelheart Skies

Airship Fantasy in the Thousand Isles

Long ago, the world was torn. Mountains leapt into the air and the oceans fell into fire... Survivors thought the world had ended, but it had only changed. Those mountains hung in the air like rain drops, and the world below was wreathed in steam that became the Sea of Clouds. Most folk live on these floating islands, but there's some that live below the Sea, living alongside the fire of the world itself. Airships ply the winds between islands and fearsome sky serpents prowl the sea below. The wind is ripe with adventure in **Steelheart Skies!**

Steelheart

Steelheart, the inner core of an island, is a mysterious metal that can be shaped like iron and has the curious property of cancelling out weight. A sword with a steelheart core is quick to respond as it practically floats around its center of gravity. A child's trifle hangs in the air, spinning for minutes before gently touching down. An improbable air fortress hangs in the sky, pulled by powerful rotors and a steelheart support frame.

Should an island's heart be mined out, it will slowly lose lift until it crashes. Some small islands are mined in this way with the knowledge that it will destroy the island: "A person and a mountain are the same: Cut out their heart and they fall."

Sky Serpents

The Sea of Clouds is home to a variety of creatures: some small beasts in schools or flocks, some lethal predators, and others of such immense size that they hardly notice comparatively tiny airships. Many feature glowing markings or eyes that help them navigate the fog and mist of the Sea, and some even cause ripples of lightning to erupt in their passage through the clouds. While there are common "species" of sky serpents and other creatures, the truly massive ones are unique in ways that confound lorekeepers. To date, no one has ever credibly communicated with a sky serpent (or other animal) outside of legends.

It is said that an entire community has built its home on the back of a particularly placid sky whale. They hunt creatures that live on its hide, drink of its blood, and harvest materials for their homes and livelihoods from its scales and bristles. What should happen if the creature dies, no one knows.

Airships

Airships have been built to cross the Cloud Sea for over a hundred generations, and many regions take pride in the superiority of their solution to common design and travel problems. A variety of hulls and propulsion styles exist; an attempt to list them all would simply be a map of the Thousand Isles and a history book. Some styles are cultural, from the heavily armed junks of the Iron Reaches to the glittering constructs of Lo-Faria. Others utilize local materials or even the bones and armored plates of long-dead sea serpents. Crews likewise vary from a small

handful on a short-reach schooner to a few hundred aboard a fully-loaded man o'war. Crew positions must feature a captain to maintain order, and commonly feature a navigator tasked with maintaining the course. A gunner oversees any weapon crews, and a master carpenter tasked with maintaining the vessel. Merchant vessels can travel with a much smaller crew, as they will not be attempting to board other ships or require additional crew to replace combat losses.

The crew of an airship subtly alters the echo of the ship itself. Eventually their triumphs, fears, and talents bleed into the marrow of the ship. Eventually, she has a spirit of her own, providing little perks to those closest to her (or troubling those that never respected her!). It takes time for a crew to imprint their echo onto a vessel, and new crew members may have to take some time before they align themselves to the ship or the ship to them.

Raiders

A ghost story made flesh, *Atseldyr* are airship crews that live permanently afoul of common law and human custom. Their heavily modified airships often sport the glow-sacs of large sky serpents and are decorated with the bones and teeth of beasts less fearsome than these fanatical pirates and raiders. Woe betide the community that sees such a craft breaking the clouds on their approach. Some are willing to negotiate, some are not. The only constant is that these raiders live apart from their fellow denizens in the Isles for reasons that can hardly be good news.

Resonance

Every physical process (and quite a few metaphysical ones) leave an echo, a print that lasts far beyond its time. Trained *cantors* can find these reflections by careful examination of an environment, able to catch the last glimpse of a moment in a mirror even though the event was days ago, or hear the echo of a conversation from years past. The lasting nature of these echoes explains some “weird” phenomena like hauntings and “reading” an object’s history by the subtle vibrations in its nature.

Particularly forceful events have a longer impact, and some significant events can overwrite the majority of an object or location’s echoes. The further back the event the harder a cantor must work to find the angle of reflection or precise echo point.

Some cantors are not content to simply read echoes and instead further the field of harmonics. By reinforcing or diverting elements of an echo’s frequency, the cantor can change the nature of the space around them. This may have unintended consequences when a room is established to create feelings instead of receive them, or an airship’s keel is bent when reverberations twist it like a shattering wine glass. Some harmonic responses are very subtle, while others can have massive impacts, though it is believed impossible to create “butterfly effect”-level havoc at a moment’s notice.