



Kalutsa

The Enchanted City

PREVIEW AND INTRODUCTORY ADVENTURE

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It was not enough for the mage circle to rule a city whose fame touched the stars. They wanted to control time itself, to decide for themselves when the trees would bear fruit and the people of Kalusa's faces would wrinkle and age.

Beldarina was the only mage to issue a warning: "Machines are alive. They are cunning, capricious, rebellious. I talk to them sometimes, and this I have learned: the more complicated the mechanism, the more complicated the mind that resides within. This undertaking is well above your abilities."

But the mage-rulers of Kalusa did not heed her warning. They built a tower, and in it, a magical clock which set the time for all corners of Kalusa... but it brought only chaos and misfortune. Here, a whole household froze while doing their chores, there a night's revelry lasted only a breath. Some people even woke up to the same morning over and over again, stuck in a loop.

Turning off the clock didn't help. Even when all its components were disassembled and the gears melted, time did not return to normal. The tower itself was torn down, but the ragged time raged on.

"No amount of destruction will reverse what has happened," Beldarina said to those who humbly came to her door for help. "The sickness is spreading through the city's magic. The only cure is healing the city itself."

"But how shall we do that?" they asked.

And so wise Beldarina conceived of a plan. Ancient laws and rules were revised, aqueducts were built, schools and hospitals were established, punishments were mitigated, and incompetent officials were replaced by capable ones. Beldarina also commanded that a new tower of white stone be built in place of the old. She hid a mysterious device in the heart of its clock, the secret of which she shared with no one.

Once the townspeople had fulfilled all her demands, she said to them, "There is one last task which is my own to complete. I must shut myself in the white tower, and no one may disturb me until the cock's crow."

The doors of the tower chambers locked behind her, and that was the last time anyone saw Beldarina alive. The next morning, she was nowhere to be found, not even in the chamber with the strange apparatus. However, from that day onwards the time anomalies ceased. Fearing that they might break something, the Kalusians did not touch the device again. They entrusted the clock to the Clockmakers' Guild, and to this day, none of the mage-rulers has dared to meddle in any way.

And the Alabaster Tower? It still looms over the city like a guardian, and no matter where you are standing, the clock is in sight, an unceasing reminder that pride comes before a fall.

Kalusian story

Kalusa

The Enchanted City

WELCOME TO KALUSA!

Kalusa is mysterious and steeped in magic, a city chock-full of oddities and fateful encounters. It attracts adventurers from other realms, continents, worlds, and even dimensions. It's the sort of place where a grumpy flowerpot might spit dirt at you, where you can get lost on a street with no exit, and where a manhole might be a portal to a tavern on the other side of town.

This is a campaign setting (supplemented by a campaign in Volume 2) in the postmodern fantasy genre. Your players will solve mysteries; unravel conspiracies; explore nooks, crannies, and the occasional cellar; build odd and enduring relationships; and much more.

All this under the sleeping gaze of the Primordial Cat and her furry little emissaries, who never forget who defies their will. By the way, have you petted a cat today?

That's me, and I'm not sleeping, only napping. Watchfully.

Note on the Preview

These pages are an excerpt from the Kalusa campaign set that is crowdfunding on BackerKit right now (October 2026). It introduces the basic ideas about the city, five major NPCs and an introductory adventure so you can try it out.

In the full book, you can expect descriptions of city locales, 33 major NPCs, five political factions with a system for playing them against each other and 16 full-fledged adventures tying into a sandbox campaign.

The book is already written, we just need to finish the translation and put it into print. If you want to help us with this, visit our BackerKit and tell your friends!

- Martina



SETTING BASICS

"The magical phenomena of Kalusa are a great excuse for anything. Late for a meeting? On your way, a cosmic fox happened to trap you in an endless burrow. Phew, what a morning. Witness catch you 'borrowing' from a store? Oh, weird, it must have been an illusion, your doppleganger, an echo from another dimension.... Who can prove you wrong? Just don't try any of this on Protector Corlani. After an unfortunate 'misunderstanding' with the dear Protector, I had to find excuses for quite a few bruises..."

Damian Escudar, popular bard

THE CITY

- ✦ Kalusa is a giant tangle of tall, dilapidated buildings. It was once home to hundreds of thousands of inhabitants, but the Great Plague – a mysterious, aggressive disease incurable even by the most powerful magic – decimated the city about 30 years ago, and today there are only about 80,000 residents. But it is a diverse and cosmopolitan place, and you can meet virtually any fantasy race or species supported by your ruleset.
- ✦ The city lies sandwiched between two branches of the Aruffa River rushing towards the Bitter Sea, in a valley saturated with magic. All sorts of unexpected phenomena can occur here: gravity in a room turning upside down, a sign above a shop growing bored and fluttering off, a portal opening up on a street and spitting out carrots...
- ✦ In addition, spells are easier to cast here. Mages flock to the city, filling both the halls of the renowned Felix University and the halls of power in the city's government.
- ✦ The magical potency of the area brings great economic gain to the city. Kalusa's economy is powered by the production and export of magical items, potions, and scrolls. However, the complex nature of their production leads to great social inequalities between those with access to the necessary secrets, knowledge, and contacts and everyone else. Kalusa has a reputation as a thoroughly modern place where anyone with magical ability and a bit of spunk can earn a living; in reality, it's more like a giant staging ground where powerful magicians fight (mostly metaphorically) and ordinary people pay the price.
- ✦ The city slopes steeply southward toward the port and the coast. Its districts are crisscrossed by stairways, elevators, and bridges.



SETTING IDEAS

What are the main ideas on which this world and the premade campaign are based?

✦ **It is in the postmodern fantasy genre.**

Postmodern fantasy often turns clichés and expectations upside down and uses irony, satire, or even absurdity. It borrows elements from other genres, winks at the problems of our times, and may even break the fourth wall here and there.

However, this does not mean that it has to be cheerful; irony and satire can also be used to convey serious topics. As you will discover, Kalusa is at its core tragic and dystopian.

✦ **It is very much about social exploration and relationship building.**

Just like a dungeon, NPCs can be thoroughly explored, from one corner of the soul to the other. Kalusa is written to encourage gradual exploration of the local NPCs and their personalities, secrets, pains, and desires. And there are plenty of opportunities to turn that into satisfying story outcomes.

✦ **It emphasizes contrasts.**

Adventures in Kalusa make the most of its harsh context: a semi-abandoned city with a precarious and cut-throat society, and the deep human tragedies that result.

But it's not all grim. The campaign oscillates between serious and lighthearted, between action and dialogue, between big problems and slice-of-life scenes. One moment, the player characters are saving the city from destruction, and the next day, they have to deal with the neighbor's spoiled son vandalizing their garden.

The goal is to tell stories that let you enjoy drama, but also allow you to catch your breath.

✦ **It gives hope in dystopia.**

This is not a setting where everything falls into some shade of evil, there is no one to root for, and everything must necessarily end badly. Yes, there is a lot of filth, dirt, and hypocrisy, but that makes those who stand against the darkness shine even brighter. And the player characters have a chance to fight for a better future here – if they want to. *Breaking everything is also fun.*

✦ **There are cats!**

Are you a cat lover? Then your cat expects you to fulfill your duty and play in this setting.

we usually try to be a bit more subtle in ordering you around, but sometimes, you humans can really be quite dense.

- ✦ In addition to people (a category that includes all kinds of intelligent humanoid species, including humans, elves, dwarves, orcs, and so forth), the city is inhabited by cats. They display intelligence equal to or even greater than that of humans, and some of them can use magic. Some speak human language (perhaps they all can, but just don't want to). There are even cats with special features like translucence, scales, or six legs.
- ✦ The inhabitants share a fondness for making up and retelling urban superstitions and legends. Especially for the poor, it can be a great escape from reality. Anyone whose house doesn't have at least one mystery or tall tale is not a true Kalusian!
- ✦ Technologically and socially, Kalusa cannot be easily compared to any historical period in the real world. Magic has been used here to solve many human needs that did not need to be explored in other ways. That is why, for example, gunpowder, electricity, and combustion engines never really caught on here. Thus, common technology is reminiscent of the Middle Ages, while magical inventions sometimes surpass even the present day.

Note on magic

The nature of magic in this setting is described vaguely so that it would be compatible with various game systems. Nevertheless, there are a few principles that influence the plot of the premade campaign:

- The vast majority of people have at least a little innate magical talent. For most people, however, it is not worthwhile to develop it, as it would take them decades of training to get proficient with just simple cantrips.
- True resurrection and immortality are the stuff of legends. Not even the most powerful wizard of Kalusa can stop death.
- Spells for gathering information are not entirely reliable and are not admissible as evidence in court. (This is because they draw information from a magical repository distorted by falsehoods. A detailed explanation can be found in the chapter **The Cosmic Tome**, in the final book)
- Gods do not meddle directly in the affairs of mortals and can't be called upon to grant knowledge or help with daily miracles. While the diverse peoples of the city have many different belief systems, religion is expected to help a person with their inner life, not with repairing a leaky drain.

Of course, feel free to adjust these things in your campaign – just be aware that the characters in the story don't expect that they can be easily resurrected or that they can petition their gods to uncover lies.



SCENES FROM KALUSA

The following images should give you an idea of the atmosphere and setting of Kalusa:

- ✦ Four people carry a giant pillow down the street, and on it reclines a cat with fur the color of the night sky... She watches hungrily as passersby bow with respect. *← As they should.*
- ✦ Decadently dressed people race in flying carriages through a poor neighborhood. At breakneck speeds, they whizz over people's heads, keeping score of how many poor bystanders they can hit with rubber projectiles.
- ✦ At the point where the Aruffa River flows into the sea, a fierce battle rages between freshwater and saltwater elementals. As always, it ends in a draw because neither party will enter the other's territory.
- ✦ An earth mage fervently chants a spell in an attempt to tunnel into the private prison of a powerful magnate family. She wants to rescue her friend, who was caught spying on business dealings and is about to be used as a test subject in a magical experiment. However, the earth resists her machinations because of the family's enchantments – they were expecting such tricks.
- ✦ A dozen workers are repairing the road, and a nearby sorceress in a white dress maintains speed and strength charms on them while flicking through a fashion magazine.
- ✦ A large cat is painted on the wall in the harbor, with a plaque next to it reading: "Malenius, hero, destroyer of harbor rodents, and collector of coins." People place coins in a small opening where his mouth is in hopes of receiving a blessing, and the painting immediately swallows the coins and purrs contentedly.
- ✦ In the hidden depths of a workshop producing magical washing machines and dryers, six unfortunate souls are working to pay off their debts. Magical collars cloud their minds so they cannot leave and reveal trade secrets. Strong doses of magic eat away at their skin, making them look more like undead. Slavery is officially banned in the city, but the workshop owner has powerful connections...
- ✦ A bard with ten fingers on each hand plays the lute and sings on the street. He is accompanied by a group of magically animated puppets with tiny musical instruments. One of them breaks free from the control of his spell and tries to run away.

yum yum.



WEATHER CONTROL

The cycle of seasons has little influence on Kalusa. The mage-rulers conjure up whatever weather they need for that particular day.

Therefore, when you need to decide on the weather for a specific scene, you can choose practically any weather or roll for it:

Weather table

1. – 3. Nice and sunny.
4. Windy – in narrow streets, it gets rather unruly.
5. It's raining cats and dogs. (Not literally. Just rain.)
6. Weather experiment, roll on the following table.

Weather experiments

1. Rain falling up from below.
2. Snowflakes that burn when touched.
3. A miniature sun hangs above each street and shines brightly.
4. Clouds hovering 3 feet above the ground.
5. Hailstones made of soap.
6. It's raining cats and dogs (Literally. Dogs made out of pearlescent magical matter slowly fall to the ground, where Kalusian cats pounce on them and burst them into a spray of water.)

Another option is to choose the weather based on whether the scene is serious or lighthearted, thereby magnifying the scene's tone.

← I wouldn't give it very favorable odds – which cat would pass on a hunt like that?



THE CITY OF CATS

"R-IV-54/8647-004. Sandorr Vashirani, accused of a misdemeanor crime. The relevant decree is No. 50/1344, on restricting the movement of live cattle in the city. The defendant attests that his cat, Gracietta Estefanella Zunitia, wanted to take a ride on the back of a cow but did not want to leave the city to do so. Due to the cat's high status, it was not possible to use the usual range of interrogation methods. Complicated case, I'm passing it to a higher authority."

Flara Windrell, criminal investigator

EZIL, THE PRIMORDIAL CAT

According to legends, in ancient times, powerful titans called the Primordials roamed the world. Each of them was the shape and patron of a certain animal. Eventually, Mother Earth put them to sleep to make room for smaller creatures, but in places where a titan rests, its power remains.

And because Kalusa's magic is strong and unique and intelligent cats live here, the idea has taken root that Ezil, the Primordial Cat, sleeps beneath the city.

The details of this legend vary. Some believe that a giant cat really sleeps beneath the city and that the city's streets lie atop her fur. Others imagine her consciousness as a powerful source of energy hidden beneath the city. For others, Ezil's mind is scattered throughout Kalusa; it is in every house, cat, or even person.

The Primordials can serve as a source of drama for your campaign:

- ✦ It is said that the Primordials were extremely territorial. Each had their own seat of power, and they surrounded themselves with their favored animal. They avoided encroaching upon each other's territories and always met on neutral ground. To enter each other's territory was a declaration of war, usually fought bitterly to the death.
- ✦ According to legend, Ezil drifts between dreams and waking. She was smarter than the other Primordials and knew in advance what Mother Earth was planning. So she gathered together a significant amount of magical energy in her valley, protecting her from the full extent of the sleeping spell. What exactly does she plan to do next?
- ✦ One theory says that the Primordials are actually dead and only decaying fragments of their minds remain in the world. They will not awaken to their former glory... but perhaps crafty or ambitious people could use residues of the Primordials to strengthen themselves and establish a new world order.

Nonsense.

MAGICAL CATS

Kalusa is full of cats. They have lived in the Aruffa Valley since long before people arrived.

Kalusian cats live longer than ordinary animals and are smarter as well (maybe even smarter than people). Some of them can read and count, some take an interest in fashion and art, and some of them can even do magic.

But beware: if they leave the magical borders of Kalusa behind, they lose their intelligence or go mad. Conversely, when a cat from elsewhere comes to Kalusa, a stronger consciousness awakens within it.

They communicate with humans in various ways. Some can speak human language. Some use telepathy. Some refuse to bother with it at all – after all, it is self-evident that two-legged creatures must learn to understand their body language and occasional meows.

They do not consider themselves animals. They would be offended to be treated by a veterinarian; they require special cat healers.

After death, it is believed that the soul of a Kalusian cat returns to Ezil and can then be reincarnated into a newly born kitten.

And they are all amazing.

I may consider up to nine lives.

yawn

Flatterer, aren't you?





COHABITATION OF CATS & PEOPLE

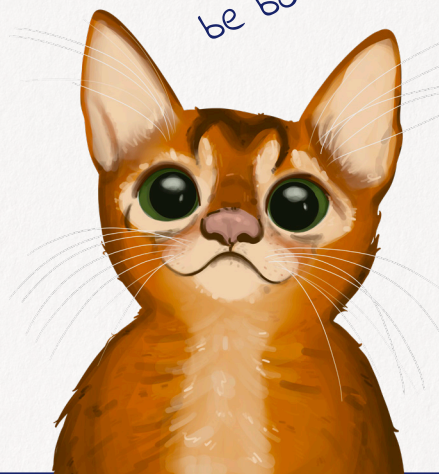
Kalusian society is built upon the belief in an ancient pact between Ezil and the two-legged inhabitants of the Aruffa Valley. According to this pact, humans can use Ezil's magical powers on the condition that they live in harmony with her cats and do not interfere with the politics of the feline community. In return, the cats will not interfere in purely human affairs, except those concerning members of a shared household.

Whatever the Kalusians imagine Ezil to be, most of them hold her in high esteem and worship her by caring for, even pampering, the city's cats. The streets are lined with cat walkways and elevators, cats look down on passersby from padded ledges, and job postings for professions such as fur groomer, meow interpreter, or climbing frame architect can be found on city bulletin boards.

A very strong, even magical, bond can develop over time between a humanoid and a cat, which can manifest in ways such as perceiving each other's feelings or transferring magical energy to help with spellcasting. Cats tend to bond with people who have similar personalities to them. However, the bond cannot be planned – either it develops, or it doesn't.

The cat community has its own hierarchy, rules, and political struggles that remain opaque to people. They are also exempt from the human system of private property. In Kalusa, everything belongs to them. More specifically, cats have their own system of territory, marked objects, and dispute resolution, which humans have no business interfering with. If an unfamiliar cat enters your home, you should leave it there at least until your cat has had a chance to comment on it.

we let people think it's because we're benevolent, not because we can't be bothered.



CAT NAMES

Cats expect two-legged creatures to come up with names for them, which they then just approve.

Cats of higher status usually require longer names than their people. Purebred cats may even have several names. Examples: Amaryllis, Elestria, Iriandar, Mordredis, Rosenvina, Zargorion.

On the other hand, street cats tend to have short names like Alfa, Erza, Kras, Medd, Nala, Sel. In both cases, however, cats demand proper names, not terms like Fluffy, Waffle, Muzzle, Buttercup, or Mittens.

And if you don't have a cat, well, pfff... At least feed and cuddle this one!

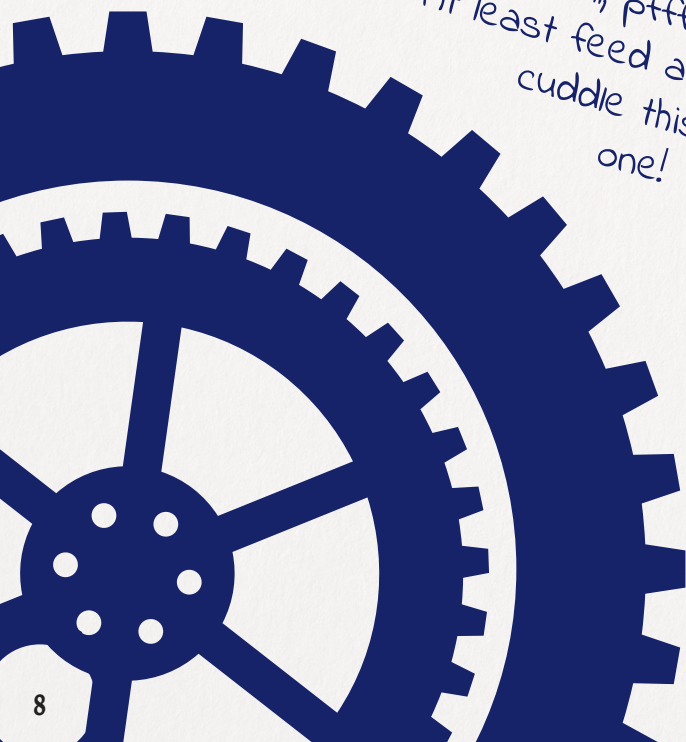
KALUSIAN CAT GENERATOR

Color

1. White
2. Black
3. Tabby
4. Orange
5. Calico
6. Unusual color, roll on the next table

Unusual color

1. Green
2. Blue
3. Red
4. Gold
5. Rainbow
6. Color changing





Fur

1. Hairless
2. Short
3. Medium
4. Long
5. There is probably a cat in there somewhere
6. Unusual “fur”, roll on the next table

Unusual “fur”

1. Petals
2. Scales
3. Translucent as if made from colored glass
4. Colorful feathers
5. Metal bristles
6. As if folded from origami paper

Body build

1. Skin and bones
2. Slim and agile
3. Totally average
4. Majestically built
5. Chonky unit
6. Unusual body build, roll on the next table

Unusual body build

1. Wings
2. Buff brawler
3. Missing a limb
4. Six legs
5. As big as a wolf
6. Nine tails

Magical element

1. Can become invisible
2. Can stretch parts of their body
3. Can revive the creatures they catch as undead
4. Can bouncingly levitate
5. Sparks fly when they hiss
6. Flaming tail

Other peculiarity

1. Doesn't cast a shadow
2. Walks on two legs, wears boots
3. Pulsing tattoo
4. Moves incredibly fast
5. Wears a lot of jewelry
6. Can bite through plate armor

Reaction to catnip

1. Doesn't care at all
2. Takes notice but grows bored quickly
3. Enjoys it but remains lucid
4. Gets cuddly
5. Dazed, lying on its back, and drooling
6. Sped up, distracted, euphorically chewing on the herb





KALUSIAN SOCIETY

"Recently, the guards caught a murderous railing, yeah, a metal bannister. Maybe it didn't want to put up with everyone groping it anymore, I don't know. But that was just the beginning of the entertainment. The council ordered Corlani to make an example out of it. Justice for the victims, I guess, ha ha. He had to heat up a furnace in the square and spend a couple of hours melting the railing down. It roared and struggled like a cat in the bath, and we watched and laughed at him the entire time. You wouldn't find such a sight anywhere else."

Jolee Whitfield, influential shipbuilder

It couldn't be any other way. Have you ever seen a cat that takes human rules seriously?

POPULATION

Approximately 80,000 people live within the walls of Kalusa. Another 10,000 or so are temporary visitors to the city.

Another 80,000 people live in the Kalusian countryside – not as many as one might expect for such a large city, because the fields are enhanced by magic and much of the agricultural work is done by university mages.

People come from diverse backgrounds. In addition to humans, these books discuss elves, dwarves, gnomes, lizardfolk, and orcs. However, virtually any humanoid species can live here. The multicultural nature of Kalusa is reflected, among other things, in the diversity of names. Mildred, Dagon, Kazimera, Hiroki, and Jiwan all live side by side here. Player characters can have any name they want and won't stand out.

Only people have rights (and obligations to pay taxes) in Kalusa. Magical entities, mutated animals, golems, or machines with souls (more about special creatures in the chapter "Peculiar Inhabitants" (p. 18)) are considered objects, cannot legally own anything, and forfeit any inheritance to the city. And cats? They are special and above the rules.

The language spoken here is known as the common tongue. It is assumed that all player characters and NPCs are fluent in it.

LIFESPAN

The premade campaign assumes that all people of Kalusa (humans, elves, dwarves, etc.) live to roughly the same age. However, beings that greatly differ in nature from regular people may have significantly longer or shorter lifespans.

RULES

The society of Kalusa formally adheres to six rules that originated in an alleged “sacred pact” with Ezil. These are the only rules that cats adhere to as well.

They are engraved on a golden plaque in the center of the hall where the city council meets:

1. Kalusa is an independent city.
2. Kalusa is a city tolerant of all religions and origins.
3. Kalusa is a refuge for those who are unwelcome in their homelands.
4. The heart of the city beats through its magic. This magic is sacred, and it is forbidden to disrupt its essence.
5. Kalusa is neutral. It is forbidden to engage in activities that could cause Kalusa to be perceived as a threat by the outside world.
6. People and cats live here in mutually beneficial harmony and do not interfere in each other’s politics, except for matters of members of the same household.

Newcomers learn a simplified version from the townspeople:

1. Woe betide anyone who displeases the cats.
2. This town is a refuge for all.
3. We support your ambitions as long as you don’t threaten the safety of Kalusa.



AND WHAT IS THE REALITY?

For many townspeople, compliance with these rules is mainly motivated by fear that Ezil will take away the town’s magical privileges. This hasn’t happened yet, but fear is fear... ← Eh, too much effort.

And as is often the case with people complying for selfish motives, there is a culture in Kalusa of respecting the rules on paper, but circumventing any actual consequences through hair-splitting or technical interpretations, making exceptions, and turning a blind eye to the excesses of the privileged.

Those who come to Kalusa in search of a new life or adventure soon discover the truth behind its lofty ideals.

GOVERNMENT

The city is ruled by the Prime Guild, which is open to anyone who makes a living from magic (interpreted very expansively; magical ability is not tested for membership) and pays the annual fee. Guild members elect 31 representatives, who then elect a five-member city council. Both the representatives and the council are based in The Hive (a fort described in the final book).

Representatives and city council members are elected for five years and can be re-elected. Each of them must be a member of the Prime Guild and have a strong level of magical ability; in exceptional cases, they may be tested.

A DIVIDED CITY

After the Great Plague 28 years ago, the city was depopulated, and the wealthier survivors moved to the most elegant, highest-lying part of the city.

To further isolate themselves from the less fortunate, they administratively separated the upper and lower parts of Kalusa. Upper Kalusa, comprised of the residences of the elite, the university, and the adjacent gardens, they dubbed Apex. They called the lower-lying and poorer rest of the city the Protectorate. They also divided the city guard into the Apex Guard and the Protectorate Guard.

Today, about one-fifth of Kalusa’s permanent residents live in Apex, with the rest living in the Protectorate.

You can find more about the events surrounding the division of the city in the chapter **The Big Issue: Impressum Deletum** in the final book.

IMPORTANT TITLES

- ✦ **Magister:** Held by all members of the Prime Guild.
- ✦ **Archmage:** Awarded by the university for achievements in the field of magic.
- ✦ **Rector:** Head of Felix University.
- ✦ **Docent, Professor:** Academic titles.
- ✦ **General:** Head of the Apex Guard and commander-in-chief of the army in the event of an attack on the city.
- ✦ **Protector:** Administrator of the Protectorate and head of the Protectorate Guard.



SOCIAL DIFFERENCES

Does the magical power of the city bring wealth to the Kalusians? Yes, but only to some. The elite are not very dependent on the labour of the poor, and so do not need to care for their welfare.

An economy based on magical workshops favors people with delicate skills trained in the best schools. For some tasks, a golem is better than a live servant, laundry can be cleaned with magic instead of a laundress, goods can be sent on a flying carpet rather than with a courier... that's why social differences are even greater here than is standard in fantasy realms.

SOCIAL MOBILITY? ONLY IN THEORY.

The political system of Kalusa seems advanced, but it is rotten. It rests in the hands of the most powerful wizard families, who make sure no outsider easily penetrates the ruling structures.

The Kalusa leadership proclaims that magical skill comes first and that even a poor wizard, if talented, can go far here. Wizards from abroad arrive with these expectations.

However, the ruling families then throw obstacles in their way: they are given menial tasks at the university, put in harm's way during experiments to protect home-grown mages, or pressured to elect representatives that don't align fully with their interests.

Most foreign mages resign themselves to their fate after a few years, pay off any student debt through the Harmony of Blood (see next page), and leave.

OTHER FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION?

Kalusa is a multicultural melting pot. It is not customary here to dwell on skin color, physical differences, sexual orientation, or gender. People here live in different types of relationships and families.

What is at the center of discourse here, however, is magical talent. Especially in the upper classes, those with greater magical talent tend to be favored even in areas where it is not necessarily relevant.

At the same time, due to negative experiences with foreign powers that have often coveted Kalusa throughout its history, its inhabitants are sensitive to attempts to destroy or restrict the unique elements of their city's culture. Therefore, anyone who isn't aligned with values such as the worship of cats or the normalcy of necromancy (more in the final book) is viewed with suspicion by Kalusians.

CULTURE & ATTITUDES

The attitudes mentioned in this section do not apply to all townspeople; there are certainly plenty who may feel and act completely differently. Think of it more as inspiration. And remember: you can best show these attitudes through specific NPCs who espouse them. You will find examples of such NPCs in later chapters.

✦ What are people afraid of?

Physical harm or mutation due to an unexpected magical phenomenon; the return of the Great Plague; criminal gangs; tax increases.

✦ What, perhaps surprisingly, are they not afraid of?

Moving within the city; the labyrinthine complexity of the streets; darkness; portals and teleportation; non-aggressive magical beings; the undead.

✦ What do they cling to in times of trouble?

Arming their neighborhoods against "foreign elements"; consuming magically flavored unhealthy food; following gossip and trying to get close to celebrities.

✦ What do they do in times of growth?

Invent new holidays, hobbies, and fashions; purchase magical enhancements for their homes; take trips to the rural part of Kalusa.

✦ What impresses them in others?

Strong magical talent; having any sort of asset in Apex (business, apartments, or even just connections); interesting or unusual skills.

✦ What bothers them in others?

Taking advantage of city magic and not giving anything in return; not taking city mysteries seriously; praising something foreign or expressing a desire to travel abroad.

✦ What sacred rule do they follow with gritted teeth?

Tolerance towards worshippers of anything other than Ezil.

✦ What sacred rule do they follow willingly and enthusiastically?

Pampering the cats.

See? The city is fine. I don't know what you're talking about with all this dystopia stuff.



RULING CLASS

IMPORTANT FAMILIES

The ruling class of Kalusa consists of approximately 30 powerful families. Only a few of them are mentioned or elaborated on in both volumes; feel free to invent the rest and add them to your campaign as needed.

LIFE OF THE ELITE

The elite of Kalusa take the study and mastery of magic seriously and are disciplined in this regard. In other aspects of life, they tend to be very individualistic. It is common for members of the same family to have completely different styles of dress and self-presentation. Those who have mastered a unique magical trick boast about it extensively.

THE HARMONY OF BLOOD

The ruling mages of Kalusa want to maintain power for future generations of their lineage, for which they need magically gifted offspring. The chances of a child having great magical talent increase when both parents also have it. However, there are only a few ruling families, and intermarriage would soon lead to degeneration.

Therefore, a custom called the Harmony of Blood has developed, whereby a mage from abroad or from a lower social status is offered a contract to produce offspring with a member of the ruling family, for which they receive a payment and relinquish all rights to the child. They are not even registered as the child's parent. For poor mages, this is often the only chance to gain access to the expensive studies at Felix University.

Samples of magical accessories

1. A bracelet linked to your bank account, which can be used to make payments
2. Earrings that block out unwanted noise
3. Glasses that highlight selected sections of the text you are reading
4. Nail polish that speeds up your hand movements when casting spells
5. A cloak that protects against both cold and heat
6. A hat that casts an illusion over your face when it detects someone nearby who you don't want to run into

DEPENDENCE ON THE CITY'S MAGIC

The magical atmosphere of Kalusa is different from that of neighboring countries. Every magician who enters the city and tries to cast a spell can tell immediately. If casting a spell meant sifting through colors, suddenly there are not dozens of colors flying around you, but hundreds. And at the same time, the colors jump into your hands and beg to be used, as if they know exactly which one you need. Saying goodbye to this power upon leaving the city is not a pleasant feeling.

That's why magicians who have lived in Kalusa their whole lives can have a hard time doing magic when they go abroad. But no one ever says out loud that Kalusa is actually a trap, a prison, a gilded cage.

Shhh! Don't say that!

"THE ILLUSION TRAP"

Especially for illusionists, there is the danger of psychological problems known as the illusion trap. It's easy to get used to illusions as a universal life enhancer: you can make yourself more attractive, cover up your mistakes or laziness, go invisible and find out what other people think of you...

In the first phase of the illusion trap, you become dependent on solving your problems with illusions and feel unable to interact with people without them. This isn't a Kalusa-specific problem. In Kalusa, however, thanks to the stronger magic here, it can progress to a second phase, where magicians begin to believe their own illusions, causing psychosis or other, more serious mental problems.

Samples of magical household gadgets

1. Door peephole capable of seeing through illusions
2. Cutlery that changes color when it touches something rotten/poisoned
3. Flowers that emit a scent that changes depending on how you turn the pot
4. Bed for insomniacs: keeps a sleep spell on its user until they fall asleep naturally
5. Voice-activated search aid: tell it which household item you are looking for, and it will conjure arrows pointing to it
6. Dust fairy, summoned to fly around the house and consume dust



CITY PARTS



LANDMARKS

"MANA EMERGENCY RESCUE – the cheapest way to recharge your magical items! Thanks to us, you too can afford a self-cutting knife and a gargoyle guardian! Magical energy in all colors, 24 hours a day! How to find us? Follow the arrows, walk under the aqueduct, and find our entrance behind the alchemical waste dump. Act fast! It's a mana emergency!"

street advert

BASIC LAYOUT

An area of abnormally strong magic affects the city of Kalusa and its surroundings. It forms a spherical shape with a diameter of approximately 60 miles. Its edges also form the political border of the city-state of Kalusa, which extends into the countryside beyond Kalusa's walls. Stone statues of cats covered in unusually colored flowers mark the border, piercing visitors with their eyes.

The city itself lies roughly in the middle of this area. It is bordered by walls on two of its sides and a waterfront on the third. The length of one side of the walls is approximately 10 miles. Its shape resembles a cat drinking from the sea.

Weird and wondrous houses

1. A house covered in a layer of slime and flesh. It is a huge living organism; its consciousness can be found in the basement.
2. A menacing wind blows out of the house. Doors, curtains, and shutters flail about frantically or are long gone.
3. An angry house. Chimneys spew steam from their depths, and a hissing voice echoes from all the windows, growling insults onto the street.
4. In this house, gravity does whatever it wants. You will find rooms where you can fly, places where you can walk on the ceiling, and so on.
5. A house capable of conjuring up a slide from any window onto the street when one of its inhabitants wants to go out.
6. A house where each floor has a different number of sides and corners. These floors sometimes swap places.



CITY HOUSES

Inside the city walls of Kalusa lies a cramped labyrinth of buildings, usually stretching six to ten stories high. In the days when Kalusa was overcrowded, its inhabitants built almost everywhere they possibly could, and sometimes even where they couldn't.

In addition, its rulers could afford extremely demanding magical rituals at the time, so they reinforced most of the city's houses. There are two main types of this protection:

1. **Indestructible** – houses are more difficult to damage by physical force or magic, or impossible to damage at all.
2. **Self-repair** – a damaged house will reassemble itself after some time. Chipped-off parts will attempt to return to the house by levitating and falling into place; if that doesn't work, they will teleport there. The Kalusians use this creatively – for example, goods can be attached to levitating pieces of houses and transported cheaply around the city, daring souls can even hitch a ride...

Houses have either one of these types of protection or both. If you need it for a specific house in game, choose the option at your discretion or roll 1d6: **1–2:** the house is indestructible, **3–4:** self-repairing, **5–6:** both.

Thanks to these protections, the Kalusians were able to give free rein to their imagination and ignore the limitations of architecture and structural engineering.

MANADUCTS

A system of pipes called the manaducts distributes mana throughout the city to homes and facilities. The manaducts are capable of drawing mana on their own from the surrounding area and from collection points scattered throughout the city. No one really knows how they work; the pipes have been here for centuries and are the subject of many legends.

SAMPLE CITY PART: THE BELLY

The Belly is the central part of the urban area, north of the harbor and south of Apex. There is a steep downward slope from the north to the south towards the harbor. Few places here are flat.

Today, most of the buildings are abandoned. People try to live close together so that they have at least some protection. They mainly cluster around magically potent places. When a new power source appears in the city, someone immediately builds a business around it, and then other people move in. When the power source is exhausted and another one appears, the community moves again. As a result, there is not much division into classic city districts here.

Administratively, the Belly falls under the Protectorate, but the Protectorate Guard is severely underfunded. Influential communities prefer to maintain private security, and some streets and blocks of houses have their own laws. You may well find that by the time you cross from one end of the city to the other, you will have been asked for a "toll" several times.

The narrow streets of the Belly used to have hectic, even unmanageable traffic. That is why two other modes of transport were created: bridges and catwalks connect the upper levels of houses and apartments, and underground passages and tunnels connect the lower levels. Today, most of them have fallen into disrepair, but more adventurous types still use them.

The main arteries running through the Belly from the harbor to Apex are full of people, mainly adventurers and tourists. There are also lots of vehicles, including levitating ones. However, as soon as a curious adventurer leaves the main streets, they will find themselves in deserted areas or communities of long-time residents eager for peace and safety. There, they may find themselves the target of aggression simply because the locals don't like the look of them.

Examples of relevant groups and NPCs: Protectorate Leadership (*in the final book*), Sharp Blood (*in the final book*), Celethar Isteri (*in the final book*), Ralka Vassevich (*in the final book*).

Examples of relevant adventures: Protectorate's Plight (*in the final book*), Drink blood while it's sharp (*in the final book*), On Celethar's trail (*in the final book*), Own house (*in the final book*).

Sample streets

1. Extremely long, with impossible turns. In several places, it even intersects itself.
2. This street runs alongside a waterfall. Mist drifts down onto it, and an ever-present rainbow shimmers overhead.
3. A junction between three busy streets. There are lots of people and pubs here.
4. The ground has sunk slightly beneath the road, and it is visibly warped.
5. It is on a steep hill. When wet, it is impossible to walk on, and couriers and water elementals use it as a slide.
6. Part of the street passes under a house like a tunnel.

THE LIGHTHOUSE CABARET

There used to be a lighthouse on the cliff west of Kalusa. When it became obsolete and the town attempted to replace it, the indestructibility enchantment on it turned out to be so strong that it could not be dismantled. But it could be removed from the ground in one piece and relocated.

So it ended up inside the city's walls, squeezed between two rows of houses (with a street running under its base), and has since become a famous cabaret. Ropes and trapezes hang from the rotating lighthouse light, and the performers whizz around above the heads of the audience as if on a carousel.

Cats are not bored here either – they run after the lighthouse light on the surrounding roofs.

Sample weird elements on the street

1. Sometimes, some of the tiles turn black for a moment. Anyone who steps on them feels a mild electric shock.
2. Every morning, ghost nightingales hold a concert here.
3. The houses here are covered with mechanical joints and rods. In case of danger, the street is able to lift itself up and move.
4. From time to time, it gets covered in lots of marbles.
5. If the sun is shining, on this street it rains (or snows, if it is winter), and vice versa.
6. One random belonging on each visitor turns blue until they leave the street.

THE MARKET SPHERE

A sphere with a diameter of 200 feet occasionally flies over the city, its shell made of black metal. It also flies into the harbor and Apex, but spends most of its time in the Belly. Inside is a market focused mainly on groceries. It shuttles between squares, where it lands, unfolds like an onion, and creates alleys between which you can walk and shop. Then it folds up again and flies away. Twice a week, it flies to the countryside to pick up supplies.

It was created centuries ago by a spell that has not been successfully reproduced since. Its magic recharges itself from the city's manaducts as it flies just above them, causing magic outages in the surrounding houses.

The staff is diverse, but gnomes and other light-weight folk are preferred, particularly those without claustrophobia or a fear of heights.

The sphere is operated by the Prime Guild. Since the Great Plague, they no longer invest as much money in its repairs, so sometimes the sphere opens slightly during flight and fruit and vegetables fall onto the streets. People know this, so they either hide when the sphere flies overhead or stand there with a basket.

What else is eaten in the Protectorate?

1. Cricket cracklings with herbs
2. Soup made from instant gelatin cubes
3. Steamed mussels with scraps from the pot
4. Dried fruity leftovers of alchemical experiments
5. Wasps in honey with chili and mashed chestnuts
6. Pineapple on a salty flour pancake baked with cheese and tomatoes.

*A disgusting atrocity.
I'm considering a ban.*

PALACE OF LIGHTNING

On six metal pillars fixed to the roofs of neighboring houses, a bizarre metal structure towers above the streets of Kalusa. It resembles a tree, only instead of branches and leaves, it has a tangle of steeples intertwined with wires and bridges. It is home to eccentric wizards, mostly of gnome origin, who experiment with the weather.

The building constantly rattles, emitting strange sounds and electric discharges, and various parts of it glow in different colors. Lightning strikes the structure with dangerous regularity several times a day, even when the skies are clear without a single cloud.

Adrenaline-fueled bets about who can climb the highest and bring back a piece of the structure as a trophy are popular as initiation rituals into thieves' societies.

ALABASTER TOWER

No visitor to Kalusa can miss the Alabaster Tower, as its clock can be seen from every street. Yes, even in the harbor. Yes, even where it doesn't make sense in terms of direction.

The tower has a triangular floor plan with rounded corners. There are nine giant statues of climbing cats on the outside, a viewing platform at the top, and above the platform, a metronome whose pendulum takes 15 seconds to swing. The central Protectorate post office is located on the lowest floor.

The tower is described in detail in the adventure *Alabaster Tower* (*in the final book*), and postal services are discussed *in the final book*.

Sample commotions in the street

1. Two pastry trucks collide, and an angry cake elemental materializes from their thoroughly mangled contents.
2. A 7-foot-tall work golem is out of control and rampaging through the city.
3. The annual Fire Fight between the streets in this part of town has begun. People dress up in fireproof costumes and shoot magic rockets at each other.
4. Workers from the toothpaste factory haven't been paid in three months, so they have taken to the streets and are smearing toothpaste everywhere. Their (now former) employer has sent a flock of flying dentures after them.
5. The crowd stormed a stall after discovering that it was selling vegetables enlarged by low-quality and harmful magic. Cabbage, zucchini, and pumpkins are flying everywhere.
6. The buildings (the buildings themselves, not their inhabitants) on opposite sides of the street are mad at each other. They are telekinetically throwing their poor residents' household items at each other across the street.





PECULIAR INHABITANTS

"I keep repeating: if a stress daemon materializes next to you and you allow yourself to get stressed out by it, all you do is prolong its life or create another one. But just try getting someone to stay calm for a single moment in this chaotic city..."

Mikoto Sugano, Protectorate official



This chapter describes some city residents and creatures that are physically different from "classic" fantasy ancestries. Humans, orcs, elves, dwarves, and similar creatures that are commonly described in game system manuals do not need elaboration here.

Specific NPCs are then described in the chapters starting on page 21.

MOUSEKIN

Rare humanoid

The usual punishment for property crimes against the city (unless you have good connections) is to be turned into a mousekin. A mousekin is a furry humanoid the size of a human but resembling a mouse. They retain their intelligence, memories, and skills, but their reputation suffers, especially with cats, who would love to hunt them if they were able.

When the judgment is pronounced, the duration of the curse is also determined, ranging from a short while to indefinite. Those who perform commendable deeds for the city in mousekin form can be released from the curse earlier. This has the added benefit of reducing their social stigma and facilitating reintegration.

The ritual of transformation into a mousekin (and any subsequent reversal, if the spell was not set for a specific period of time) is performed personally by members of the city council, and only they can break the curse.

I took care of that.

Part of the ritual involves invoking Ezil and connecting mentally with the city's essence, which is why it works best for crimes against the city's infrastructure.

Mousekin who do not leave Kalusa usually choose a nickname for themselves for the duration of their curse. This is often subversive and ironic. Examples: Hamster, Fearnot, Dentist, Handsome, Shoe, Madam. They also often leave their social circles for small communities of mousekin, but these are often criminal in nature, so there is not much rehabilitation going on there.

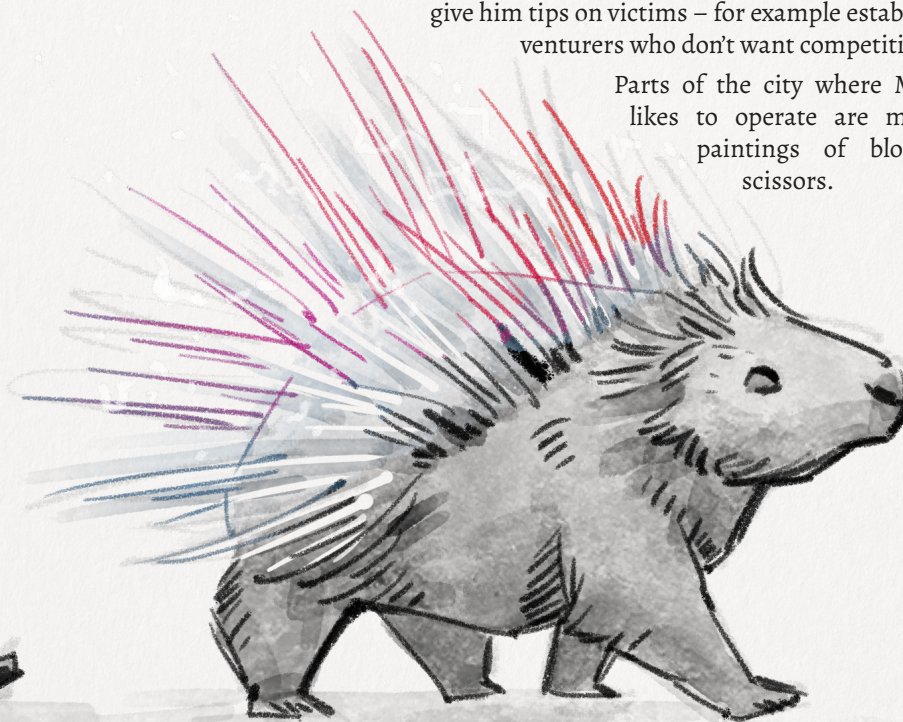
CONDUIT PORCUPINES

Altered animal

To monitor the magical climate in Kalusa, the Prime Guild breeds and uses special porcupines that are about 4 feet long with transparent quills. These porcupines absorb magical energy from the air, and the color of their quills indicates the type of magic and how strong it is in that location.

Workers walk around with the porcupines and record the results. At the end of the day, they use the collected magic from the porcupines to recharge magical items. In the Protectorate, in order to save money, guards take the porcupines and check the magic as part of their patrols.

Sometimes, however, a porcupine encounters a very powerful magical effect. This causes it to go wild, fluff up its quills like a peacock, and spray magical charges in all directions. If someone doesn't pacify it immediately (which guardsmen don't always manage to do since they're usually trying not to hurt the creature), it runs loose around the city and can cause damage to people and property.



MR. TAYLOR

Unique magical being

This monster came alive in a tailor shop. It is a levitating pseudo-humanoid made out of scraps of cloth and human skin, and it is accompanied by three helpers:

- ✦ Hatter: Two gloved hands, they are able to conjure up hats with sharp brims and throw them at enemies,
- ✦ Meter: 60 inches long tailors tape, it can snap like a whip or garotte someone
- ✦ Needler: large pincushion, can shoot out dangerous needles

Mr. Taylor is driven by a desire to tear someone to shreds. He has enough self-preservation instinct not to attack established Kalusians, so he targets newcomers whom no one in Kalus will miss. Many Kalusians know about this monster; some even have a deal with him and give him tips on victims – for example established adventurers who don't want competition.

Parts of the city where Mr. Taylor likes to operate are marked by paintings of bloodstained scissors.

PECULIAR INHABITANTS

THE MATMAN

Unique magical being

As a result of peculiar magical currents, a large number of doormats in the city have gained consciousness and grown tired of everyone walking all over them. Flying away from their entryways, these mats merged into a monster that wants to settle the score.

The Matman consists of dozens of doormats. It smells like trash and feels dirty to the touch. Its mind is the collective consciousness of all the doormats in it, and while it cannot speak, it understands human speech and can respond with gestures.

It can freely rearrange the doormats inside itself and levitate them up to 6 feet above the ground. It can even split them up, up to a distance of 70 feet, while keeping them connected to the collective consciousness. In this way, the Matman can take on various forms and create a variety of traps:

MATMANHOLE

Mats stack themselves over a pit and cover themselves with soil to create the appearance of normal ground. When the victim steps on them, the mats give way, and the victim falls into the pit.

HEDGEHOG

The mats have pins and nails stuck between their bristles, with the sharp ends pointing outwards. They roll themselves into a cylinder or ball (or a volley of smaller cylinders or balls) and attack the enemy. Another option is a mat with nails lying inconspicuously on the ground in wait for someone to step on it.

SABOTEUR

A swarm of doormats rolls around in mud or feces, then flies to the dwelling of a hated person and “decorates” it.

ELEMENTAL

In this form, the Matman assembles itself into a levitating creature vaguely resembling a humanoid. Its prettiest doormats are located where its head would be, while the largest doormats are rolled into cylinders and form its “limbs.” Other doormats levitate around it, collecting debris and stones from the surrounding area, which it then throws at its enemies.

If cat scratching posts ever come to life in a similar way, we'll really have a problem.





SAMPLE NPCs

This is a sample of the core of our campaign and setting: Rich and intricate NPCs to become friends, rivals, companions or hateful enemies. Final book offers 33 main NPCs, each with its own full-page illustration, and dozens of side characters like Juli who appears in the introductory adventure below.

Descriptions of our five sample characters are somewhat shortened for the preview – they form factions, pursue opposing goals and hide their secrets I didn't want to spoil here. You will learn the full extent of all their shenanigans in the final book.

Adventures in the final book will offer specific situations, challenges and tasks through which players become involved in the lives of these Kalusians. Even though I wrote it as not to force players into anything and choose what piques their interest, it should safely get you enough material for a year of play.

“When dealing with Kalusian politicians, it's considered polite to spend part of the meeting paying attention to their cats. Everyone accepts that you're focusing on the cat and ignoring people around you. It's a great way to survive those dreadful meetings.”

Palonia Bentalas, an ambitious sorceress



"LADY"

JOLEE WHITFIELD

Shipwright of noble birth, leader of the Regals, she/her

"Aye, it needs to go through the Council's bloody vote. I get it. At sea, we solve problems by voting all the time: each cannon gets one vote."

- ✦ **Physical characteristics:** 62 years old, styles herself as a pirate of noble blood.
- ✦ **Personality:** Commanding, uncompromising, ambitious.
- ✦ **Strengths:** Leadership, seamanship, intimidation, fencing.
- ✦ **Behavior:** Forceful and dominant. Rough sailor's language. During conversation, she often takes a swig from a rum flask.
- ✦ **Weaknesses:** She loves risky plans, even if they endanger her loved ones, and only regrets it when it is too late. She can be manipulated by playing on her noble origins.
- ✦ **Usual combat approach:** First, she shoots with a crossbow, then moves on to sabre fencing (she can defeat most young adventurers). She also calls on her guards and henchmen, whom she keeps close by.
- ✦ **Introduction:** In the first adventure, "The Mirage", "Time Chapter 795 – The Construction of the Ship" (p. 54).

Jolee was the third child of a noble family in a distant kingdom. She had no chance of inheriting a large fortune, so she set out into the world. Through adventures, piracy, and privateering, she amassed wealth, founded a shipping company in Kalusa, and gradually took over the local market.

She also occupies Resin Island at the mouth of the Aruffa River and has built a community of dockers, sailors, and privateers there. They call themselves the Regals and strive (to varying degrees of accuracy) to uphold the aristocratic customs of Jolee's homeland, which are otherwise not very popular in Kalusa.

She had five children, but her second-born, Annabel, died in the year 795. She tries to keep the family together primarily by rallying them against external enemies. (Sometimes she exaggerates or even invents these – lately, she started to blame the Protectorate leadership for almost everything.) As a result, there are many unresolved and trivialized conflicts in her family that could erupt in an ugly way.

Jolee refuses to admit that she is aging. She does not want to name her successor.

She thinks herself superior to most Kalusians because of her noble birth; she introduces herself as "Lady" Jolee and demands that title from her subordinates. She would like to make all Kalusians call her that (and in her dreams, to make them call her queen).

She leads her community with vigor and strictness, but she always protects her people from outsiders – even if they do something wrong, she would rather keelhaul them herself. She convinces herself that protecting her family and community is a matter of honor, not feelings, but there are moments when her hard shell cracks (see Annabel's death in "Time Chapter 795 – The Construction of the Ship" (p. 54) and *in the final book*) – only it's usually too late.





HARUKA SUGANO

Ruthless businesswoman, she/her

"You seek a security solution that will fully eviscerate potential intruders, leaving behind not a trace of their former existence? Of course, I have just the thing. It is in a higher price range than the security solutions you currently purchase from us, but I guarantee that the investment is worth it."

- ✦ **Physical characteristics:** 49 years old. Her style combines tradition and modernity.
- ✦ **Personality:** Ambitious, orderly, snobbish.
- ✦ **Strengths:** Business, leadership, persuasion, manipulation, politics, and magic theory.
- ✦ **Behavior:** She finds out what people are good at and then praises them for it. Her thoughts are always partly on her business – for example, she will likely interrupt her conversation with PCs to order supplies via one of the assistants that hover around her.
- ✦ **Weaknesses:** Obsessed with work. Overconfident with overly complicated schemes. Although she loves her children, she is unable to show it properly.
- ✦ **Usual combat approach:** She hides behind her bodyguards or hedromatons (*in the final book*), and casts advanced spells from magical items.
- ✦ **Companion:** Taldaron, a longhair blue cat (he/him) capable of sensing the magical potential of those around him.
- ✦ **Introduction:** e.g. "Haruka's vaults" (*in the final book*).

Ambitious and intelligent, Haruka inherited a renowned workshop that produces magical locks and traps. As she herself has only a slight magical talent, she hires mages to do the manufacturing while she runs the business side.

She also maintains alliances with the city's thieves. She has realized that thieves can and will sooner or later break through any security measure but in the end are in it for the money. So she keeps most of the city's good safecrackers and catburglars on her payroll, and sells "security that no thief will break" for a fat premium.

Despite her wealth, the ruling class looks down on her – the custom in Kalusa is that the person who leads a magical business is also its most capable mage. A magical business led by a non-magical boss is generally viewed as untrustworthy.

Haruka is too ambitious and proud to formally place her enterprise in the hands of somebody else, and she seeks a change in the social structure of Kalusa so that magical talent is not a prerequisite for reaching the top. She is working towards a coup that would transform Kalusa from a magocracy into Haruka's vision of a meritocracy (which would be more of an oligarchy, where those with sharp elbows, fewer scruples, and good self-presentation prevail). With the help of informants and frequent social events, she is building a network of loyal followers – she prefers to win over rather than coerce.

Her children Nagi (*in the final book*), Akiko (*in the final book*), and Madoka (*in the final book*) also did not inherit any magical talent. Only her son Mikoto (*in the final book*) has it, but his magic is "defective," which has an even worse stigma. She tells herself and the world that all she does is so her children do not have to experience the same social rejection she did. However, she has never stopped to ask them how they feel about the topic. She sternly instills in her children the importance of building and protecting the family reputation.



Tofuscini 7
2025



BATUPO MEZAI

Playful water mage, Protectorate waterworks administrator, he/him

"You should have seen the look on that dimwit's face. He stared at his flooded workshop like a mousekin staring at a tax bill. That'll teach him not to dump his gunk in the river!"

- ✧ **Physical characteristics:** 26 years old, looks like a hybrid between a human and a water elemental.
- ✧ **Personality:** Sociable, playful, gossipy.
- ✧ **Strengths:** Partying, prying information from people, water magic.
- ✧ **Behavior:** Likes to show off. Invites people for drinks.
- ✧ **Special abilities:** Basic spells + water magic, e.g., sending his consciousness through the water infrastructure to gather information about what is happening in the city; surfing on controlled waves; diluting or concentrating alcohol and mixing drinks in cool ways; transforming into an almost completely water-based form in which he reduces damage from any wounds he sustains.
- ✧ **Weaknesses:** Needs to be the center of attention. Mourns his sister. Overly attached to the river (harming the river can cause him mental damage). He finds it much harder to cast spells with salt water, and immersion in salt water would cause him injury.
- ✧ **Usual combat approach:** Morphs into his water form, then tries to injure opponents at close range by touching them and controlling the water in their bodies. When this is not feasible, he conjures waves to take his opponents down or drown them. Alternatively, he summons a water elemental for help.
- ✧ **Companion:** Kandar (he/him), a cat with multicolored, shimmering fur. He loves water, enjoys swimming like a sea lion, and instead of hair, he sheds glitter that disappears after a few days. Most cats consider him strange because of his love of water.
- ✧ **Introduction:** e.g., "Batupo's arrival" (*in the final book*).

Batupo is a water mage and administrator of the Protectorate's water supply and sewage systems. He was given this position for his past heroism in defense of the city when he helped prevent a coup (*in the final book*).

He took up water magic because of a childhood tragedy. His sister Amata drowned before his eyes during a trip to the sea, and despite his best efforts, he was unable to save her. To this day, he hates the sea and considers it a dull, heartless, ignorant being.

Now his aim is to protect the river. He has made a magical pact with it: it lends him part of its essence, and he has partially become its avatar.

He comes from a low social class. He hates Apex, which is the source of most of the magical waste flowing into the river (which he can sense through his bond with it). He wants to get the rich into hot water, or even boil them alive in it. He tries to be loyal to the Protectorate's leadership, but he doesn't mind "collateral damage" and will encourage those around him to rebel whenever opportunities arise.

He hates Damian Escudar (p. 28) because Damian is the prototype of a rich man who exploits the poor. But it is also a question of ego and mutual jealousy between two extroverted show-offs in a city where everyone who's anyone knows everyone. He would love to damage Damian's reputation if he got a chance.



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DAMIAN ESCUDAR

Popular bard, information broker, he/him

"Just an autograph? Sure, sweethearts, but you'll have to wait until some other time for my music. You know, I need to rest. If I don't get my beauty sleep, who'll be able to keep you all entertained?"

- ✧ **Physical characteristics:** 25 years old. He conjures a beard as needed.
- ✧ **Personality:** Extroverted, hedonistic, spoiled.
- ✧ **Strengths:** Influencing crowds, entertainment, fashion, sound-controlling spells.
- ✧ **Behavior:** Talkative. He occasionally intersperses stories about his successes with stories about his failures to make himself seem more likable and human. He has a favorite trick where he plucks his fingers in the air and produces pleasant sounds as if strumming a harp.
- ✧ **Special abilities:** Advanced spells + sound spells, e.g., strengthening and modulating his voice, conjuring sounds from different places and directions, or adding echoes and choirs.
- ✧ **Weaknesses:** He is afraid of losing relevancy. His best "original" compositions are secretly written by impoverished musicians with actual talent (e.g., Labain, *in the final book*). When he has to sell information due to financial hardship, he is insecure and may blurt something out without thinking it through or sell false gossip.
- ✧ **Usual combat approach:** He stays in the back, tries to stop the fight with his eloquence, uses his spells to distract enemies and help allies, or throws knives and whatever else he can get his hands on.
- ✧ **Companion:** Gabiatra (she/her), long-haired white-gray cat with big eyes, very cute. She protects Damian by going belly up between him and aggressors and demanding to be petted.
- ✧ **Introduction:** e.g., "Detective Glass" (*in the final book*), or "Problems of Cosmopedia, Part Two" (*in the final book*).

Damian is a popular Kalusian bard and the nephew of Councilor Rigoberto Escudar (*in the final book*). He has a twin brother named Ignacio Escudar (*in the final book*).

Both ordinary people and the city's elite love his shows, which are full of mesmerizing singing, recitation, and audiovisual delights. They don't seem to notice or mind that there is nothing spontaneous about these shows; they are meticulously planned and constructed by an ensemble of assistants.

Sometimes Damian takes up a "stage persona" with a distinctive style of expression. For example, he might dress up as a confused romantic knight, a stern old-fashioned governess, a druid experimenting with hallucinogenic mushrooms, or a giant hollowed-out pumpkin sarcastically commenting on fashion. Even though the Kalusians know it is him, they play along and talk about these personas as if they were real people, placing bets on the continuation of their story and how long the persona will live (i.e., when Damian will spectacularly "kill" it and create a new one).

Damian's musical talent is actually only mediocre, but he has understood quite well that in Kalusa, there is no need to cultivate artistic talent when you have magic and family connections. So instead of training to improve his voice, he learned to enchant it. Instead of learning to compose songs and write skits, he found poor artists who would work for him for peanuts. And it has paid off: Damian is a celebrity.

Damian's audience is used to the high quality of his performances. While Damian knows a number of useful spells, he doesn't have the capacity to learn all of them, so he needs many magical items and scrolls as well. These are expensive, as are costumes and his flock of assistants, and he soon became a slave to his own fame: whatever he earns, he has to spend on his career. Only recently did he realize that he was essentially trapped. He would like to get out of this financial predicament, but he does not want to give up his fame or lifestyle. And so he started a side business: trading information ("**Damian's Information Business**", *in the final book*).

Damian mostly stays in Apex and visits the Protectorate about once a week. He lives in the Escudar family palace and tries to act like the head of the household (his mother Meztli (*in the final book*) is dead, and his uncle Rigoberto lives in The Hive). He would like to convert part of the palace into an entertainment venue where he would take a managerial position instead of performing himself. However, he faces resistance from his brother Ignacio and a lack of sponsors – those who have real power and money have already seen through him and consider him to be an unreliable windbag. And so he is on the hunt for new people to help him.

He has a complicated relationship with his twin brother Ignacio. He doesn't want to listen to Ignacio's reproaches and avoids him in public, as he is afraid that when people see them together, they will realize how much Damian's appearance has been enhanced by magic. Deep down, however, he feels that Ignacio is right in saying that Kalusa is a trap.

He suspects that the recent death of his mother, Meztli was not an accident; she was very secretive, and in the days leading up to her death, was behaving fearfully. He suspects Mikoto Sugano (*in the final book*), who is notorious for his ability to arrange sudden deaths. Damian feels remorse that, despite his popularity and contacts, he was not well-informed enough to prevent his mother's death, and this makes him all the more motivated to make his side job as an information broker a success.



SEBARRA

Pyromaniac artificer, child of the streets, she/her

"This city destroys you. Drains your desires, feelings, dreams. I only feel free from its clutches when I blow something up. Shit flying everywhere, the city a helpless wreck... I love making Kalusa my bitch."

- ✦ **Physical characteristics:** 22 years old, orc. She looks like she has been through a lot for her age.
- ✦ **Personality:** Angry, explosive, feels a need to protect the outcasts.
- ✦ **Strengths:** Survival, street smarts, artificery, destruction.
- ✦ **Behavior:** Tense and alert, always with explosive and paralyzing phials at hand.
- ✦ **Special abilities:** Advanced artificer skills and spells + specialization in pyromancy. Talent for figuring out new techniques on the fly without needing to test them.
- ✦ **Weaknesses:** Even when she means well, she often acts rashly and destructively. She only understands certain human personalities – those she grew up around in her tough neighborhood. She is unable to organize her time and delivers orders late. She has a tendency to blame others and the system for her own mistakes.
- ✦ **Usual combat approach:** She starts by throwing explosives, then switches to fist fighting with special brass knuckles capable of creating small explosions upon impact.
- ✦ **Companion:** Robsa (she/her); dark brown cat, with a deformed face and an aggressive expression. She can cause hallucinations in the minds of her targets.
- ✦ **Introduction:** e.g., "The Mirage", "Time Chapter 801 – The Undead Wreck" (p. 51), or at the hydroproparty (in the final book).

Sebarra grew up in the Sourpit (in the final book), the worst slum in Kalusa, and experienced nothing but hardship for most of her life. Her talent as an artificer became her saving grace, and she eventually escaped her neighborhood by taking over an island tower called Maldemar (in the final book), and making it her artificer's and alchemist's laboratory.

She still regularly frequents the mainland to take orders for her gadgets (for example, she arranges pyrotechnics for Batupo's hydroproparty (in the final book)) and maintains contact with other outcasts.

She supports and encourages people on the margins of society to enjoy at least a few moments of their miserable lives. However, she has rather limited ideas about how to be happy – drinking, partying, and fighting – so even though she means well, she can't really help people escape their misery in the long run; she may even deepen it.

She hates the Regals (in the final book) because of their antisocial behavior when they get drunk in the city – behavior she has experienced firsthand several times. This is why she often spends time devising ways to make their lives unpleasant.

Recently, with the help of the necromancers Ulgmar (in the final book) and Celethar (in the final book), she organized the reanimation of a wrecked ship in the sea outside Kalusa. They sent the ship to Kalusa's port, where it attacked the port and damaged the Regals' property (see "Time Chapter 801 – The Undead Wreck" (p. 51) for the relevant scene). She very much enjoyed the damage and would like to try something similar again. She doesn't realize how much trouble this caused for Celethar at the hands of "Lady" Jolee Whitfield" (p. 22).



SESSION ZERO

"In Kalusa, it's handy to know at least some basic illusion spells. The cats here may be smart, but they're still cats; a moving red dot always does the trick."

Lori Baram, seasoned adventurer

This will be a part of Volume 2 of the Kalusa: The Enchanted City set, containing all the adventures from the campaign.

And me again. Surely you didn't expect me to stop butting in?

Page numbers

All references to final text were replaced by italicised phrase "*in the final book*". All remaining references point to pages of this preview.

Important Abbreviations

- ✦ PC – Player Character
- ✦ NPC – Non-Player Character
- ✦ GM – Game Master
- ✦ D6 – six-sided die

Important Expressions

The term "people" refers to all kinds of intelligent humanoid species including humans, elves, dwarves, orcs, and so forth. They are the sort of folk that usually have to pay taxes.

WHAT YOU NEED TO READ BEFORE THE FIRST SESSION

The introductory adventure "The Mirage" is self-contained on a ship, and everything you need to know from other parts of the books is always annotated with a page number for ease of reference. Of course, it is probably a good idea to read up on the "Setting Basics" (p. 4) so that players won't catch you off guard with questions during character creation. In addition, reading about the underlying plotline of *Impressum Deletum* (*in the final book*) will give you a better sense of what's going on.

After players arrive to the city proper, the campaign opens up, and you should familiarize yourself with the plot hooks *in the final book*. You should also read **Special Game Mechanics** (*in the final book*) so you can start tracking progress in your story.

Here are some things you'll need to discuss with your players before starting the campaign:

INTRODUCTORY DESCRIPTION FOR PLAYERS

Before players create their characters, give them some basic info about the city and the campaign. Something like this will suffice:

Kalusa is a city-state built on a site of powerful magic. You might encounter a house that has come to life or aggressive vegetables. There are also numerous intelligent cats who could take over the city easily at any time – they just don't feel like it. Instead, a community of wizards rules here – for now. Obscure religions and practices, such as necromancy, are also permitted. Thanks to this, all sorts of people, even feared gangs, fanatical cults, and mad inventors can find their place there.

The city is huge, but large parts of it are abandoned, and adventurers flock in seeking sundry treasures.

Your characters have been sailing together for quite some time and should arrive in Kalusa tomorrow morning. During a stop along the way, you heard that strange phenomena have been occurring in the waters of Kalusa lately. Colorful spots dancing on the surface, water flowing upward, even ships disappearing without a trace. But no one can tell you for sure whether this is cause for concern or if that's normal there.

People come to Kalusa from around the world and maybe even beyond. Think about who your character is and what brings them there. Are they looking for a lost relative? Are they coming for revenge? Do they need powerful magic to cure a rare ailment or trauma? Do they long to learn forbidden spell or obtain an artifact? If you can't think of anything, we'll come up with your reason for traveling to Kalusa together.

Note on boxed text

There are a few texts throughout the book speaking directly to your players. You don't need to read it out loud verbatim – reading sounds different than normal speech, and, let's be frank, some players zone out pretty easily. The speeches should give you an idea of the relevant information, structure, and tone, but feel free to paraphrase it in your own words.

(The example on this page is a bit different in that you can pretty easily just send it to your players as a text before session zero.)



CHARACTER CREATION

Don't overwhelm players with too much information before the campaign. The campaign in the final books takes place in Kalusa, without venturing beyond the city-state's borders. If you don't want to worldbuild what exists beyond Kalusa, tell the players up front that you want to keep the campaign within the city. Have them come up with a strong motivation for their characters to stay.

The players should create characters who are visiting Kalusa for the first time and don't know much more about the city than what is in the introductory description above. This will allow them to enjoy discovering the city organically and will limit the need for long descriptions about what their characters already know.

Also, emphasize to the players that they should create characters with adventurous dispositions. This campaign assumes that the heroes will choose their own challenges and throw themselves headfirst into interesting situations.

Sure, I could keep them here with some sort of magical fog, but that shouldn't be necessary-- who wouldn't want to stay voluntarily with lots of cats?

SENSITIVE TOPICS

This campaign touches on sensitive topics. It deals with, among other things: death in the family, poverty, addiction, mental health issues, murder, suicide, abuse, torture, imprisonment, enslavement, execution, threats, bullying, discrimination, disability, child abuse, forced labor, serious illness, armed forces terror, and mind control.

These issues mainly affect NPCs rather than being directed at PCs. Even so, agree on safety tools during session zero. Tips on how to do this can be found in the final book.

CONNECTING PLAYER CHARACTERS TO NPCs

The campaign features several NPCs from Kalusa who have been abroad in the past and may have met the PCs there, at least briefly.

You can choose some of the encounters listed below and present them to the players before the campaign starts. This will bond the PCs as a group and give them a direct relationship with an NPC.

Hunt for the Necromancer

- When: about a year ago
- Relevant NPC: **Celethar Isteri** (in the final book)
- In a region where necromancy is forbidden, you took on a quest to capture an elven necromancer. You tracked him down (how?) and caught up with him in an old cemetery in the mountains. A confrontation ensued. However, the elf's magic was much weaker than you expected. He was too accustomed to the magical climate of Kalusa and had trouble casting spells in a foreign land. The elf ultimately survived the encounter with you (how?), but one of you was left with something that you carry to this day (what? It could be something positive or negative...).

Playing with Fire

- When: less than a year ago
- Relevant NPC: **Ignacio Escudar** (in the final book)
- A polite but spoiled young mage hired you as his guide. He didn't tell you his name, but because he wielded very powerful fire magic, friends called him Cinder. His snobbery tended to get you into trouble – usually you were able to solve it (how?). However, once you got involved in something where he ended up with half his face burned. It must have been something unusual to burn even a fire-resistant mage (what exactly happened there?). Your attempt to talk it out and part on good terms failed (why?), and you haven't seen each other since.

Attacked by Assassins

- When: about two years ago
- Relevant NPC: **Flara Windrell** (in the final book)
- A young scholarly sorceress calling herself "Blossom" hired you as a guide through a dangerous region. She had no experience with traveling, but she was very curious and tried to understand you and your surroundings. One night, however, you were attacked by a group of assassins. They were more skilled in combat than you, but you still managed to defeat them (how?). Blossom then admitted that they were after her. She had fallen out of favor with someone powerful in her homeland. In the end, she left you before you had originally agreed (was it your fault?).



The Necklace Affair

- ✦ When: about two years ago
- ✦ Relevant NPC: Ita Kentela Galoro de Fiocarda (*in the final book*)
- ✦ You were in some big city when an important foreign delegation from the Fiocarda archipelago arrived to great fanfare.

The center of attention was Ita, the young daughter of the Duke of Fiocarda. She was walking around town shopping, smiling, talking to people, including you (how did you manage that?).

But then the alarm was raised when her expensive necklace had disappeared. The guards combed the city and found the item in your possession (how did it end up with you, and how did they find it?). But in the end, you got away with it (how?).

Ita was really good in getting personal information from people with her innocent charm and nice chatter. What personal information about you did you reveal to her (even though it might not have been not the best idea)?

Hunting the Unicorn

- ✦ When: about three years ago
- ✦ Relevant NPC: Tolisa Riaghel (*in the final book*)
- ✦ While in the wilderness, you met a young half-elf named Tolisa.

She was there on an expedition to capture and tame a unicorn. "No one has one at home, a unicorn will be great publicity for my farm!"

She was looking for helpers. (How did you respond? Did you help her? Or did you try to stop her? Did you want to catch the unicorn yourself?)

In the end, she managed to catch it. (If you helped her, how did you do it? If you tried to stop her, why did you fail?)

She used magic to make it obey her, mounted it, and rode away.

HOW TO USE THEM?

Choose one of the encounters that you think at least some of the PCs might be interested in. If you don't know, draw one at random.

Briefly tell the players what happened there and show them a portrait of the NPC in question.

Let each player decide whether their PC was involved. There can be more than one PC in a single encounter – in fact, it's better that way. If a player doesn't like the idea of their PC being involved in the encounter, that's okay! They can join in another scene later.

Together, flesh out the details of the PCs' behavior in that situation. You can act out a scene, but don't make it too long so players whose characters weren't there don't get bored.

If the players need additional information about the NPC, feel free to reveal a little more, as long as it makes sense that they could have learned it there. However, try to avoid major spoilers. If players come up with a story idea that doesn't fit with the NPC's backstory, suggest an adjustment.

At least some of the PCs should take something away from the encounter that will make a future encounter with the NPC very juicy (a gift? a scar? a romance? ...).

If necessary, you can select another encounter and repeat the process – ask the players if these connections are enough for them before the campaign begins, or if they want more.

WHAT NEXT?

All that remains is to finalize the rules for your game system.

The **System Toolkit** bundled with the full book will help you with this. It contains rule adjustments for playing this campaign in selected well-known systems, as well as enemy stats, environmental hazards, and more.

Then you can dive into your first adventure.

The campaign is set in the year 801 of the New Kalusian Era. The PCs start on a ship bound for Kalusa. The date is April 15, 801.

Together, name the ship that the PCs are traveling on. Here, it is provisionally named the Siren.

Next comes the adventure *The Mirage*, which begins with the PCs immediately thrown into a dramatic situation.

THE MIRAGE

"Wake up! Kalusa is on the horizon! We'll be docking in an hour! Gather your belongings and come up on deck!" shouts your lanky red-haired captain.

It is the morning of April 15, 801 of the New Kalusian Era, and you are sailing on the Siren to the city of magic, Kalusa. You emerge up onto deck.

Suddenly, it seems to you all that you are made up of thousands of tiny cogwheels that have stopped turning. You feel like lifeless, helpless machines.

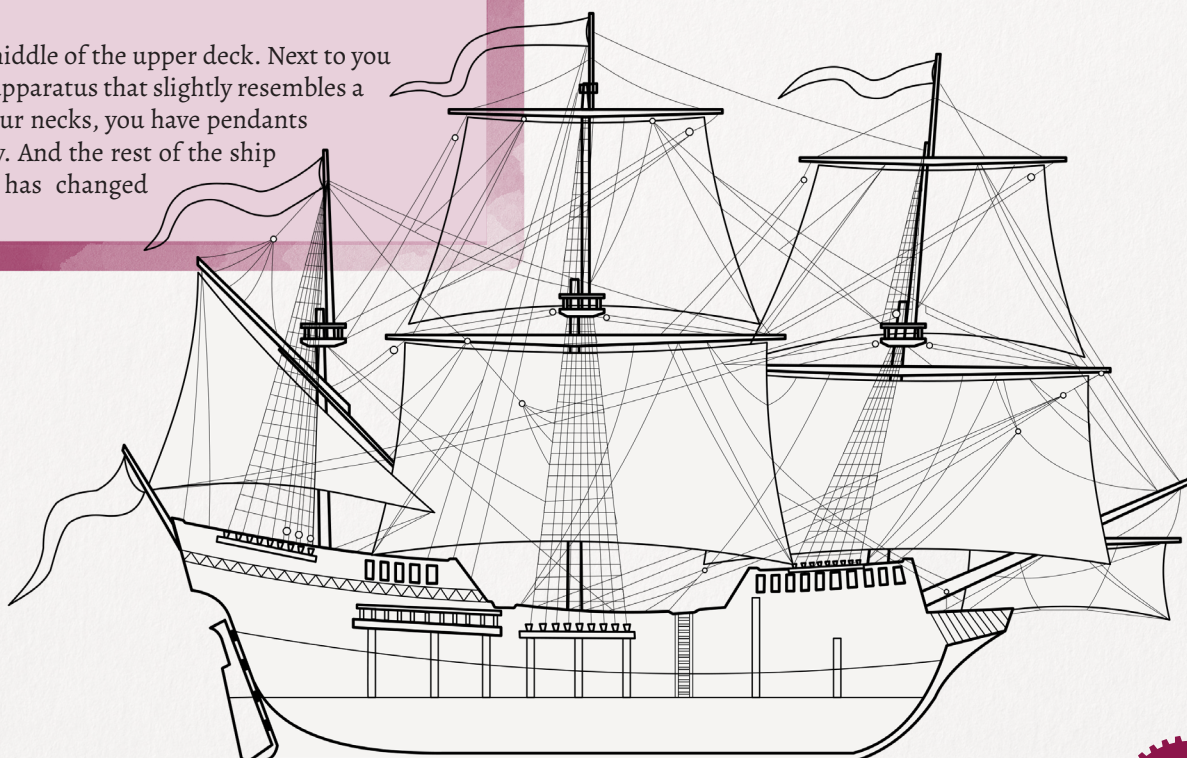
Then some invisible force inserts a winding key into you and turns it. Your wheels start slowly spinning, you feel in control over your body again, and you find you can move...

But the rest of the ship cannot. All the people on it, as well as the animals, goods, sails, even the sea waves around the ship – they are frozen in time and space.

"Welcome, repairmen. Warning error, warning error, alert! Severity level of the malfunction: high. Manual intervention: necessary," says a monotonous, formal female voice that seems to go straight into your heads, adding: "Energy remaining: 8 replays."

You all are in the middle of the upper deck. Next to you stands a clocklike apparatus that slightly resembles a cat, and around your necks, you have pendants with a winding key. And the rest of the ship also looks like it has changed dramatically."

See note on boxed text on page 28. Describe the intro in your own words, just be aware that the date is important to mention as PCs will navigate scenes from the past. Then show the ship's map (p. 59). Once the PCs start to look around, they will find that many things have changed.



SUMMARY

This is the introductory adventure of the campaign. It takes place on a ship just before arriving in Kalusa. The ship is caught in a magical time-freeze anomaly, and Clockwork Bel (*in the final book*) has chosen the PCs as repairmen to fix it.

In the anomaly, the PCs may encounter a temporal echo of past events about a ship called the Mirage that traveled along the same sailing route as their own ship and discover juicy information about the city's NPCs. At the same time, Ralka Vassevich (*in the final book*) will try to draw them into her burglary scheme.

START OF THE ADVENTURE

- ✦ Describe to the players the initial foginess of their minds and their reawakening to the malfunction report.
- ✦ Show them the "map of the ship" (p. 59).
- ✦ Describe what has changed on the ship: the strange "Beldarina's Clock" (p. 39), "The Cogwheels" (p. 46), the different crew, and "The Ship at the Beginning" (p. 44).
- ✦ Point out that the dial on the cat-clock begins to count down 15 minutes.
- ✦ Start the introductory situation from Time Chapter 799, where the mercenaries on board are preparing to disembark ("A Brief History of the Ship" (p. 39)).

Then react to the actions of the player characters.

NPCs MENTIONED IN THE TEXT

In the adventure text itself, there are usually no links to the page with the main description of NPCs. So if you don't know who a given NPC is, look in this list or in the index *in the final book* and go to the relevant page for a detailed description.

NPCs with Main Descriptions in Vol. 1

Beldarina "Clockwork Bel" (*in the final book*)

Celethar Isteri (*in the final book*)

Echias Lenarte (*in the final book*)

Elling Whitfield (*in the final book*)

Greysen Whitfield (*in the final book*)

Haruka Sugano (p. 24) – brief mention

"Lady" Jolee Whitfield (p. 22)

The Mole (*in the final book*)

Mirodar Isteri (*in the final book*)

Ralka "Shell" Vassevich (*in the final book*)

Sebarra (p. 30)

Tal-Reon Corlani (*in the final book*) – brief mention

Ulgmar Bronzefire (*in the final book*)

Mikoto Sugano (*in the final book*)

NPCs with Main Descriptions Here

Annabel Whitfield (p. 56)

Arkox (p. 47)

Juli (p. 49)

Norelma (p. 45)

Pim Branco (p. 44)

Rudy (p. 55)

Kasper Vrono (p. 50)

(Their descriptions are highlighted.)

NPCs with Main Descriptions in Other Adventures

Laurina von Egiam (*in the final book*) – brief mention

Siebel von Egiam (*in the final book*) – brief mention

WHAT IS GOING ON HERE?

THE MAGICAL RIFT

800 years ago, the rulers of Kalusa accidentally created a magical rift beneath the city with a failed time spell (*in the final book*). Since then, space-time debris has occasionally traveled through it to Kalusa, mainly manifesting in the form of anomalies, which are localized time freezes. These freezes close again on their own, but not without causing inconveniences and mildly unpleasant side effects for anyone caught within them.

The cat sorceress Beldarina (also known by townsfolk as Clockwork Bel) tried to save the city at the time, but she could not figure out how to close the rift. As a stopgap solution, she created a device in the clock of the Alabaster Tower that instantaneously detects and dissolves anomalies. Beldarina acted in secret and had to sacrifice herself by transferring her mind into the machine for it to work.

The present-day inhabitants of Kalusa know nothing about this; they only have an old legend about the creation of the "Alabaster Tower" (p. 17) and consider it little more than a tall tale.

It's hard to find out how exactly Beldarina's plan works because she was secretive, but that is not to say players shouldn't get to know – don't explain everything in the first anomaly, but it's perfectly fine to give them few clues whenever they try to look into it.

A NEW PROBLEM

A few weeks before the start of the campaign, unauthorized persons entered the clockworks (*in the final book*) and damaged Beldarina's machine. Since then, anomalies have not been correcting automatically.

Fortunately, she had previously designed a safety protocol that activates in case her device fails. This is a backup solution where "repairmen" enter the anomalies and close them. These repairmen will be the PCs.

THE EMERGENCE OF ANOMALIES

Anomalies occur mostly at random, but the chance of their emergence can be increased in cases of déjà vu, when history repeats or rhymes in a specific location. In such instances, space-time, already damaged by the rift, mixes up past and present, and time freezes at the site of the anomaly.

That is exactly what happened to the ship carrying the PCs – it was following the same route that another ship, the Mirage, had traveled two years prior. The Siren still occupies a physical area in the real world, but everything inside it, including living creatures, are trapped in a frozen bubble until the anomaly can be closed.

THE SAFETY PROTOCOL

Beldarina's safety protocol is a spell combining advanced time magic and cosmic magic (*in the final book*).

It works by creating a temporal echo inside the anomaly, allowing short chapters of the past to play out (a general explanation of temporal echoes can be found in the chapter The Cosmic Tome *in the final book*).

At the same time, the safety protocol grants specific people within the anomaly repair authorization through magical winding keys. These people are not frozen, but instead can enter the temporal echo and repair the anomaly by unraveling the tangled pieces of time and reality. To help them, they use a "user interface" in the form of a cat-clock and ghostly cogwheels ("Missing cogwheels" (p. 41)).

Winding the cat-clock with a key is the final step in repairing the anomaly.

Beldarina herself did not really know how well this protocol would work, nor did she have time to test it. She only roughly designed it, with the idea that the protocol would automatically fill in the details when activated. At the same time, something of Beldarina's personality is reflected in it, mainly her distrust of human abilities (repairers do not have to untangle all the errors for the protocol to continue, for example) and her passion for complexities and logical puzzles (which is why the system is so complicated and risk-filled).

I was not pleased with Beldarina's interference. It is up to humans to fix their own messes. Not a good example of how we superior beings should behave.

Winding Key

The key is actually a spell (which the PCs immediately realize), but it manifests itself as a pendant around their neck. The wearer can manipulate it at will, but cannot remove it. The key does not burden them mentally, and it is easy to ignore. Normal people don't see it, but every key carrier can see the keys around the necks of Beldarina's other repairmen.

The key remains with the repairers even after the anomaly is closed. Details about the keys can be found in *the final book*.

Why Did the Protocol Choose the PCs?

That's up to you, or it can remain unsaid – the premade campaign does not deal with this anywhere. Perhaps Beldarina's safety protocol chose people with no ties to Kalusian politicians because Beldarina didn't trust the city's leaders. Maybe it was by random chance that the PCs were sitting close to the center of the anomaly. You could also explain it with a personal story of one of the characters, if it fits.

THE SIREN AND THE MIRAGE

The Siren is the ship that the PCs were traveling on before getting stuck in the anomaly. However, because the Mirage traveled a similar route two years prior, the anomaly triggered and has frozen time and space aboard the Siren. Beldarina's safety protocol has also activated, temporarily transporting the PCs onto a temporal echo of the Mirage. The temporal echo is technically in the same physical spot as the frozen Siren, just in a different "layer" of reality, as if you put a sticker on a damaged surface.

Undoing the anomaly will require the players to experience various chapters of the history of the Mirage.

Fixing anomalies is not mandatory

Possession of the winding keys does not oblige PCs to do anything; they can always escape from the anomaly and let it be someone else's problem. If you ever feel that this is not clear to the players and they feel pressured to manage anomalies, talk to them out of character and reassure them that it's not the case. Perhaps they are used to other campaigns, where if they are given a task by someone, they need it or the game halts.

On the other hand, if you are interested in the adventure and would really like to play it, and your players run away from it, a discussion out of character is also recommended. Everyone around the table, you included, should have fun, so try to find a solution that lets everyone be "into it".

In any case, PCs can return to anomalies under certain circumstances (*in the final book*).

BASIC ELEMENTS OF THE ANOMALY

- ✦ The anomaly affected the entire ship and its surroundings; it is a sphere with a diameter of 180 feet, centered on the central mast. The echo, created by Beldarina, is the same size and overlays the anomaly seamlessly.
- ✦ The cat-clock, a device created by Beldarina, stands on the ship's deck. The key to fixing the anomaly and freeing the frozen Siren is to repair it, then insert the winding key and turn it.
- ✦ There are a total of 4 chapters within the echo. Each one shows a fragment of time from the life of the Mirage – a 15-minute story that repeats over and over. PCs can move between them using the buttons on the cat-clock's chest.
- ✦ To close the anomaly, it is necessary to untangle six of the eight tangled knots of reality scattered across all four chapters. Beldarina's safety protocol has visually marked these knots with ghostly cogwheels about the size of a palm. After untangling the knot, the cogwheel disappears and instead appears inside the cat-clock.
- ✦ PCs can replay the chapters, starting them over from the beginning.
- ✦ There is a time limit for everything – only a total of eight playthroughs within the echo, regardless of which chapters they experience. If the PCs don't make it in time, the temporal echo will collapse and they stay frozen within the anomaly like the others on the ship.
- ✦ It is possible to escape the anomaly through its edge even without closing it, but passing through will cause slight injuries.
- ✦ If the PCs do not close it, the anomaly will disappear on its own after 4 days.
- ✦ Anyone who is frozen in the anomaly for more than a day will feel like they have a very bad hangover for the next 14 days after thawing. The "hangover" is untreatable (other than waiting it out) and really looks like a hangover, so most healers will not believe any explanations about anomalies.

Everything is explained in detail further below.

Beldarina's safety protocol created a temporal echo of the Mirage's past on the anomaly-frozen Siren. It found events from the recent past with tangled reality knots and created chapters within the echo so that repairers could physically access and interact with these events.

This is not actual time travel – it is a visit to memories, records of past events. The PCs can take actions within the echo but cannot change what actually happened in the past. The NPCs created by the echo (referred as "echoed NPCs" from now on) are unaware that they are within an echo, and within their 15-minute loop, they will react exactly as if they were reacting in real life.

The echo is so strong that it looks exactly like reality and can be fully interacted with. The fact that it is only an echo does not help in overcoming physical obstacles within it – PCs can still be seriously injured or even killed.

While the anomaly is a product of the rift beneath the city, the echo and its chapters are the work of Beldarina. Even if no echo appeared, the anomaly would still exist, and everything within it would be frozen.

Other people cannot see the echo and freeze immediately upon entering the anomaly.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE SHIP

Here is a brief overview of fragments from the history of the Mirage that the PCs will have the opportunity to see in the chapters. They can meet past versions of NPCs that will come into play later in Kalusa, and even learn some useful information about them.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE SHIP (SEPTEMBER 18TH, 795)

Jolee Whitfield personally supervises the construction of the ship in the Kalusa docks, while her son Greysen helps with magical enhancements. Her grandson Elling plots revenge against Tal-Reon Corlani, and at the end of the scene, Jolee learns of the death of her daughter Annabel from university necromancer Celethar Isteri.

THE CAPTURED MAGES (MAY 4TH, 797)

The ship is owned by captain Pim Branco, who is tasked with delivering a cargo of mages abducted by Echias Lenarte, the Protector of Kalusa, to a mysterious client abroad. The ship is in Kalusa port and Branco is taking over the captives from Echias' henchman Mikoto Sugano.

THE COUP (APRIL 15TH, 799)

The ship was hired by mercenaries paid by Echias Lenarte, the Protector of Kalusa, to help him with a coup. The ship comes under fire and sinks not far from the port.

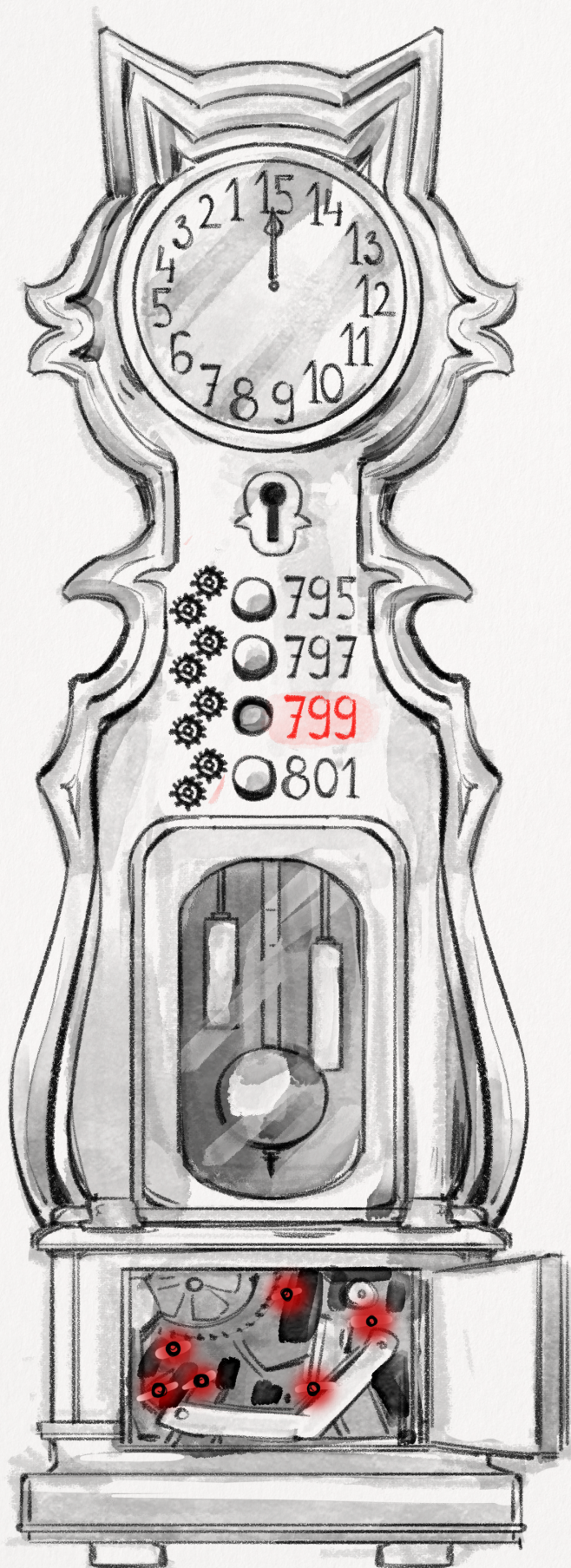
(This is the starting chapter.)

UNDEAD WRECK (MARCH 2ND, 801)

Discredited mage Celethar Isteri, along with his comrades Ulgmar, the Mole, and Sebarra, raise the ship from the bottom as an undead wreck. Celethar's father, Mirodar, tries to talk him out of it from afar, but the ship attacks Kalusa anyway, and Jolee Whitfield shoots the wreck to pieces.

BELDARINA'S

CLOCK



The PCs will start each sequence next to a Beldarina's mechanism standing in the middle of the deck, two steps away from the central mast. They will need to repair it in order to fix the time anomaly.

It looks like a grandfather clock vaguely shaped like a cat, tall as an adult, partly translucent and insubstantial to the touch – it is just an illusion made by Beldarina so the repairers can interact with it. In erratic intervals, the illusion falters and PCs can see hundreds of broken time-line fragments swirling around while shining energies of Beldarina's spell try to sort them into correct placement.

Only those with winding key can see and interact with the cat clock. Echoed NPCs are completely oblivious to it. The clock grants this invisibility to repairers, too, at the start of each time chapter, but only until they interact with the echo or move more than two steps away. This spell is signaled by a shroud of fine glittery time-magic lattice connected with golden threads to the clock – these tethers will obviously strain and break when PCs move away and become visible.

DESCRIPTION

- ✦ At the bottom, open cover shows delicate mechanism of a time machine. There are six pins that are obviously missing their cogwheels, and they are highlighted by red light.
- ✦ Pendulum has obviously trouble keeping the time, it shudders and rattles, but it still gives a warm chime marking every minute passed. These chimes are heard only by repairers.
- ✦ The control panel has four buttons marked with numbers 795, 797, 799 and 801. These can be used to switch to echo of given year. 799 is pressed at the start of the adventure. Each button also has two indicators in the shape of a cogwheel – they signalize time knots in the echoes, and they will light up green once the knot is untangled. There are eight of them, two per each year.
- ✦ Keyhole under the dial is obviously shaped for the key the repairers obtained. However it can be successfully used only after six missing cogwheels are resolved, before then, trying to wind it up will just rattle and flash the empty pins with warning light.
- ✦ Dial at the top ticks away 15 minutes, after which it will reset the time chapter to beginning. It is behind glass cover and can't be interacted with.
- ✦ There is a fragment of Beldarina's consciousness in the clock. It sees and hears what the PCs do, and can communicate by what sounds like half meowing and half metal screeching. However, it communicates only feelings of brokenness, disruption and error, and can only be heard by those with the winding key.

MISSING COGWHEELS

There are eight places where reality is particularly tangled, and the mechanism needs repairers' help with them. To mark them, the spell makes those knots look like cogwheels that are missing in the cat-clock. They are immaterial, shiny, and the size of a palm. They move together with the object or person to which they are attached.

To fix the clock and thus the whole problem, repairers need to get to the cogs and free them by entering a state of deep concentration and carefully unraveling the tangled threads of time manifesting in their mind. In terms of gameplay, this means that the PC must continuously touch the cog for one minute and hold concentration. Indirect contact, e.g. a familiar, tool or remote spell, is not sufficient. Repairer is aware of their surroundings and can speak and perform minor tasks without interrupting the repair, however, they cannot mentally maintain active spells that require more significant concentration.

On interrupting the process, it must start all over again, and having more characters untangling a single knot does not shorten the procedure, although it can provide security – if one character's concentration is interrupted, the other can continue. (Have you ever tried to untangle a tiny knot with several people at once? You'd just get in each other's ways.)

If the cog travels outside the anomaly (for example, if someone pushes the surface to which it is attached off the ship), it disappears, but the time knot is not repaired. When the sequence is restarted, it will be in its original place.

Once the cog is successfully freed, it will disappear and reappear on one of the empty pins in the cat-clock, or, if there is no empty pin left, stay in the repairer's hand. There is use for them described below ("Ralka's Agenda"), but otherwise these extra cogs behave like any other object in the echo and would disappear if taken out of the anomaly. Once a cog is freed, the knot is definitely unraveled and will not reappear after a time chapter is reset.

PCs need to get only six cogs to fix the anomaly, cat-clock will be able to deal with the remaining knots on its own. Cogs can be tackled in any order. After freeing the sixth cog, PCs can use their key to wind up the cat-clock and close the anomaly, however they don't have to do it right away.

Which cogs were already picked up is indicated on the cat-clock, beside the buttons.

The players should be told how these repairs work (including estimating how long it will take to untie the knot) upon first touching the cog. Repairers could probably understand what to do with knotted timeline even without all the illusions, but Beldarina liked to have wide margins for error.

REPLAYING TIME CHAPTERS

At the beginning of the adventure, the PCs are transported into one of four time chapters that tell an echo of the past. With the use of the cat-clock, they can travel to the other time chapters as well and solve the time knots. This is how it works:

- ✦ Each time chapter is sequence of events lasting 15 minutes. After 15 minutes, it restarts from the beginning.
- ✦ After switching or restarting chapters, PCs' visions blur and for a few seconds, they will see the world consisting of spinning and clattering gears, then get a glimpse of the frozen Siren with everything and everyone stuck on it in mid-motion.
- ✦ Then the PCs will reappear on the Mirage right next to the cat-clock in the middle of the ship.
- ✦ PCs can freely interact with the sequence and change the events – this does not change the past, only what will happen in the echo.
- ✦ Objects in the echo can't be transported outside of it and always reset with the chapter, however can do real and lasting harm and damage to the PCs, their equipment or their animal companions. Should a PC fall unconscious or die, they will appear next to the cat-clock after a chapter switch or restart in the same state.
- ✦ PCs can change the chapter with buttons on the cat-clock, however this will work only if all repairers present in the anomaly are in the vicinity of the clock. Otherwise, a safety message will warn them about this. (Their equipment or familiars don't matter.) Switching the chapter always transports all repairers in the anomaly.
- ✦ The cat-clock has only limited energy, and there is limit of 8 replays, regardless of which chapters were visited. Partial replays still count against this limit. If the PCs won't get six missing cogs before and stay in the anomaly until the end of eighth replay, they will freeze like the rest of the unfortunate souls on Siren (for what to do if PCs freeze in the anomaly, see "Freezing in an Anomaly" (p. 58)). Prerecorded message in the cat-clock will tell the PCs how many replays are left on the start of each replay.
- ✦ The PCs start in the chapter 799. It does count against the limit of 8 replays.

She's right, I wouldn't overestimate the two-leggers' abilities either.

PCs' EQUIPMENT

The equipment that the PCs had on the Siren is transferred to the echo along with the PCs, as well as the PCs' animal and magical "familiar" with whom they have a strong bond. These familiars did not receive their own winding key; the key of their PC keeps them in the echo.

Any damage taken in the echo is real and will carry over to other chapters of the echo or to reality.

NPC BEHAVIOR IN THE ECHO

Echoed NPCs are unaware of the echo or their own echoed nature. They have a self-preservation instinct and are unaware that the echo has an edge – they see the world as completely normal. (However, it is possible to convince them that they are trapped in a time loop if the players are creative.) They are also completely oblivious to the cogs and cat-clock, even if they walk right through it, and they don't hear any sounds it makes.

They remember their past and have fully-fledged personalities. However, "past" does not mean previous replays of echo sequences in which they appeared – they do not remember those. Their memory is reset to the beginning of the chapter at the start of each replay. Their reaction to the presence of PCs will vary depending on the situation and how the PCs present themselves.

If some PCs have a connection to Celethar (see "Hunt for the Necromancer" (p. 33)), then Celethar's echo in time chapter 801 will recognize them, while his echo in the earlier time chapter 795 will not. Other NPCs from the section "Connecting Player Characters to NPCs" (p. 33) do not appear in this adventure.

THE ANOMALY'S EDGE AND WAY OUT

The anomaly is static (the ship is frozen in a fixed position regardless of what is playing in the echo on it), and has a diameter of 180 feet with its center in the central ship's mast. PCs see anything at a greater distance as foggy and unclear.

The edge of the anomaly is a soft barrier that feels gelatinous and can be passed through in both directions. Passing through it feels like being chewed up by a series of soft wheels.

Passing OUT through this wall causes minor injuries. Passing INTO the anomaly does not.

Once there are no PCs left in the anomaly, the sequence stops playing. Beldarina will not waste her energy on playing the sequence when there is no audience. Everything will remain "conserved" at the moment when

the last PC left the anomaly. If the PCs return, the projection will continue from the state in which they left it. The remaining number of sequence plays and the number of time knots already corrected will remain.

RALKA'S AGENDA

Ralka "Shell" Vassevich, a Mousekin, she/her, also intervenes in the anomaly. She is from the present day, just like the PCs.

She wants to collect "excess" cogs – those that remain after the cat-clock has enough to fix the problem. She wants to use the cogs to carry out her grand theft plan (*in the final book*), and at the same time, she's assessing the PCs' potential for future cooperation.

She also has one of Beldarina's winding eys (she got it in another anomaly), but she enters the echo only via a magical projection (as Beldarina does not want her in the anomalies, look *in the final book* for the reason). So Ralka is watching the anomaly from the pier and only participating via her mouse avatar.

MOUSE AVATAR

The mouse is immaterial and translucent, same as the cat-clock, and can only be seen by the PCs. It speaks human language, with a squeaky voice of indeterminate age and gender. It can only move in close proximity to the cat-clock (it draws energy for its projection from the Beldarina's clock).

PCs will see the mouse for the first time during the first chapter reset or shift. At first, the mouse will only flicker into and out of existence for a few seconds. Ralka is trying remote presence through an avatar for the first time, so at first she will seem startled and say things like, "Cool, it really works!" or "Wow, this is weird!" or "I'm translucent, hehe!"

Physical Interaction with the Avatar

The avatar can be injured, which causes mental pain to Ralka as well, but she is able to cancel the projection immediately and disappear from the anomaly to escape further harm.

If someone touches the avatar and tries to connect to it magically, it is difficult, but they have a chance to see through the eyes of the real Ralka for a moment: the end of the pier, the sea horizon, and the frozen Siren in the distance. From this, it is later possible to find out where she was sitting. For more on the possibility of tracking down Ralka in the city and capturing her physical form, see *Searching for Ralka in the final book*.

That must really annoy Beldarina, haha.

That's how I imagine you humans feel when putting on clothes.

THE OFFER

When the PCs untangle 5 knots, Ralka's avatar stabilizes and begins to tempt the PCs with the following offer: once they untangle the sixth knot and are preparing to repair the anomaly, they should not immediately initiate the repair by turning the winding key in the cat-clock, but instead try to untangle the two remaining knots as well. After those two knots are untangled, their cogwheels will remain, and Ralka can use them to make a component for her special magical invention – the clockworm (*in the final book*).

She cannot untangle a knot herself. Another repairman must bring her the cogwheel.

She will not introduce herself by name and is vague about her identity and motivations. Try to play her so that the players can tell that she is not entirely innocent and that she is trying to get them to participate in something sneaky.

"Me? I'm just a mouse. Well, a talking mouse, yeah, but who is without sin here, am I right? I know you don't belong on this ship, and you have a nice little key around your neck, and you're trying to fix things here! Which is a good thing, sure, great job, I'm rooting for you. But I might have a certain... offer."

"You've probably figured there are two extra cogs. I could use them for... research. Hand them to me, and I'll give you a souvenir that you can later use to replay the past somewhere in Kalusa. But you have to bring them to me in the same sequence you get them, or they disappear for good."

She is willing to offer an extra 100 dc as a reward if negotiated with (ducat is the currency in Kalusa, more *in the final book*), which she will hide under the pier in the harbor.

She can also explain the general workings of echoes to the PCs, e.g., that actions here do not really change the past and that freezing here is not a good idea. She can therefore also serve as a source of hints so that the players don't get stuck. If they are struggling too much, she can appear a little earlier and give them some advice. She has already experienced two anomalies before, the first of which she closed immediately according to Beldarina's instructions, the second of which she stayed in longer and explored how she could use the excess cogs.

However, she does not reveal anything about Beldarina (who she calls Clockwork Bel). She does not know much about her anyway, only page 3) and that the person who created the cat-clock, gave out the winding keys, and sends security messages is most likely her.

HANDING OVER A COG TO RALKA

To turn in a cog to Ralka, the PC must physically hand it to the mouse avatar. First, the knot under the cog must be resolved so that the physical cogs are created.

Only the excess cogs can be handed over to Ralka in this way – until the cat-clock has all the cogs it needs, cogs will automatically move to the cat-clock after the knot is untied, and no material version of the cog will be created from it.

When the mouse avatar gets the materialized cog, it devours it. For a moment, that avatar will also look as if it is made up of cogwheels, with the new one spinning the others and the avatar looking agitated.

After a few seconds, the avatar returns to its original form and spits the cog back out, only now it will look like a cheap metal gear, the kind sold to tourists at markets in Kalusa. When a PC touches this gear, it disappears and reappears on the magical chain on their neck next to Beldarina's key. It will not disappear while leaving the anomaly or changing the sequence. The owner will sense what they can do with it: spin it to replay a moment from the past, after which the cog breaks. This ability does not function inside Beldarina's echo. For more details on how this works, see **Rewinding the Past** (*in the final book*).

Ralka thanks them for the cog. When she gets the second one, she leaves the anomaly after handing over the souvenir gear (she doesn't want to annoy Beldarina any longer than necessary) with a "See ya later!"

In this anomaly, PCs can obtain up to two souvenir gears. But they don't have to – there is still a time limit, some knots can be difficult to untangle, and it may not be worth the risk.

You can find a sample note sheet where you can mark the cogs obtained by Ralka *in the final book*.

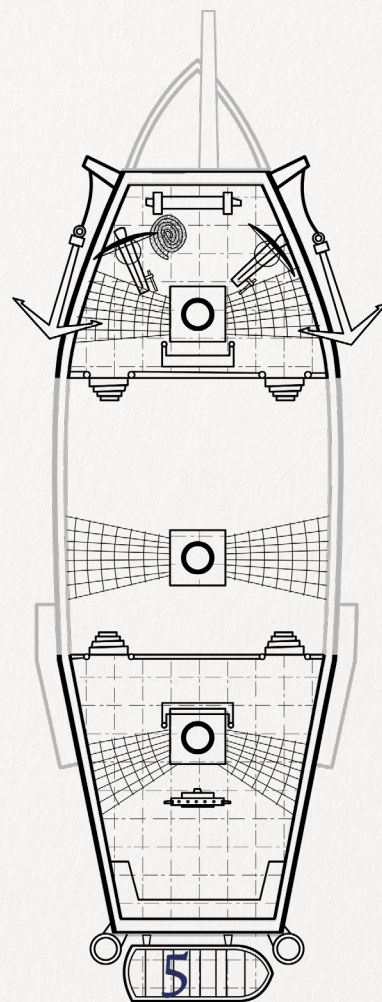
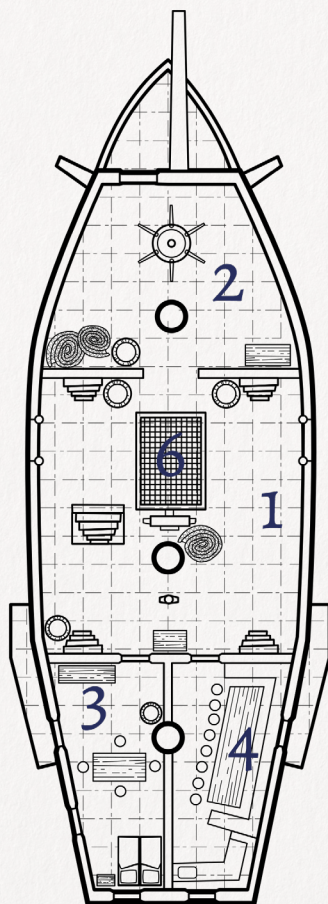
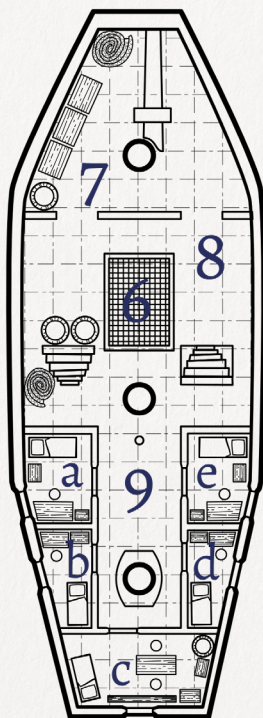
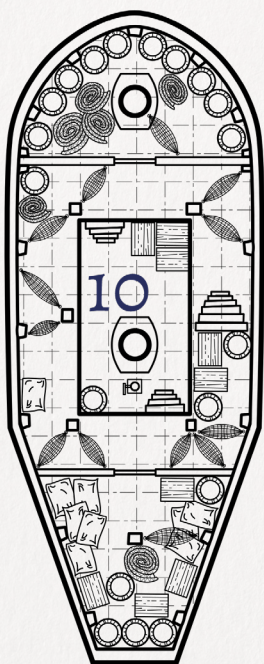
TIME CHAPTER 799 – THE COUP

The PCs begin the adventure in this time chapter.

April 15, 799. Mercenaries arrive to join a coup and overthrow the Kalusa government. The PCs immediately notice that this is a different ship than the Siren; it has different sails and a figurehead of a sorrowful woman on the bow. If they lean over the side, they will see a different name: the Mirage.



1 square = 5 feet



THE SHIP AT THE BEGINNING

You can find map of the ship on the page 56.

1. Main Deck

- It is tidy and ready for battle.
- **A hundred heavily armed mercenaries** are looking at the city, most of them wearing red scarves around their necks or arms.
- They don't know each other very well; they are a motley crew of several companies. If they see the PCs, they will assume that they belong – at most, someone will shout at them to put on a scarf.
- **14 sailors** are also preparing to disembark. They are led by Captain **Pim Branco**:
 - 50 years old, he/him, bald, with a beard braided into a plait, missing teeth, and a cough.
 - He was happy to get a lucrative job transporting mercenaries, but now he is overcome with fear that he may have bitten off more than he can chew.
- **Cog no. 1** glitters on the aft sail (details on the individual cogs are below).

2. The Crew's Cabin

- Empty, **sleeping nets** obstruct movement.
- You can climb out through the **windows**.

3. Captain's Cabin

- Contains a **table, bed, large wardrobe, and chest**.
 - The **chest** contains a green crystal charged with magical energy and 400 dc.
 - You can hide under the bed or in the wardrobe to spy on the captain.
- Ship's log on the table** reveals, among other things:
 - The Mirage was built by the Royal Shipbuilding Company in Kalusa in 795.
 - Branco sailed the seas as a freelance captain, earning money from whatever came his way.
 - Occasionally, work for Echias Lenarte, Protector of Kalusa is described in suspiciously vague terms.
 - Recently, Echias has rented the ship to help with his coup. Branco was to transport mercenaries recruited abroad to Kalusa and wait for their return and the transport of the spoils.
 - The last entry in the ship's log is from the day of the coup, April 15, 799, detailing the journey to the city – and his fears of how it would end.
- Cubbyhole** in the double middle wall. It contains these documents in waterproof cases:
 - Confirmation from the Kalusa Port Vaults (*in the final book*) regarding the rental of box no. 2577. "MYMIRAGE" is scribbled on the edge of the paper.
 - Love letters to the captain from Laurina von Egiam (for more about her, see the adventure *Own House* (*in the final book*)). Mostly innocent flirting, it can be deduced that Laurina is educated and artistic. The last letter is dated November 5, 798 (Branco's previous visit to Kalusa). Laurina promises Branco bequeath him her house on Rusty Square in her last will, "so that the greedy Siebel doesn't get it."
- You can climb out through the **windows**.

4. Kitchen/Dining Hall

- Empty, dishes are secured on shelves, smells of grog.
- You can climb out through the **windows**.

5. Lifeboat

- Towed on standby on a short rope very close behind the ship.

6. Loading Hatch

- Goes through both decks down to cargo hold.

7. Front Storage Room

- A coiled **anchor rope** passes through holes in the ceiling up to the outside.

8. First Lower Deck

- Three mercenaries and Norelma** are sitting next to the hatch.
 - Norelma:** Dwarf, 30 years old, she/her, tattoos all over her body.
 - Artificer** specialized in battle constructs, hates mages, and looks forward to conquering the city.
 - Has a metal wristband with colored buttons on her left hand, which she uses to control her beetle constructs in the cargo hold [10].



- Through the **hatch**, you can see Norelma's large metal beetles moving around in the cargo hold [10].
- Reeks of sweat and spilled beer. It is clear that the mercenaries slept wherever they could.

9. Passenger Cabins

- In cabin [9c], there is a **box with red scarves** and a hidden escape hatch leading out of the ship. It can be opened from the inside with a simple push. It opens just above the waterline.
- In the north-west corner of the cabin [9b], there is a hidden secret passage in the wooden floor leading to the cargo hold [10].

10. Cargo Hold

- 20 moving metal beetles**, each about the size of a wild boar.
 - They can absorb magic, reducing the effectiveness of spells cast by wizards.
 - They are not very adept at fighting, but they have great endurance.
 - Norelma controls the beetles with the metal band on her left hand. The beetles are currently in standby mode, attacking only when provoked.
- Cog no. 2** can be seen among the beetles.

THE COGWHEELS

Cog no. 1

- It hangs at the top of the triangular aft sail on the rear mast. It is visible from the deck.
- Draw the PCs' attention to the shiny cog as soon as they first look around the deck.
- The aft sail swings back and forth in the wind, secured by two ropes to the sides of the ship. When attempting to climb up, it helps if someone below tugs on the side ropes to keep the sail steady.
- From the 6th minute onwards, a character climbing the mast or sail will be at risk of injury from projectiles hitting the ship (see further below).
- If the sail's boom or the mast falls, the cogwheel will fall with it.

Cog no. 2

- It is down in the cargo hold [10] on the floor among the mechanical beetles. It can be seen from above through the grate.
- Norelma won't let just anyone near her beetles. At most, she will offer them access for her own amusement – she will clear the way down and then count down 30 seconds before switching the beetles to combat mode.
- The cargo hold can be accessed via a secret passage from [9b]. It can be found by thoroughly searching [9b] (in any chapter) and on the ship's plan in time chapter 795.

SEQUENCE OF EVENTS IF PCs REMAIN PASSIVE

15 min. remaining

The mercenaries gather on deck, rallying themselves for battle and praying to everything they can think of. The captain runs around the deck, organizing the sailors for disembarkation.

14 min. remaining

A larger-than-life, slightly translucent ghostly silhouette suddenly appears at the bow near the foremast: Echias Lenarte – 55 years old, slicked-back dark hair, aristocratic face, strong cheekbones. Charismatic and focused, he wants to present himself as a winner. He projects this message from his palace onto several ships at once, unable to see their reactions or interact with them.

Echias begins in a sharp voice, "Mercenaries! I am Protector Echias Lenarte, ruler of Lower Kalusa. With your help, I will be emperor of all of Kalusa tonight. Listen carefully. You will disembark at the port and quickly pass through the city center. The guards there will not resist you; they are with us. You will fight your way up to the upper city and hold the area around the town hall while I take care of any resistance inside. When I raise a purple flag with a claw on it, it means that I have taken power, and you loot the university and the villas around it. Our allies will have a red scarf, just like you do. I have chosen the best companies for this endeavor; I believe in your abilities. Tonight, we will have a celebration the likes of which the world has never seen!" The projection ends.

Regarding the description of sequences

Map of the ship is also at the last page of the preview.

In this time chapter, the ship is described in full; subsequent time chapters mark only the places that differ. What is not elaborated on contains no special features.

Unless otherwise stated in the description of the cogwheel, it is situated so that it can be picked up by hand. If the cog is too deep into a surface and it is necessary to in some way disturb the surrounding surface to pick up the cog, this is explicitly stated. This applies to all anomalies in this volume.

Events taking place in the echoes are described with timestamps according to what the Beldarina's clock shows, but this is mainly for your orientation, so don't worry too much about the exact timing. If you are unsure how long a character will spend to take an action, stick to these principles:

1. Be benevolent.
2. Reward creativity and good rolls.
3. Take advice from the players.

13 min. remaining

10 mercenaries who do not yet have a red scarf go to [9c] to get one and then return upstairs. They are led by **Arkox** – a greenskin orc, 30 years old, he/him; burly; maimed ear; pumped up on stimulants. He instructs the other mercenaries: “Don’t cast spells near the bugs, they eat magic!”

12 min. remaining

The ship speeds towards Kalusa. At the edges of the echo, you can see the sides of other ships full of mercenaries waving at each other. The captain goes to his cabin, puts the ship’s log in the chest, and checks the hiding place in the wall. Then he returns to the deck. Norelma and three mercenaries remain below deck.

10 min. remaining

Arkox suddenly puts his sword to Captain Branco’s throat and demands, “I know you have a locker in the Port Vaults with valuables in it. I heard you talking about it yesterday. Tell me the locker number and the password, and I won’t cut your throat.” The mercenaries standing around laugh. Branco squirms and appeals to the fact that they will need him to transport the loot. The rest of the crew is afraid to intervene and focuses on preparing to disembark.

8 min. remaining

A loud yell comes from the main deck: “Take cover!” Mercenaries try to hide, some below deck, some in the cabins above, some jumping off the ship. They look up to the sky, and although the PCs can’t see anything there because the incoming objects are still outside the echo, the NPCs appear horrified by what they can see. After a moment, alchemical bombs thrown from the city hit the ship – three firebombs the size of watermelons. Those who did not hide are at risk of injury.

7 min. remaining

There is chaos on the ship, but it continues to sail. Arkox leaves the captain alone, who hides in his cabin, checks the secret hiding place again, and prays to the sea spirits. Norelma stays below deck and watches over her beetles. Every minute, the ship is hit by a barrage of alchemy bombs, alternating between showers of fire, poison, and lightning. The lightning strikes cause injuries even below deck.



3 min. remaining

A barrage hits the captain’s cabin and kills Captain Branco.

2 min. remaining

Another volley of projectiles hits the ship, this time it’s giant pinecones bursting into tangles of thorny branches that dig into the deck. More brambles begin to sprout from the woodwork. The masts turn into giant wooden claws – getting to the cog no. 1 will now be much more dangerous.

1 min. remaining

The ship is too badly damaged and begins to sink. Water floods into the cargo hold. Arkox yells for everyone to jump into the water and swim to Kalusa. Norelma brings the beetles onto the deck. Just before the ship sinks, the sequence ends.

Measure game time, not real time

A sequence lasting 15 minutes of game time does not mean that you have to give players 15 minutes to solve it in real time. Players will take more time to find their bearings, and that’s okay. Calmly describe the situation to them and answer their questions. Let them plan, talk to NPCs, and investigate.

This adventure will take about 2 sessions to complete.



TIME CHAPTER 797 – THE CAPTURED MAGES

May 4, 797. Mikoto Sugano, acting on behalf of Echias Lenarte, sells 12 kidnapped mages who fell out of Echias' favor to Pim Branco.

The mages are drugged with a sleeping potion and have cuffs on their wrists that suppress their magical abilities.

Branco is taking the captives to the south of Kalusa where he gives them to a mysterious female figure that presented herself as some monster that devours Kalusaian mages, although Branco is not really sure about it and suspects that it is, in fact, someone from Kalusa (and he's right, it's Jolee Whitfield; more on this conspiracy in the final book).

It is nighttime, and the Mirage stands at the pier in the port of Kalusa. Her crew consists of 26 people – they are nervous, afraid that something will go wrong during the risky loading. Any PCs who appear will most likely be considered wizards from Kalusa who suddenly teleported onto the ship, and the crew will panic that their business has been exposed.

THE SHIP AT THE BEGINNING

1. Main Deck

- **Sailors bring prisoners** onto the ship in **sacks** that are enchanted to look like hay bales. The sailors are visibly nervous and handle the sacks with unusual care.
- **One sailor** stands on the front deck by the ballista and keeps watch.
- **Two sailors** keep watch at the stern by the helm.
- **Captain Branco** walks around the deck and monitors the situation.
- There are also **15 barrels** here, containing:
 - Fruit and vegetables
 - Glue in bottles
 - Nails
 - Cheap rye liquor
 - Bottles of sleeping draughts
 - Numbing tinctures
 - Lubricating oil capable of creating a highly slippery surface
- A black cat watches everything from the pier. This is

Mikoto Sugano, disguised by an illusion.

- 23 years old, posh clothes, perfumed and well-groomed.
- He recently entered Echias' service as an illusionist and was tasked with securing the transport of the captives.
- Eager to please Echias and stressed about everything going to plan. The smelly harbor offends him.

2. The Crew's Cabin

- **10 sailors** sleep here.

3. Captain's Cabin

- The **chest** contains a green crystal charged with magical energy and 2500 dc.
- The hiding place in the double middle wall contains the following documents in waterproof cases:
 - Confirmation from the Kalusa Port Vaults regarding the rental of box no. 2577. "MYMIRAGE" is scribbled on the edge of the paper.
 - Love letters to Laurina von Egiam. The last letter is dated May 3, 797 (Captain Branco is just returning from Kalusa, where he received the letter from his beloved yesterday). It is clear from the letter that Laurina is a singer and lives on Rusty Square.
 - Technical and logistical notes about transporting captured Kalusian mages to a meeting spot on open sea few days south of Kalusa, where an unmarked ship full of masked, monstrosity-looking humanoids takes them and pays for them. There were already four transactions of this kind, all in the last 6 months. Echias Lenarte is mentioned as the person who contracted the Mirage, with Mikoto Sugano as the liaison.

5. Lifeboat

- The boat hangs a few feet above the waterline, suspended at the stern behind the rudder at the height of the middle deck, and has **cog no. 4** on it.

9. Passenger Cabins

- They have been converted into cells with bars instead of walls.
- Cell [9c] is not locked and serves as a storage room.
- **Cog no. 3** can be seen in cell [9b].

THE COGWHEELS

Cog no. 3

- It sits in cell [9b], in the drinking trough by the bars separating cells [9b] and [9a]. It can be reached from cell [9a], but not from the corridor.
- At the beginning of the sequence, the lower deck is not guarded, as the sailors are still carrying the prisoners onto the ship. This is the ideal time to pick up the cog in [9b] before they put the captured mage Kasper there (see next page). He will be aggressive, and even in chains, he will be able to reach the trough with his feet and head and will kick and bite. The other prisoners are sedated with a potion and cannot be awakened in the usual way.
- You can also get to [9b] through a secret passage from the cargo hold [10].

Cog no. 4

- It is located in the boat and is not hidden in any way.
- There are always at least two sailors on watch at the helm, and they can see the boat.
- The boat can be accessed from below through a secret exit from [9c] and also through a window in the captain's cabin [3].

SEQUENCE OF EVENTS IF PCs REMAIN PASSIVE

15 min. remaining

Sailors board the ship from the pier via a plank, each carrying a prisoner in a sack, disguised by magical illusions as hay bales. Mikoto watches from the pier, similarly disguised as a cat. Branco monitors loading from the deck.

There is no one on the first lower deck, and 10 sailors are sleeping in the crew's cabin.



14 min. remaining

The sailors gradually carry 12 sleeping prisoners to the lower deck. There, the illusion of hay bales falls. They place 3 prisoners in each of the cells [9a], [9b], [9d], [9e]. The guards lock the cells and give the key to **Juli** – gnome, 20 years old, she/her, tired expression, sniffles a lot. Hasn't slept much and doesn't like it here. Her main goal is to avoid problems with the prisoners.

9 min. remaining

The sailors return to the deck. Only Juli remains with the prisoners.

Mikoto looks around one last time to make sure no one is following him and walks onto the deck, where he drops his illusion.

Mikoto: "Disgusting. This ship stinks. You all stink. If the money I'm supposed to collect from you was for me, I'd let you keep it just so that I wouldn't have to come here. Let's get this over with quickly."

Branco looks surprised and disgusted but just nods, goes to his cabin, opens a chest, counts out 2000 dc into a pouch and brings it to Mikoto.

8 min. remaining

The following conversation takes place:

Branco: "By the way, this is the last batch. Tell Echias that I will take no more mages from him, the deal is over. My client does no longer need mages to... uhm... devour."

Mikoto (surprised and nervous, but trying to appear in-the-know about the transaction): "What? Why? Did the monsters from Fiocardia develop a new diet or something? If they fancy clerics or alchemists now, we can arrange that as well... I would be happy to..."

Branco (with contempt): "I see... you have really no idea what's really going on here, do you?"

Mikoto: "Not really. But my boss will be really unhappy if I tell him this. Please, can we arrange something? All the executions are getting expensive and we need some way to recuperate costs. I can work out some discount—"

Branco: "No. I'm done with this. I thought I've seen all but this client, what she's capable of... just go back to your boss kid."

7 min. remaining

While Branco and Mikoto sort out the last details of the contract, In cell [5a], a prisoner wakes up; **Kasper Vrono** – fire mage, 24 years old, he/him, long dirty hair and a crazed expression. The sleeping potion had unpredicted side effects on him, and Kasper is now in a furious rage and thrashing about in his chains.

6 min. remaining

Kasper mumbles, growls, and tries to break out of his cell. Juli tries unsuccessfully to calm him down. She doesn't want to go on deck for new sleeping potions. She is afraid of both Branco and Mikoto and doesn't want to disturb their haggling.

4 min. remaining

Branco and Mikoto finish their conversation, Mikoto then casts an illusion on himself to look like the same black cat he was before, and leaves.

3 min. remaining

The ship pushes off from the pier. Kasper screams, bites, and spits around him. Juli goes on deck to look for a sleeping potion in the barrels. No one is guarding the captured mages.

2 min. remaining

Juli finds a sleeping potion on deck, but Branco tells her to hit the mage over the head and not waste the potion.

1 min. remaining

Juli returns downstairs, unlocks cell [9a], hesitates for a while as Kasper mumbles "Help me, please... don't leave me here like this...". Then she says "sorry" and hits him on the head with a plank, and knocks him unconscious. Then she locks the cell and stands guard in the hallway and looks unhappy.

Just before the ship sails away, the sequence ends.



TIME CHAPTER 801 – THE UNDEAD WRECK

March 2, 801. The Mirage is almost unrecognizable. It was damaged by artillery fire sustained two years ago, laid scuttled at the bottom of the harbor since then, and is being further deformed by the necromantic spell that raised it to the surface and is forcing it to sail once more.

From the holes in the ship, masses of undulating, rotting seaweed resembling protruding intestines are spilling out.

11 drowned undead lay around inside the ship, but they cannot be seen from the deck. At the beginning of the sequence, they are motionless, but if someone living passes by, they begin to claw in their direction. After a few minutes, they slowly get up and go where they can "smell brains", aiming to feast on them.

Norelma and Arkox are not among the drowned – they survived the sinking in 799 and made it to Kalusa (for more on them, see **The False Echias**, in the final book).

The lifeboat behind the ship is missing; only broken ropes remain.

Just off the starboard side, a rickety raft tied with a rope floats next to the ship. It cannot be seen directly from the deck, but voices can be heard coming from it. Likewise, the occupants of the raft cannot see the ship's deck. If one were to lean over the edge of the deck, cog no. 5 and four people could be seen on the raft:

☛ Celethar Isteri

- The elven necromancer who magically reanimated the ship.
- Here he is 30 years old, unkempt, a disturbed expression, wears a tattered black robe.
- A human skull reinforced with magical glass floats around his head, purple-green fire blazing from its eye sockets.
- He is ecstatic that he finally has the chance to cast a powerful necromantic spell after so long, and is agitated and anxious that something could go wrong.
- If any PC has a connection to his past ("Hunt for the Necromancer" (p. 33), this version of Celethar will recognize them.

☛ Ulgmar Bronzefire

- 22 year old dwarf necromancer, bald head, short beard, white facial tattoos, and a blue cloak.
- He is enjoying the opportunity to assist Celethar with a necromantic spell.
- Has a bag under his cloak containing two explosive potions and two acid potions.

☛ Sebarra

- 22 year old orc artificer, an angry expression and mismatched daggers at her waist.
- She organized the operation and is steering the raft. She is looking forward to sending the wreck into the harbor and destroying the property of the Regals (in the final book), whom she hates.
- Has a belt with 4 explosive potions and 4 potions for breathing underwater.

☛ The Mole

- 25 year old mage; a mutated human with mole-like hands covered in sticky clay, face obscured but their claws visible.
- They keep an eye on their surroundings, thinking ahead to the escape plan.
- They don't agree with this operation, but don't want to abandon their friends.

Celethar and his crew can no longer call off the operation; the reanimated wreck is visible in the harbor, and the alarm bells are ringing. When they see the PCs, they will be surprised and won't know what to make of it. They will be willing to come to an agreement if it allows them to complete their operation undisturbed.

For the drowned undead, use basic zombie statblock but describe how mushy they are and give them resistance to fire.

PARTS OF THE SHIP AT THE BEGINNING

1. Main Deck

- It's very slippery, sand and silt on the deck from its years under the sea.
- All three masts are bent in half, with branches growing from their ends. They look like giant claws leaning over the sides of the ship.
- The ship's figurehead, carved by Greysen Whitfield in the likeness of his sister Annabel (a woman in her thirties with an innocent expression on her face, "5 min. remaining" (p. 56)), rocks back and forth and wails a **confused litany** of death and destruction.
 - The wailing causes minor mental injuries or concentration penalties.
 - Due to the necromantic spell affecting the vessel, the figure can speak. She is unhappy, and if her agitation increases, it can cause the ship to vibrate so much that the bombs stuck in [2] and [8] explode.
 - The players can learn from the figurehead that Annabel committed suicide, she was close with her brother, Greysen, and her life also revolved around Echias Lenarte who was her employer and benefactor.
 - Attacking the figurehead risks an attack from the mast-claw.

2. Crew's Cabin

- **2 drowned undead.**
- 1 unexploded alchemist **bomb**, which causes fire damage.

3. Captain's Cabin

- **1 drowned undead** – Captain Pim Branco.
 - His body is well preserved and contains fragments of his memory. He may not necessarily attack immediately.
 - Occasionally, he glances at the secret hiding place in the wall.
- The hiding place in the double middle wall contains the same documents as in "Time Chapter 799 – The Coup" (p. 44), preserved in waterproof cases.

4. Kitchen/Dining Hall

- **2 drowned undead.**

8. First Lower Deck

- **6 drowned undead.**
- There is a **large hole** on the starboard side through which you can see the raft and hear the conversation on it.
- **Cog no. 6** is here, tangled in animated, squirming seaweed. Right next to it swings an unexploded green corrosive bomb. If handled carelessly, the bomb will explode: minor injury and damage to equipment worth 50 dc.

THE COGWHEELS

Cog no. 5

- Stuck in the middle of the raft (can be grasped).

Cog no. 6

- Below deck, tangled in animated seaweed intestines.

SEQUENCE OF EVENTS IF PCs REMAIN PASSIVE

15 min. remaining

Celethar mutters and waves his hands to cast the spell. The skull is flying around him, and Ulgmar assists him.

14 min. remaining

Celethar raises his hands and shouts, "I release you, my messenger of death!" The mast claws dig into the water and "paddle," and the ship slowly begins to move toward the harbor. The undead on board wake up.

13 min. remaining

The wreck sets off for the harbor. The drowned rise and search for prey. The raft floats alongside the ship, tethered by a rope. The ship's figurehead turns to Celethar and wails, "Celethar... You will suffer for what you have done to me..." He is thrown off balance and staggers. The flying skull shakes, its fire weakens, and it loses its ability to fly and falls into the sea.

Celethar cries, "No! My Boney!"

Unmoved, Sebarra tells him, "You'll make another one."

Celethar is distraught. "But she's been with me since I came back."

Sebarra rolls her eyes. The ship paddles on with the four of them pulled along behind it.

12 min. remaining

Next to the raft, a sea sprite suddenly flies out of the water – a small winged fairy made entirely of water. It rearranges itself into the face of an old bearded elf and levitates a few feet above the surface. It is a distant projection of the elven water mage Mirodar – Celethar's father, 68 years old here. He is somewhere in the Kalusian bay on a houseboat, and sensed his son's necromancy from the water. He has projected himself through the water sprite because he is worried for his son.

11 min. remaining

"Celethar! What in the Ezil's name are you doing? And who are these strange people?" Mirodar demands.

Celethar (surprised): "Father... what do you want? This is none of your business. Didn't you say you never wanted to see me again?"

Mirodar: "Never mind that now. Are you sending that ship to the harbor? By a hundred thunders, you'll get yourself into major trouble!"

Celethar (laughing): "Now you're worried? You've got to be joking. If you still care a tiny shred about me, then support me, damn it! Stay here and watch us crush the Whitfields' puny little kingdom!"

Mirodar: "Celethar, don't be crazy. This isn't a joke. The authorities could consider this sabotage of the city, and that's a crime punishable by death. Believe me, the Whitfields will use their influence to make sure of it. Jolee never forgot what you—"

Mirodar's speech is cut off by Sebarra, who throws an explosive potion at his illusory head. It bursts, and the projection vanishes into mist.

Sebarra sits back, satisfied. "Good, he shut up. We have to focus, come on! We're almost done!"

Celethar looks anxiously at the spot where the head was. "That didn't hurt him, right?" Sebarra shakes her head. Celethar looks relieved and focuses on the spell again.

10 min. remaining

The wreck continues to move forward, and Celethar and Ulgmar keep casting the spell. Alarm bells ring in the harbor.

9 min. remaining

The wreck keeps getting closer to the harbor. It hits a large wave, and the alchemical bomb stuck in [8] explodes and new holes appear in the hull. (Now, if PCs want to traverse into adjacent room, roll a d6: on 4+, there is now a hole which can be crawled through.) Despite the damage, the wreck continues to move forward.

8 min. remaining

The Mole says, "It can sail by itself now! We have to get out of here!" Sebarra cuts the raft loose and hands out water-breathing potions. All four jump into the water and swim to the bottom, where the Mole plans to use magic to create an underwater tunnel.

7 min. remaining

Arrows and darts from outside the echo volley towards the Mirage.

6 min. remaining

The wreck crashes into a ship moored at the harbor. The alchemical bomb stuck in the crew's cabin [2] explodes. Spars of splintered wood fly, and sailors from the attacked ship fall into the water. Panic in the harbor.

5 min. remaining

More arrows and darts fly at the Mirage.

4 min. remaining

A larger ship appears nearby, with Jolee Whitfield standing on deck. She's 62 years old here, well-dressed, with a saber at her waist. She is at first brisk and dominant in demeanor. She defends the harbor like it's her personal property. Shouting things like, "Yo-ho!" and "Let's feed the fish!", she fires explosive missiles from a small ballista. When she sees the figurehead of the Mirage, she pauses for a moment and whispers, "Annabel..." but then clenches her jaw and attacks even more ferociously.

2 min. remaining

The Mirage manages to destroy two more ships and one pier, but gradually falls apart. Just before the undead ship is blown to smithereens, the sequence ends.

TIME CHAPTER 795 – THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE SHIP

September 18, 795. The Mirage is only just being completed in the Royal Shipbuilding Company dock, owned by “Lady” Jolee Whitfield” (p. 22). The dock is rectangular in shape, with a door in the middle of the longer wall, to the left side of the ship. The anomaly occupies the entire dock and a small section of muddy paths beyond its walls.

The ship is hoisted on logs and surrounded by scaffolding. On the right side of the bow, the scaffolding collapsed and was replaced by ropes for suspending workers. On the left side of the bow, there are steps leading to the deck. The ship's lifeboat is not visible.

There are lots of tools, planks, ropes, and other materials scattered everywhere.

Two workers are working on deck, three are on the scaffolding, one is suspended on a rope with them, and two others are resting by the toolboxes on the port side.

The workers are loyal to Jolee Whitfield, who they call Lady Whitfield, and if she commands them, they will take up their tools and fight. Any PC who appears will probably be considered an unwelcome snooping Kalusian.

Anomalies are a means, not an end

As you will discover in subsequent adventures, most of the content of this campaign is not about the anomalies. It mainly deals with the city's problems and opportunities for adventurers. This should give rise to group and personal goals for the player characters, such as becoming respected citizens, obtaining powerful artifacts, staging a coup, building a cult, destroying the city, etc.

Anomalies are a tool to show an interesting past and provide PCs with exclusive information that they can use to fulfill their goals. Anomalies are not designed with the idea that exploring and closing them should be a player's goal in itself – that would be too impersonal and negatively motivated (focusing on preventing something, not achieving something).

PARTS OF THE SHIP AT THE BEGINNING

1. Main Deck

- Unfinished; with a **risk of falling** into a hole. The figurehead is not done yet.
- **Jolee Whitfield** stands at the helm and supervises the construction.
 - Here she is 56 years old, well-dressed, brisk and dominant, with a saber at her waist.
 - She is proud of her ships and looks forward with almost religious fervor to the launch of this “beauty.”
- **Two laborers** are working on the deck.
- In the middle of the deck, a few steps north of the cat-clock, stands a flower pot with a two-foot-high **coniferous tree** in it.
 - It looks unusually colorful and lively, and you can sense magic coming from it. Characters knowledgeable in magic can recognize that it is a source of natural mana.

3. Captain's Cabin

- Among the tools lies a plan of the ship, including “3. Captain's Cabin” (p. 45).

8. First Lower Deck

- Jolee's son, **Greysen Whitfield**, is meditating in the hallway between the cabins.
 - 37 years old, half-naked, smells of pine, with druidic amulets around his neck.
 - He treats this work as routine and looks forward to a calm, uneventful evening.
 - He is preparing to cast spells, improving the ship with natural magic.
 - He is mentally connected to the small tree on the main deck, which he uses as a source of energy.
 - While he meditates, his mind is highly vulnerable, and damage to the tree could send him into a coma. Even after waking up from meditation, damage to the tree would hurt him.

9. Passenger Cabins

- The hull on the starboard side is not finished; **laborers on scaffolding** are currently working there and can see inside cabins [9d] and [9e] through the missing planks.
- **Cog no. 7** protrudes from the ceiling beam in [9e]. It is buried so deep in the beam that it cannot be grasped by hand.

THE COGWHEELS

Cog no. 7

- It is stuck in the ceiling beam of the cabin [9e]. It is so deep that it cannot be removed without damaging the wood around it first.
- The cog cannot be seen from the kitchen one floor above; the beam is too thick.
- The wood can be chipped away from both the cabin and the kitchen, but this will be noisy, and the workers on the scaffolding can see into the cabin.

Cog no. 8

- It is stuck to the back of Elling Whitfield, who is dragged onto the dock at the beginning of the sequence. Make sure the PCs see it as Elling is dragged onto the deck.
- It can be grabbed, but if Elling moves a lot, a roll is required to maintain concentration.

SEQUENCE OF EVENTS IF PCs REMAIN PASSIVE

15 min. remaining

Jolee stands at the helm and takes a swig from her rum flask. Greysen is below deck, meditating. The door to the dock opens, and two harbor brawlers, armed with swords, drag a brutally beaten man inside. It is **Elling Whitfield**, Jolee's grandson and Greysen's nephew.

- Here he is 19 years old and has no blood tattoos or blood magic abilities yet.
- His voice and mind contain aggression and malice. He thinks only of revenge.
- Cog no. 8 is on Elling's back.

14 min. remaining

The brawlers drag Elling onto the ship and into the middle of the deck. An angry Jolee comes down from the bridge and interrogates Elling. The conversation goes something like this:

Jolee: "Elling?! By the sea devils, what is going on? Who did this to you?"

Elling (panting furiously): "Tal-Reon... Corlani... he won't get away with this. You'll teach him a lesson, won't you, Grandma?"

Jolee: "Tal-Reon Corlani? He doesn't beat people up for no reason. What did you do, tell me!"

Elling: "Well... I went to visit my ex, see how she's doing... and the bastard suddenly showed up and punched me, and then it all went downhill from there..."

Jolee: "For fuck's sake... Your ex? The girl you threatened with a knife when she told you to get lost? That ex?"

Elling (surprised): "What? How do you know that?"

Jolee punches Elling: "You loser! You scumbag! I'm not sure what's worse – being a loser or a scumbag, but by the garces, you're both! You pull a knife on a defenseless woman and then get beaten up by a guy who doesn't even carry a weapon? And then you come crying back to Grandma, begging her to fix it for you? I always tell you to pick your battles, but you've got soup for brains. If you actually trained properly, then maybe one day you'd get to show him what you're made of. But you'd have to practice with someone other than your poor ex for that. Get up, and get out of my sight."

13 min. remaining

Elling shuffles off the ship. Jolee turns and goes to the captain's cabin.

12 min. remaining

Elling descends the steps, but instead of leaving the dock, he takes one of the workers aside – **Rudy** (20 years old, he/him, redhead with a broken nose, sly voice, looks forward to going to the pub).

They walk a little further under the ship so that no one can hear them. Rudy knows the port thugs, and Elling asks him to find at least six of them for revenge.

Rudy objects that none of his acquaintances would dare to take on Tal-Reon Corlani, even with such superior numbers. For the next couple of minutes, they argue about how to do it – in the end, they can't come up with anything better than Elling paying the thugs a lot of money to motivate them to attack one of the best-trained brawlers in the city.

11 min. remaining

Jolee takes a map of the ship with secret passages from the captain's cabin and goes below deck to see Greysen. He has come out of meditation and is waiting there. The brawlers who brought Elling in earlier chat with the workers on deck for a while and then leave.

10 min. remaining

Jolee hands Greysen the blueprint, pointing out the secret passages and compartments that the clients want added to the ship. For the next couple of minutes, they go together around all the specified places, and Greysen conjures up secret compartments and passages. As he casts his spells, the tree on the deck glows with magic.

5 min. remaining

The door to the dock opens, and Celethar Isteri enters – here he is 25 years old, still a graduate student at the university, well-groomed and healthy. He has a black magic staff and an elegant necromancer's robe decorated with symbols of skulls and bones and bearing the insignia of Felix's magic university. If any PC has a connection to his past ("Hunt for the Necromancer" (p. 33), this version of Celethar does not recognize them (this happened before Celethar's trip abroad).

Behind Celethar shuffles **Annabel** – a zombie, gray skin, swaying gait, uniform of a Protectorate captain of the guard. Her face is covered with a scarf, hiding a 35-year-old woman with a symmetrical face, an innocent expression, and piercing eyes. A purple aura leads from the zombie to Celethar's staff; the zombie is under his control.

4 min. remaining

Celethar and the zombie reach the deck of the ship, everyone watching them silently. Jolee and Greysen return to the deck from below.

3 min. remaining

The following conversation takes place:

Jolee: "Magister... Isteri, if I remember correctly? I wasn't expecting you here. What's going on?"

Celethar (without emotion): "I have come to inform you, madam, that your daughter Annabel has died. The formalities have been taken care of; you don't have to worry about anything. And thank you for the quality material." And with that, he reveals the face of the zombie – the same face that the Mirage's figurehead has in other sequences (Greysen's grief over his sister's death was projected into the magic that shaped the ship).

Jolee and Greysen freeze and stare in horror. Then Greysen cries out, "What have you done?! My sister!!"

Celethar (doesn't understand why they are upset; he feels he is doing everything right): "Calm down, Mr. Whitfield. Annabel committed suicide in the palace of her employer, Echias Lenarte, who thus has the right to dispose of her remains. In accordance with standard procedure, he immediately handed the body over to me."

Greysen (sobbing): "What... But... Suicide? ... You could have let us say goodbye to her!"

Celethar: "Every hour of delay after death degrades the material. Protector Lenarte arranged everything quickly, for which I am grateful, since raising the body helped with my dissertation. If you want to buy the corpse now, it will cost—"

Jolee (sternly): "Get out. Get out, and leave her here."

Celethar tries to argue about the price of the corpse, but Jolee cuts him short: "I don't give a shit about your school, Protector, or the laws of this city. Leave her here, now, and get off my ship. Or you won't leave at all."

2 min. remaining

Elling, who has just come aboard after talking to Rudy, joins the scene: "Well, look at that. Mama's finally done it. Looks like I'm not the family loser after all."

Jolee (bellows suddenly): "Get out. All of you. NOW!!"

1 min. remaining

Everyone except Jolee and Celethar leave the dock. Celethar releases the zombie from his power, leaving her with Jolee, and as he departs, he says, "You should also know that Protector Lenarte will keep some of Annabel's personal belongings as compensation for the trouble this matter has caused him. The rest will be delivered to the Port Vaults, box number 3297, password DEATH. Have a nice day."

Jolee (quietly at his back) "I'm not done with you yet."

When everyone leaves, Jolee approaches the zombie, which is slowly beginning to disintegrate now that the necromancer's power is no longer holding it together. Jolee looks around to make sure no one is nearby, then begins to cry. "It's my fault... I'm sorry, Annie... you should never have..." she sobs and falls to her knees, stroking the corpse's face as it is crumbling to dust. The sequence ends.



CLOSING THE ANOMALY

The anomaly will NOT close automatically after placing six cogs in the cat-clock. It is still necessary to insert the key into the winding hole in the cat-clock (only one PC needs to do this; all keys are the same) and turn it.

PCs thus have the option to wait and collect extra cogs for Ralka and watch the sequences without disruption.

Note that the limit of 8 replays and the threat of freezing still apply, even if the cat-clock has all the cogs.

IMPORTANT SECURITY MESSAGE

When the sixth cog is placed in the cat-clock, all PCs will receive an important security message from Beldarina in their heads, this time in both audible and visual form.

Telepathically, they will see an image of a lavishly furnished study with lots of antique-looking objects (Beldarina's study from the year 0) and drawings of gear-driven devices, including clockwork cats and star maps.

In the middle is a chair with its back turned – the person in it cannot be seen, nor can any legs be seen under the chair. Beldarina sits in the chair and speaks in a pragmatic and scholarly female voice:

"This is a security recording in case the automatic correction of anomalies through my magnus apparatus fails. Anomalies that shut down parts of reality are malfunctions with potentially cataclysmic consequences. Therefore, an emergency mechanism has been activated to enable the manual closing of the anomalies.

Before you is a user interface converted into a form comprehensible to you. You have also been given an activation key. After correcting the errors indicated by the red lights, insert the key into the interface and turn it." With that, the image disappears.

"Magnus apparatus" is a reference to Beldarina's machine in the "Alabaster Tower" (p. 17).

REPAIRING THE CLOCK

After turning the key, all PCs are transported to the cat-clock if they are not next to it yet, and its cogs start spinning. After a while, the PCs begin to see visions of cog-wheels everywhere again.

All PCs will have their winding key strengthened at that moment (more *in the final book*). Then the rest of the security message will be played:

"Anomaly closed. The system errors persist. 98% probability of further occurrences. Analyzing cause:---" For a moment, only the clacking of gears can be heard, and then: "---failure of responsible persons. Intentional sabotage for political, ideological, or personal reasons. Improvisation on the part of repairmen necessary. Caution required. Locate the Vanishing Statue for---"

The end of the message is damaged; just an unintelligible buzz can be heard.

The message refers to the cat statue in the Alabaster Tower (see *The Vanishing Statue in the final book*).

SPECIAL SITUATIONS

Here are some guidelines for dealing with anomalies (this one as well as any following). This is not an exhaustive list, and don't be afraid to bend the principles of the anomaly to accommodate creative player ideas.

PCs TRY TO ESCAPE FROM THE ANOMALY

Players don't have to deal with the anomaly, they are free to escape from it. However, Ralka does not want to leave the anomaly unresolved and will try to convince them to close it. She will offer arguments even for selfish characters – strengthening the winding key may be useful, and a lingering anomaly and the subsequent discomfort of the affected people after unfreezing could attract unwanted attention from the authorities.

If the PCs still decide to flee the anomaly anyway, Ralka will advise them that they can return later.

If all PCs leave the anomaly, Beldarina's security protocol will suspend the echo until they return. The PCs' keys will remain – Beldarina cannot take them away, no matter how much they anger her.

Escaping from the anomaly on the Mirage throws the PCs into the water near the ship. Show the players the map of the Protectorate (*in the final book*) and let them choose where to swim. While in the water, they may encounter a problem caused by unstable magic (see **Problem with Water** *in the final book*).

BEWARE OF SPLITTING THE PARTY!

A situation may arise where one PC tries to escape the anomaly by reaching its edge (for example, if their life is in danger and they are close to the edge), while the rest of the PCs remain in the echo.

This situation is problematic because it can remove one character from the rest of the adventure. Therefore, it is important to give the character a clear indication that they can return to the echo at any time (use Ralka for this). If they still decide to swim away, that's okay – the important thing is that it is based on an informed decision and not incomprehension.

ENTERING AN ANOMALY FROM THE OUTSIDE

If the PCs are outside the anomaly, they simply cross the edge of the anomaly (entering does not cause injury) and appear in the echo at the edge from which they came; if there is nowhere obvious to “land”, they are teleported to the nearest available space within the ship. Larger objects that they bring with them (e.g., a vehicle) will also be transported inside. “Echoed” NPCs will perceive it as if the PCs teleported there.

If returning to the anomaly, the sequence will continue from the state in which the last PC left it. The remaining number of chapter replays and the number of already untangled knots (and the corresponding gears in the cat-clock) remain.

People without a winding key will not voluntarily enter an anomaly – they will see the frozen reality beyond its border and at the same time feel a strong sense of brokenness and warning in their heads, which will deter them.

FREEZING IN AN ANOMALY

People with winding keys freeze in the anomaly only after exhausting all replays of sequences. Everyone else freezes immediately upon entering the anomaly (they do not enter the echo of the past at all).

Freezing sends the person into a standing coma. They will only wake up when the anomaly dissipates, and then experience a severe, incurable hangover for 14 days.

All anomalies dissipate spontaneously four days after their creation.

Ralka's avatar is not physical, so if the replays of sequences are exhausted, the avatar will disappear rather than be frozen.

DESTRUCTION OF THE CAT-CLOCK

The cat-clock can be destroyed using any special skills or items that affect phantoms or projections. Beldarina will send a security message warning against such an action: “Warning: destroying the cat-clock will incapacitate the repairers and make it impossible to repair the anomaly manually.” The PC should have the opportunity to reconsider their action.

When the cat-clock is destroyed, the echo collapses, and all repairers in the anomaly freeze. The spontaneous dissolution of the anomaly after 4 days (and the hangover from the long freeze) will still occur.

Destroying a cat-clock in one anomaly will NOT destroy other cat-clocks in any other anomalies. The security protocol handles each anomaly completely separately.

WHAT HAPPENS TO THE ITEMS FROM THE ANOMALY?

If the PCs in the echo obtained excess cogs and had Ralka make souvenir gears out of them, these souvenirs will remain with them after the anomaly closes.

All other items created by the echo will disappear irretrievably after the anomaly is destroyed (either by the PCs closing it or by it spontaneously dissolving after 4 days).

EXAMPLE OF THE BEHAVIOR OF ECHOED ITEMS

In the echo, the PCs convince Captain Branco to write a will in which he bequeaths his property to them.

If they give Branco both paper and ink from reality, they will keep the signed will even after leaving the echo.

If they use paper from reality and “echoed” ink, they will be left with a blank, slightly scratched piece of paper.

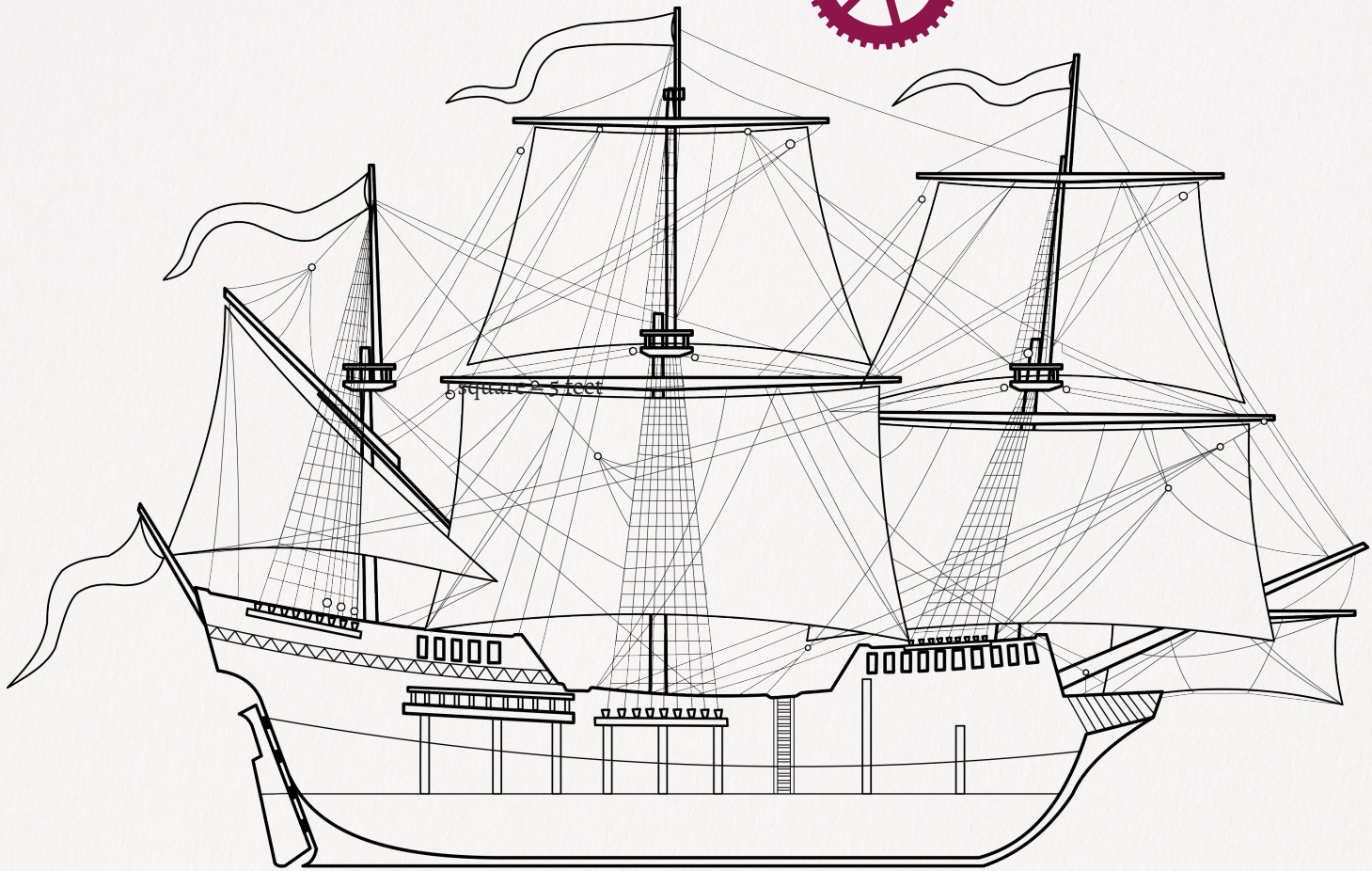
If they use ink from reality and “echoed” paper, then at the end of the sequence, the paper will disappear, and only an ink stain will remain.

THE JOURNEY CONTINUES

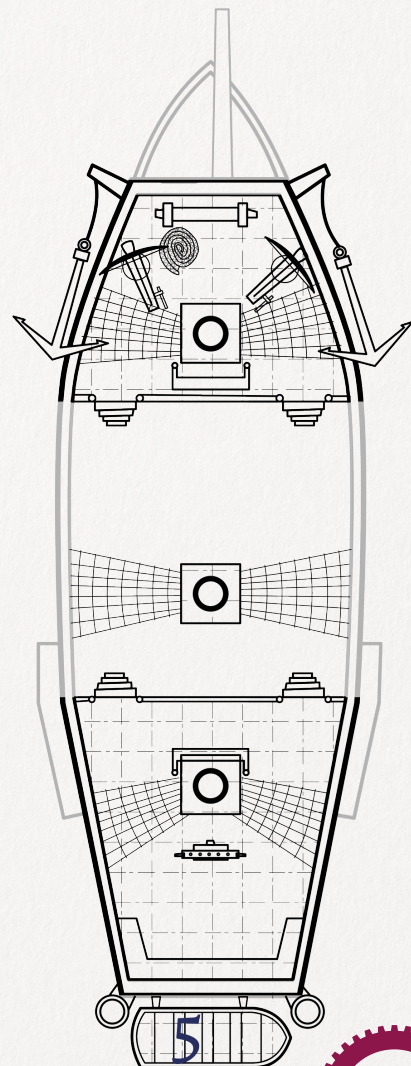
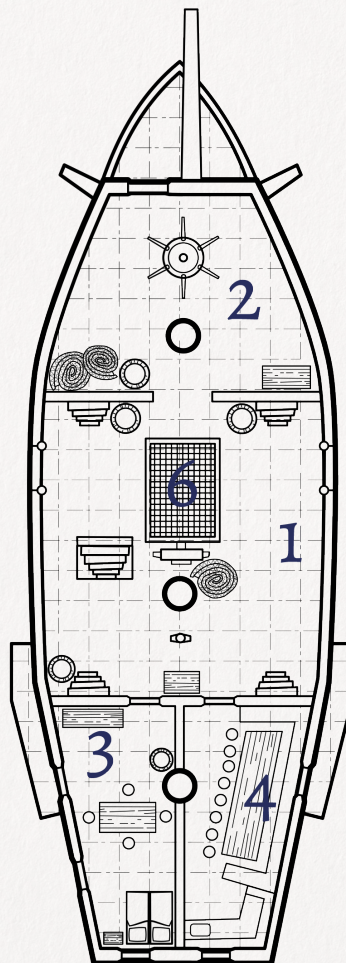
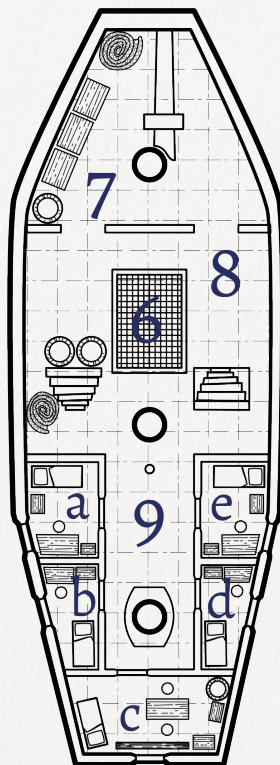
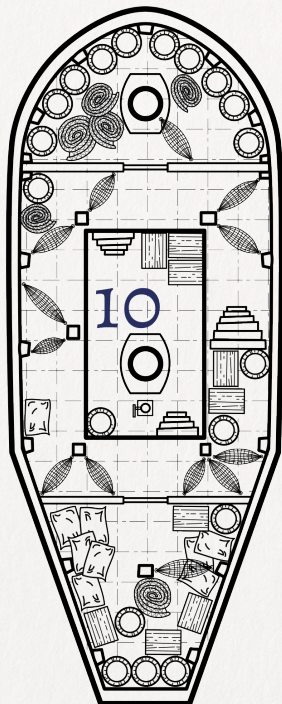
After playing the final security message, the vision of gears everywhere disappears, and the PCs find themselves back on the Siren, roughly in the middle of the ship. The ship continues on to Kalusa as if nothing had happened. As long as the repairers were successful, the people on the Siren will not notice anything unusual and do not experience a temporal hangover.

The ship arrives in the city and anchors in the middle of the harbor.

Players should take away several plot hooks from this adventure that they can explore in the city: they can pick up Captain Branco's belongings in the Port Vaults, try to find out more about Ralka, visit the Whitfields, investigate the origin of the anomalies and the Vanishing Statue, etc. In any case, this adventure should give the campaign enough energy to get started and allow you to hand over the reins to the players.



1 square = 5 feet



Discover the hidden corners
of this city steeped in magic
and learn about the turbulent
fates of its inhabitants. Will
your actions go down in
history?



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