

AX&X: THE SKY-ANCHOR OF AETHELGARD

A fantasy adventure for AX&X, for 4 to 6 characters of levels 4 to 5

THE HOOK

A frantic gnome named Pipkin, Archivist of Oakhaven, hires the party on the strength of a torn star-chart. It points to the Cloud-Spires, a range of floating peaks that broke from the mainland during the Great Sundering and drifted off centuries ago. Pipkin is sure the *Sovereign of the Zephyr*, a gnomish airship that once crossed oceans in days, still sits docked at the highest spire, held in an old stasis field. He offers **1,000 GP** for its safe return, and first claim on whatever else the party can carry off.

ACT I: THE ASCENT

The party starts at the foot of the Cloud-Spires and has to reach the floating islands.

- **The Gravity Lift:** A massive stone platform, powered by a dormant elemental core, still stands at the base. Wake the core and it will carry the party up.
- **The Gargoyles:** A colony of gargoyles roosts on the platform and treats it as an ancestral throne. Their chieftain wants a tribute of gems or a tale of real bravery before he lets anyone pass. Offer one and the party rolls Reaction at +2; refuse and they fight for the control crystals.
- **The Rise:** Starting the lift trips an alarm in the spire above. As the platform climbs through the mist, harpies swoop in and sing, trying to coax characters off the edge.

ACT II: THE SPIRE OF WHISPERS

The lift reaches a jagged island of obsidian and marble, overgrown with glowing flora. The way to the airship runs up through the Spire of Whispers, a vertical dungeon of crumbling libraries and floating stairs.

- **Weightless Zones:** Some halls have lost their gravity. Crossing one is a **STR or DEX Check, 12+**, or you drift into the ceiling spikes or out into open air.
- **Wraith-Librarians:** The spire is haunted by wraiths that attack anyone who reads the forbidden scrolls. A wraith can hush a caster: **Will save** or no casting for 1d4 rounds. They are harmed only by magic or silver.
- **The Solar Mirrors:** The hangar doors open only to concentrated moonlight. Three mirrors on three platforms must be turned to throw the beam into a central prism, each a character's action, while Clockwork Sentinels come in waves. Three aligned beams and the doors grind open.

ACT III: THE SOVEREIGN OF THE ZEPHYR

Beyond the doors waits the *Sovereign of the Zephyr*, a ship of brass and mahogany. It is not empty.

- **Thalros:** A cloud giant has claimed the ship as his hoard. He has no wish to sail it. He lounges on its deck and keeps the crew's preserved bodies as furniture.
- **The Deck Fight:** The battle plays out on the open deck. Thalros wakes the ship's last working systems to call up small thunderstorms that shove the party toward the rail.
- **The Failing Engine:** The Aether-Engine is unstable. Every few rounds the deck heaves: **Dodge save** or slide 20 ft in a random direction. Over the rail is a long fall.
- **The Navigator:** With Thalros down, one riddle remains, etched into the helm. Solve it with an **INT Check, 12+** or with good talk, and the ship's sleeping spirit wakes. The crew called it the Navigator.

THE CHOICE

The Navigator opens its eyes and asks whose orders it follows now. The party has three ways to go.

- 1 Keep the *Sovereign*. It answers to the party, but Pipkin's claim and the approaching fleet both come due.
- 2 Hand the ship to Pipkin and Oakhaven. Collect the pay and a standing welcome in the gnome-halls.
- 3 Let the Navigator steer its own course. It grants the party one voyage anywhere in thanks, then lifts off alone.

REWARDS

Pipkin pays the promised **1,000 GP** the moment the chart proves true.

Keep the *Sovereign* and the party holds a ship that crosses oceans in days, though its Aether-Engine wants a gnomish wright's care after every long haul.

Either way, a fleet of hired blades now knows the ship was found, and the open sky ahead is not empty.

THREATS

HD Hit Dice, **AC** Armor Class, **Atk** attack bonus and damage. Attack bonus equals HD.

- **Gargoyle:** HD 4, HP 18, AC 16, Atk +4 (1d6 claws). Flies. A Mindless construct. Resistant to all but magic weapons.
- **Gargoyle Chieftain:** HD 6, HP 28, AC 17, Atk +6 (1d8 claws). Flies. As a gargoyle, but proud, and open to tribute.
- **Harpies:** HD 3, HP 13, AC 13, Atk +3 (1d4 talons). Flies. Song: Will save or walk toward the harpy, even off a ledge, until struck.

- **Wraith-Librarian:** HD 5, HP 22, AC 15, Atk +5 (1d6 chilling touch, Body save or Injured). Harmed only by magic or silver. Can hush a caster for 1d4 rounds on a failed Will save.
- **Clockwork Sentinel:** HD 4, HP 20, AC 17, Atk +4 (1d8 blade). A Mindless construct. Vulnerable to lightning.
- **Thalros, Cloud Giant:** HD 8, HP 40, AC 17, Atk +8 (2d8 slam). Thunder-call: a 20 ft burst, Dodge save or 3d6 and shoved to the deck's edge.