



# *The World of the 7 Skies*

Above the Blue, skyships ply the 7 Skies, soaring from cloud-island to cloud-island for adventure: conquest, espionage, trade, and piracy. Kingdoms clash, cultures collide, and secrets abound. Heroes and villains roam, both on and between islands, seeking wealth, power, revenge, and romance.

Will you be one of them?

Captain Pyotr Yvanson nodded as his crewman Otto finished lashing down the gigantic perch for his esteemed passenger's ruq. "That'll do, lad," he said after tugging on the crossbeam. "It's secure. Go below and get yourself a ration of grog."

"Aye, Cap'n," replied the skysailor, tugging at his forelock before he left.

Pyotr looked past the starboard rail of his skyship, *The Sparrow*, to see his passenger returning from exercising her gigantic flying mount. At first just a dot in the immense sky, the ruq quickly loomed larger. Soon, the ruqrider deftly brought her mount to a perfect landing on the new perch.

She leapt easily from the back of the ruq to land, barefooted, upon the deck. Xenia's clothing was all savage finery, brilliant colors, primitive, dangerous. She smiled, which only enhanced her beauty. "Is good, Captain Pyotr. Chimi like. This one am grateful."

"I am glad, Xenia. However, I am concerned that as we enter the Sky of Frost, your friend will be too cold. Are you sure the bird wouldn't be more comfortable belowdeck?"

"No, I think Chimi hate that. Better up in air, cold it be." Xenia pondered for a moment, then said, "Could you make tent, brazier of coals?"

Pyotr considered this. "I think that might be dangerous. Cloth, red-hot coals, and a pitching deck in a winter storm are not a good combination. However—" He looked forward, where his other passenger leaned against the figurehead, gazing into the distance. "Ho, wizard!" he cried.

Slowly, the other passenger turned to look back at him, the ruqrider, and the gigantic bird. Naku of the Dark's stare was decidedly unnerving. Shaking his head, the man made his way back to them as he spoke.

"Again, Captain, I must ask you to **not** refer to me as a 'wizard.' The correct term is koldun, a word of long history, spawned from an obscure Barathi dialect. I am not a village witch or hedge magician: I am koldun, many-blessed in the mystic arts." Naku turned to Xenia. "Greetings to you, ruqrider. Your flight went well?"

"Indeed!" laughed Xenia. "Chimi enjoys exercise. But Captain has concern."

"Yes," said Pyotr. "But first, my apologies, Naku. I meant no insult."

The koldun said, "...of the Dark. Do not neglect my epithet." But his manner indicated that Naku accepted the apology; he made a gesture indicating the captain should proceed.

Pyotr therefore proceeded. "I am concerned that our course takes us into the Sky of Frost, and since Xenia's pet will not go below, we were wondering if your arcane arts might protect the beast from the extreme chill that we will soon experience."

Naku rubbed his chin. “Intriguing.” He walked around the ruq, peering this way and that, making a full circle around the perching bird before speaking again. “An interesting application of my abilities. I believe I can keep him comfortable. But there is a price.”

“And what is that?” asked Xenia.

“Three feathers from his mighty person. Ruq feathers are useful in the my arts.”

Xenia bit her lip. “Not cause him harm?”

Naku shook his head. “None, I assure you.”

“Done!” said Xenia.

“Capital!” said Naku. “I just need to get my chalks to mark the deck—that is acceptable, Captain?” he asked Pyotr.

Pyotr nodded. “So long as once we’re through the Frosts, I can get Fritz or Otto to clean up the deck.”

Naku said, “That shouldn’t be a problem. The chalk markings will be easily removed with the application of kelp oil, and a modicum of —”

In mid-sentence, the koldun’s voice died and his eyes went blank.

The skyship captain and the ruqrider looked at each other, puzzled, for the duration of the koldun’s distraction. It was only scant moments, but seemed somehow longer. The very air seemed to crackle, and then Naku cried out.

“Pirates! Sky-pirates have targeted us!” The koldun staggered to the port rail, shaking his head. “The Gift of the Merhorse permits sight beyond sight. And this sight has come upon me unbidden, indicating we are in great danger. Great danger from —” the koldun’s finger stabbed out, pointing high towards a wisp of cloud — “there!”

Pyotr whipped out the spyglass he kept in his belt, and studied the cloud that Naku had indicated. Through the powerful lenses, he detected a dark, moving object within its thin mists.

“Fritz, Otto!” Pyotr bellowed. “Battle stations!”

The two crewmembers scattered belowdecks at their captain’s order, to man The Sparrow’s cannon turrets.

Pyotr said to his passengers, “If it is pirates, we’d surely appreciate your help.”

“Yes! Fly to battle!” cried Xenia as she reached over to Chimi’s harness and retrieved a spear with a wickedly barbed head. Then she clambered up her ruq’s feathered side to remount.

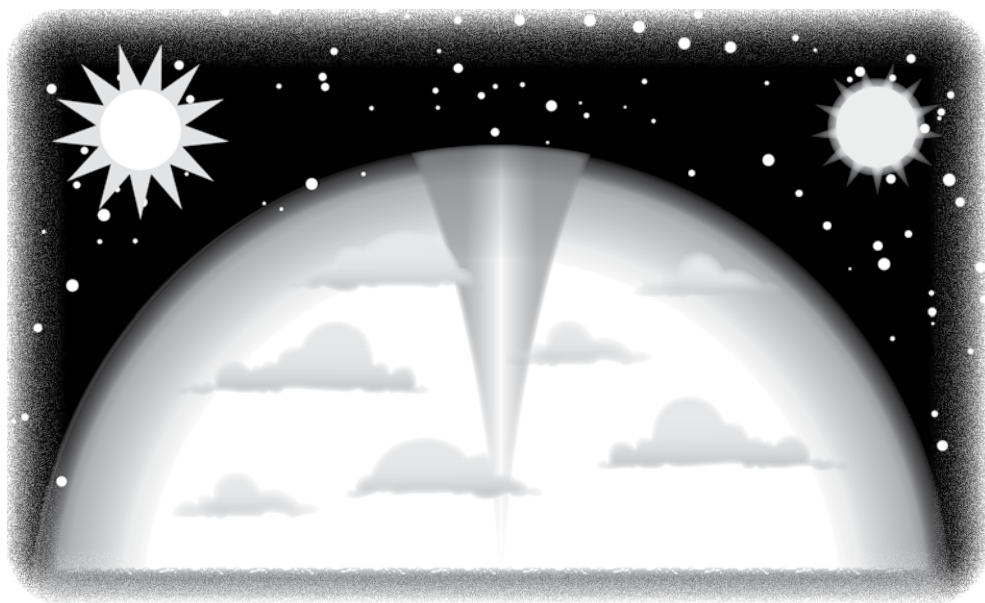
Naku just nodded, and walked back to the figurehead of the ship, mystic energies crackling around him.

Pyotr smiled and bounded aft towards the wheelhouse. Those pirates had no idea what they were in for.

# Sail the Wild Blue Skies!

Like a child's toy snowglobe, albeit one thousands of miles across, the whole of the World is a hemisphere of sky called the *Dome of the Heavens*. Within, cloud-islands (and other, stranger things) float at varying levels.

Brave women and men, piloting skyships crafted out of bluewood, venture between these islands, finding adventure in the open skies—or on one of the Islands themselves.

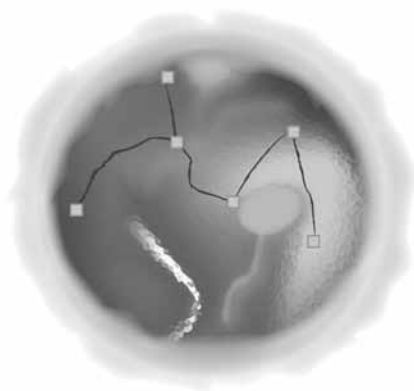
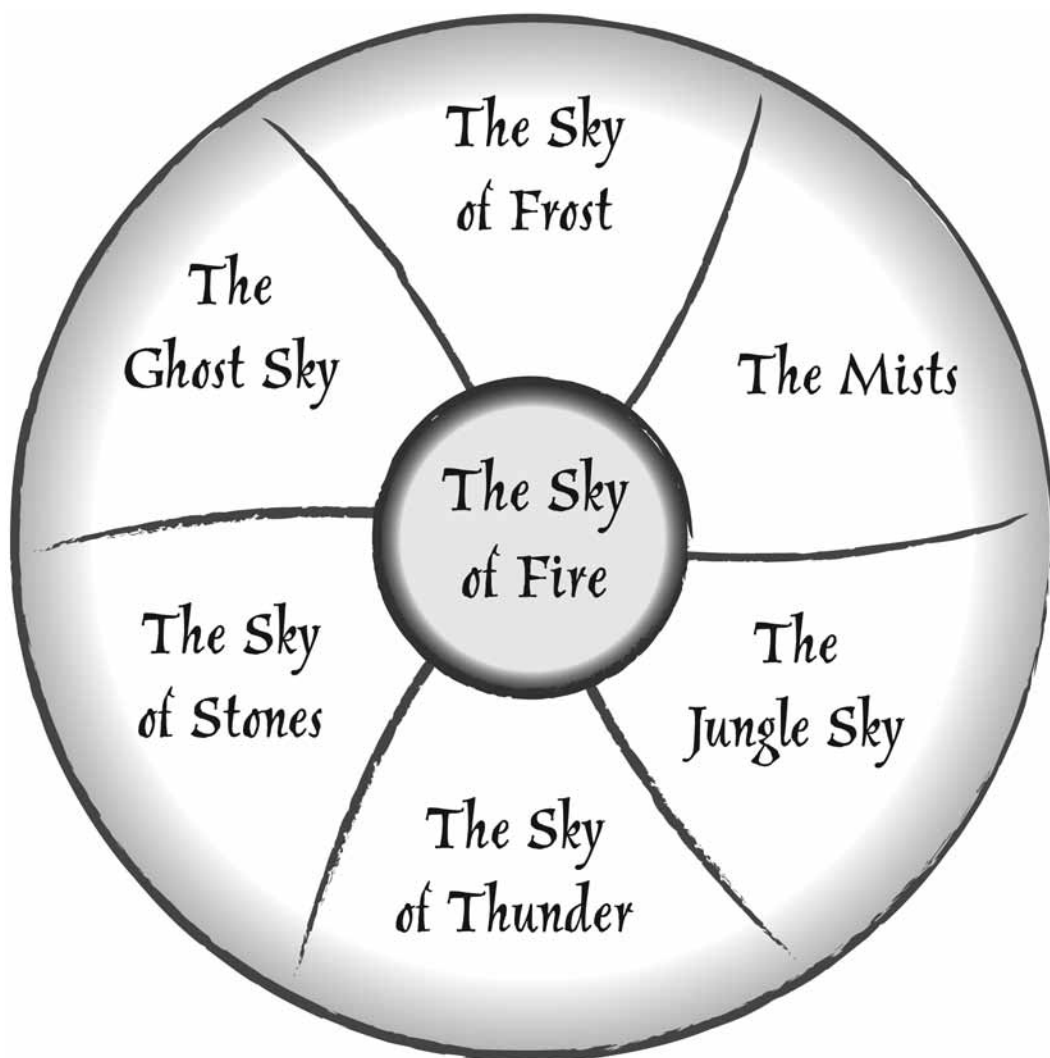


## The Mysterious Blue & Bluewood

The bottom of the World is a flat expanse of a mystical, viscous material—*the Blue*.

Timber from the floating wheeltree is known as *bluewood*. After leaving the environs of a cloud-island and entering one of the 7 Skies, rather than tumbling down to the Blue as all other things do, it does not fall—it floats. This special quality makes it a necessity in constructing skyships.

Because of the Blue, exploration into the portion of the World below it (if there *is* any World below it!) has thus far proved impossible. Oh, sure, there are rumors of what lies beyond the Known Skies—verdant cloud-islands, lost civilizations, gems the size of a horse's head, and strange people—but no expedition into this mysterious region is known to have returned.





## Lost Kroy

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*Everything has a price, and prices are negotiable.*

— Kroyu Proverb

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Before it was lost, Kroy was a major nation of the World: a crossroads of the 7 Skies, it was **the** nexus of international trade. The government (a plutocratic corporate republic) was run as a business, for a profit.

The only sin on Kroy was theft, and many crimes were framed in that idiom. Murder was “theft of life”; vandalism was “theft of the capital that will be required to repair the damage”; and running from a guardsman was “theft of effort that could have been used in a more profitable way.”

The pursuit of profit over all on Kroy led to intense *competition*—and this spurred a golden age of advancement in many crafts. Legend says that the Kroyu invented gunpowder and cannon, changed the way that people looked at the koldun, refined commerce to a high art, and encouraged technologies and mystical explorations to heights as yet still unknown. This great advancement had a darker side for the Kroyu, alas: *hubris*.

During the Last Kroyu War, the Merchant Princes of Kroy decided to strike a blow against their primary enemy: Barathi. Kroyu koldun created an *Island-Killer* weapon, and when it was finally ready, they decided to *test* it on the pirate haven of Crailwuz before they turned it on their sworn enemy.

The test went awry: Crailwuz was blasted into two smaller islands, but Kroy’s protective Fog was shredded and it began spinning towards the Sky of Fire. Thousands of refugees escaped, crowding onto all available skyships, before their island was burned to a cinder.

Though the cloud-island of Kroy is gone, its legacy remains: Kroyu is the common tongue throughout the World, their system of numbers and written glyphs is the gold standard for trade and accountancy, their insights still influence the mystical pursuits of the koldun. Any merchant or traveler worth his salt can read the Kroyu script—handy when lost Kroyu vaults are found (as they sometimes are), stuffed with traps and treasure.

Most of the surviving Kroyu have eventually blended into the peoples of the other nations. There are some few, isolated pockets of ethnic Kroyu—with their own small neighborhoods in the big cities of the Major Islands, or tiny settlements on Minor Islands. These “Lost People” are sometimes viewed with scorn and disdain, sometimes with pity and compassion, and sometimes with reverence and awe.

# Major Cultures of the 7 Skies

The people of the major Cloud-Islands of the 7 Skies are varied, occasionally contentious, and always bustling with the chaos and oddities of life. Indeed, many an adventure or intrigue can take place within the confines of a single Island.



**Barathi:** A large Cloud-Island composed of an ocean sprinkled with thousands of surface islands, Barathi is home to the oldest nation in the World: the *Empire*. A land of Byzantine intrigue and revenge, the Barathi Noble Houses bicker and plot and duel amongst themselves, as well as against the peoples of other Islands. The *Imperial Spiders* are the feared assassins of the Empress.



**Colrona:** An immense Cloud-Island, as split in geography as it is split in its cultures. Shading from sandy desert up through grassy plains and up to rolling wooded hills, Colrona was once the site of competing Barathi, Kroyu, and Viridia colonies. Eventually, it threw off the shackles of each parent stem, and became its own nation: the cosmopolitan *Kingdom* and the theocratic *Zultanate*. Colrona is a land of romance, religion, and honor, and the conflicts that each engenders. Both the *Musketeers* of the Kingdom and the *Sandmen* of the Zultanate are deadly blades, soldiers, and horsemen.





**Crail:** Before the attack of Lost Kroy, Crail was half of a fertile Cloud-Island—and pirate haven—called Crailwuz. The attack devastated the Island, shattering off pieces of its land and damaging its protective Fog; over centuries, this has made much of it into a barren desert. A small Island at the crossing of several trade routes, mid-way up the Dome and close to the Sky of Fire, Crail has become an important meeting place for all of the nations of the World—ironically replacing Lost Kroy in that way. Centuries ago, a Colronan force (from before the splitting of that nation into the Kingdom and the Zultanate) pacified the remaining pirates and set up an independent government for Crail. The Crailese *Falcons* are the peacekeepers of the Island, and doughty street fighters.



**Ilwuz:** Ilwuz is the other half of the once-fertile Cloud-Island—and pirate haven—called Crailwuz, blasted off by the attack of Lost Kroy. As a result of the powerful magic unleashed upon it during that attack, now it is a small Island with a unique characteristic: it has no fixed position in the Dome. Every forty-nine days, it mystically shifts into a new position in the Dome. Furthermore, native-born Ilwuzi have the uncanny knack of always knowing which Sky their homeland lies in (no matter where in the World they are). Unlike Crail, it has remained a semi-tropical pirate haven, and home to a freedom-loving, rambunctious, and unconventional population of nomads, transients, and buccaneers. The *Brethren of the Skull* are the most Dread of Pirates in all the 7 Skies.

### *“The Pirate King”*

Some beleaguered merchants or skyship passengers, upset at their treatment at the hands of Ilwuz pirates, often complain. Grievances are always met with a rejoinder in the form of “Well, you’ll have to take that up with the Pirate King” or something much like it.

The joke, of course, is that there is no Pirate King. (Or, from another perspective, there are a *multitude* of Pirate Kings.)

Depending upon the attitude of the speaker, the phrase is used either as the equivalent of “What do you want me to do about it?” or “Go soak your head, buddy.” Suffice to say, most foreigners are quite put out when they make this discovery while they are being held for ransom or sale as a slave.

The Ilwuzi think it’s hilarious.

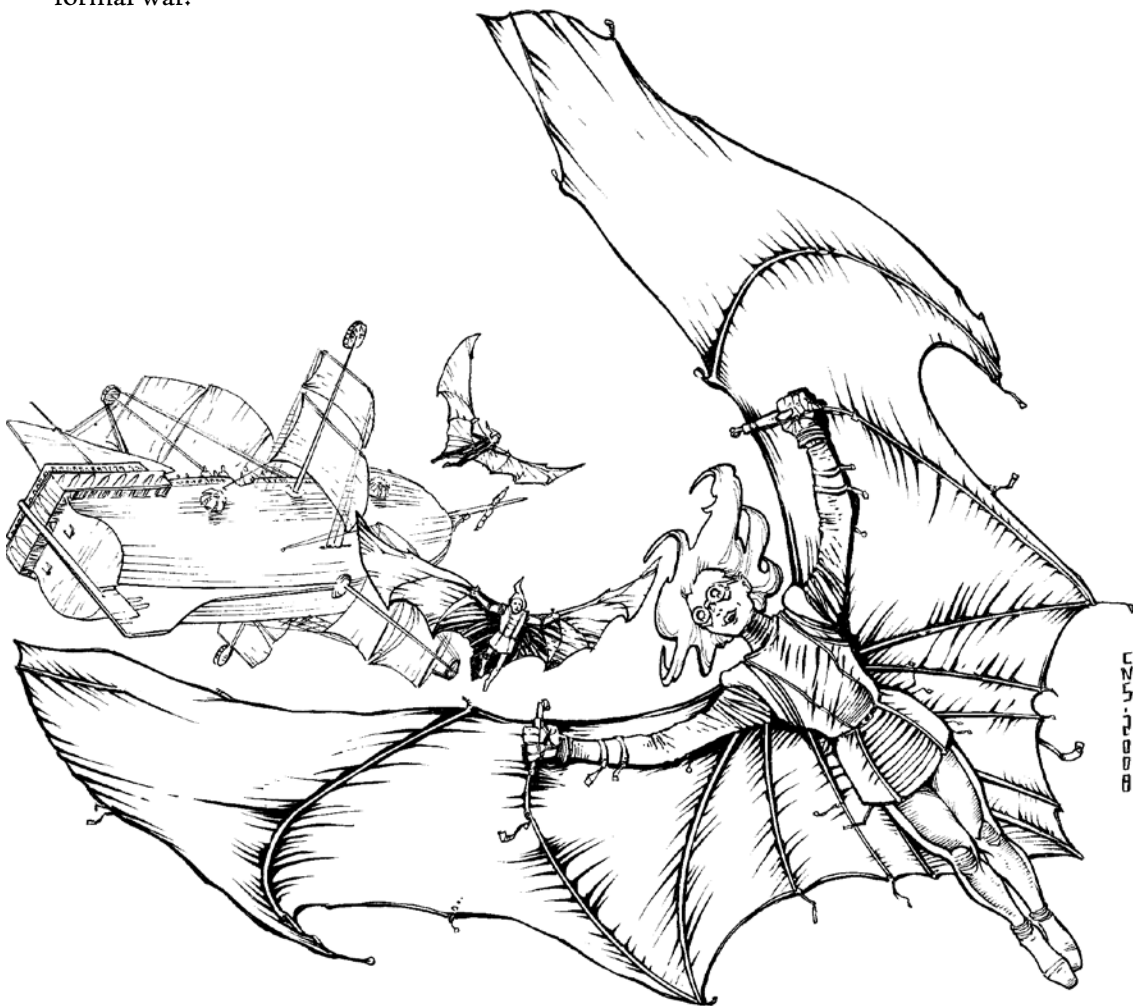




**Sha Ka Ruq:** Sha Ka Ruq is the newest Cloud-Island to rise up out of the Blue. A little over a century ago, it breached up through the Jungle Sky, and became the wild rainforest/jungle home to a number of blumen savages, explorers and colonists from a handful of Islands, and—of course—pirates. The majority of Sha Ka Ruq is still wilderness: mysterious and unexplored. Sha-Ku *Ruqriders* are aerial cavalry, riding the gigantic, carnivorous parrots that they have (mostly) tamed.



**Viridia:** Harsh and rocky, with limited animal and vegetable resources, Viridia has changed from its roots as an exile colony for Barathi radicals into a warrior nation. The alliance of Viridese Freeholds, led by their *Warmasters*, is an expansionistic and powerful people, full of pragmatism and a certain rough honor. Viridese Warmasters are the most adaptable warriors in the 7 Skies, with a broad range of knowledge of all military matters on land, sea, and sky, in wilderness or on city streets, rambunctious tavern brawls or a deadly serious formal war.



# SET SAIL!

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*Kingdoms clash,  
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*Heroes and villains  
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## SWASHBUCKLERS OF THE 7 SKIES



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