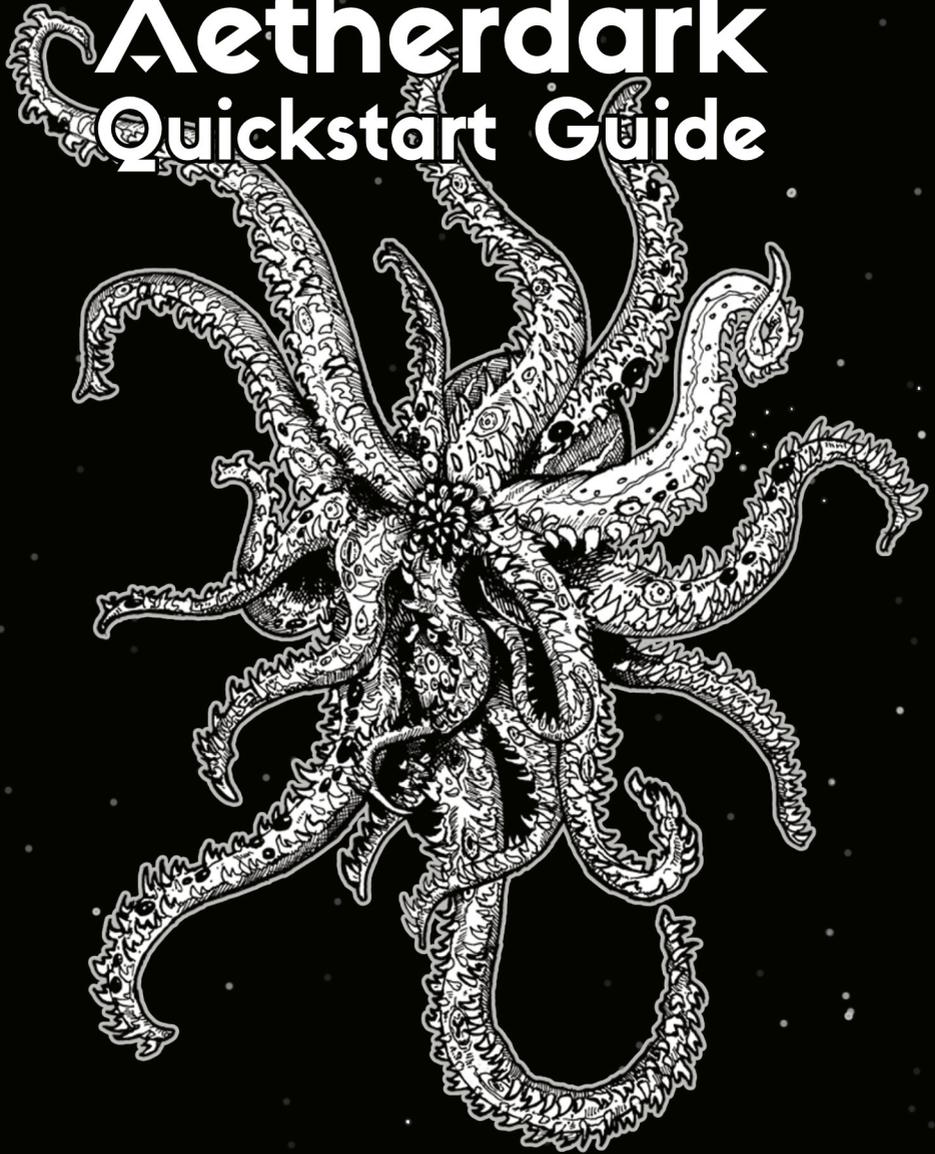


Aetherdark Quickstart Guide



Ship Class	Hull	Spd	Mvr	Size	ATK	Crew
Dinghy	5	-4	-2	1 (0)	—	1 / 6
Pinnace	8	+2	+2	1	—	2 / 8
Striker				1 (0)	1	4 / 8
Sloop	15	+2	+1	3	—	3 / 15
Corvette				3 (2)	1	5 / 15
Barque	35	+0	+0	5	—	6 / 30
Frigate				5 (3)	2	10 / 30
Galleon	80	-2	-1	8	—	10 / 50
Armed galleon				8 (7)	1	13 / 50
Battleship				8 (5)	4	18 / 50
Greatship	250	-2	-5	16	—	30 / 180
Armed greatship				16 (14)	2 (×2)	40 / 180
Dreadnought				16 (10)	6 (×2)	60 / 180

Ship Modifications	Penalty	Cost
Add ballistae, hurlers, or bombards	see <i>ship class</i>	2,000 × size
Change ship's landing method	—	500 × size
Deck Fortifications	-3 cargo × size	500 × size
Hull Reinforcements (up to 3 times)	-1 cargo × size	1000 × size
Streamlined Hull	-2 cargo × size	1500 × size
Tight Steering Yoke	+2 PRV rating	1500 × size

Deck Upgrades	Cost
Barracks	200 × size
Cabins	300 × size
Cargo bay	100 × size
Custom cargo bay	100 × size
Entertainment area	1,000 × size

Deck Upgrades	Cost
Livestock pens	250 × size
Luxury cabins	1,000 × size
Magazine	400 × size
Smuggler's hold	400 × size
Workshop	400 × size

Ship Armor	AC	Spd	Mvr	Cost
Unarmored	8 AC + MVR	—	—	—
Stone hulled	14 AC	-2	-2	—
Inscribed bronze	12 AC + MVR	-1	—	500 × size
Lacquered wood	10 AC + MVR	—	—	500 × size
Runic copper plates	13 AC + MVR	-1	—	1,500 × size
Steel plating	15 AC	-2	-1	1,000 × size

Rams	Siege	Casualties	Cost
No ram	size • d3	—	—
Blade ram	size • d20	size • d2	1,500 × size
Hammer ram	size • d12	size • d3	1,000 × size

Ballista Ammo	Damage	Effects	Cost
Ballista bolts	d4	—	1
Flame-lances	d10	fire	50
Heavy steel bolts	d8	—	10

Bottled Ammo	Damage	Effects	Cost
Arcane ampules	d12	—	15
Dust storm canisters	—	stinging sands	50
Firepots	d10	collateral, fires	100
Lightning bottles	d20	conductivity	100

Hurler Ammo	Damage	Effects	Cost
Barnacles	—	barnacle	100
Caustic globules	d4	acid	50
Frost nets	—	slow	35
Grapeshot	d4	collateral	10
Incendiary spheres	d4	fires	25
Large rocks	d8	—	5

What is Aetherdark?

Sail between the stars and visit strange worlds. Be an explorer, a pirate, a bounty-hunter. Survive the Aetherdark.

Shadowdark

The Aetherdark is a rules expansion to add fast-playing naval exploration and combat to Shadowdark.

The Setting

Aetherdark can be played in many settings, but supposes a particular way the universe makes sailing a ship between stars a sensible endeavor.

If you have a different concept of how wooden ships sail between worlds, these rules will still work, but the random tables for the aether will make less sense.

If you want more of the setting, you can find fiction and rulebooks about an aether-faring civilization The Ring, as well as some more distant worlds, at aetherdark.com.

New Rules

Aetherdark adds three major elements to your game:

The Crew. It takes a crew to manage a ship.

Aetherdark adds rules to level that group up alongside the player-characters and rules to manage mass-combat between crews.

The Ship. The ship is an upgradeable, mobile base for players to operate from.

Aetherdark adds rules for buying and upgrading ships, as well as maneuvering in naval combat and sailing across vast distances.

Siege Weapons. A fireball might be effective against a warship, but most other attacks won't be.

Aetherdark includes rules for firing siege weaponry, whether at other ships or at groups of helpless fools far below.

A black and white photograph of a starry night sky. The background is dark, filled with numerous stars of varying brightness. A prominent feature is a large, diffuse nebula or cloud of gas and dust, appearing as a lighter, wispy structure on the left side of the frame. The text "Crew & Ships" is overlaid in the center in a bold, white, sans-serif font.

Crew & Ships

Crew Stats

No one runs a ship alone. You need a crew of loyal sailors to cross the starry sea. They are your friends and allies, and if you aren't careful, they could become your enemies.

Crew Stats

When the crew as a whole takes an action without a player character, crew stats are used.

If an individual member of the crew is needed, they use that same stat block.

CRW and Casualties

The CRW stat is equal to the total number of people in the crew, not counting PCs. It functions much like HP for the crew as a whole.

Current CRW is the count of active crewmembers, not counting any casualties.

Casualties are crewmembers who are injured, killed, or otherwise incapacitated.

Crew Morale

The crew always fails morale checks. After their morale breaks, the crew cannot act and may panic or flee, depending on the circumstance.

You can restore your crew's morale with a DC 15 CHA check.

Common morale checks include: half of the crew is eliminated, the ship is reduced to half **hull**, or a dragon breathes fire.

Crew Recovery

While the ship stops in a safe place, casualties due to injury recover over 2d6 days or one downtime period.

Crew Replacement

Depending on the setting and location, there may be volunteers eager for adventure that can be recruited freely. PCs can try to recruit crewmembers with specific skills as a downtime action.

Crew Actions

Each round, the crew can either assist player characters or take a single crew action.

Assisted Actions. The crew can assist as many actions as there are characters to lead, if the number of people needed doesn't exceed the CRW.

For assisted actions, you roll using your stats, not the crew's, but can attempt tasks that need extra hands. An assisted action is still your only action for the round.

Crew Actions. If there are sufficient crewmembers left after assisting PC actions, the crew can take a single action on its own.

Crew actions always come last in the initiative and cannot be critical successes.

Mass Combat. In close combat, your crew attacks the rival crew once, dealing its damage as casualties (36).

At 60 members, the crew gains a second attack. At 200, a third.

Commanding the Crew

The crew does as you direct. If you can't give orders, the GM may decide what the crew does.

Casualties

Many attacks deal casualties, meaning that each point of damage injures or kills one crewmember.

Which casualties result in death is at the GM's discretion.

When a **siege attack** strikes a crew not protected by a ship, it deals casualties (34).

Ramming attacks deal casualties in addition to damaging the ship (35).

If a **regular attack** hits the crew as a whole, it causes 1 casualty for each full multiple of the crew's HP stat that the attack does.

Gear

You can outfit your crew by buying enough gear for every crewmember, gaining all the usual effects of that gear.

Crew Advancement

As they sail the aether together, a group becomes a crew. Key tasks are mastered, fresh faces become veterans, and new members are met with training and confidence.

Crew Experience

Your crew gains XP whenever you gain XP.

New Characters Come from the Crew

When your character stops adventuring, whether due to death or retirement, you can immediately start playing as a character from the crew.

Depending on your crew's level, this may allow you to start play at level 2, 3 or 4.

HP

The crewmembers have HP equal to the crew's level + 2 + CON modifier, up to 12 HP at level 10.

Crew Stat Advancement

Your crew starts with 7 in every stat. At every level, randomly select a stat to increase by 1 (do this 18 times at first level). Reroll if a stat would exceed 16.

Specialists

Functioning identically to talents during character advancement, specialists grant various benefits to the crew as a whole. When the crew suffers losses, specialist roles are refilled.

Reputations

Some crew abilities come from the reputation your crew has. Whenever you gain a new reputation, you can select any reputation you do not already have.

Past Level 10

After level 10, every time the crew gains another 50 XP, you may replace 1 randomly gained stat point or specialist with a reroll, or change 1 reputation.

Level	Crew Improvements by Level
1	+1 to random stats eighteen times, +1 specialist, 3 base HP
2	+1 to a random stat, select 1st reputation, 4 base HP
3	+1 to a random stat, +1 specialist, 5 base HP
4	+1 to a random stat, PCs start at level 2, 6 base HP
5	+1 to a random stat, +1 specialist, 7 base HP
6	+1 to a random stat, select 2nd reputation, 8 base HP
7	+1 to a random stat, +1 specialist, 9 base HP
8	+1 to a random stat, PCs start at level 3, 10 base HP
9	+1 to a random stat, +1 specialist, 11 base HP
10	+1 to a random stat, select 3rd reputation, PCs start at level 4, 12 base HP
+50 XP	Re-roll 1 random stat point, re-roll 1 specialist, or change 1 reputation

2d6	Specialist
2	Quartermaster. Your ship can fit additional crew on-board equal to size × 3
3-4	Bosun. Once per day, re-roll a MVR check
5-6	Carpenter. When performing repairs, each set of supplies used repairs 1 additional hull
7-8	Chef. Your provisions usage (32) is treated as though your crew was 1 tier smaller (min of 1 per 10 days)
9-11	Engineer. Once per day, re-roll a SPD check
12	Chirurgeon. After any event that caused casualties, heal 1d3 fresh casualties.

Crew Reputations

Artillerists

Whether it's a barrage of ballista bolts or rapid salvos of caustic globules, the assault of skilled artillerists is devastating.

Fire in the Hole! One round per day, roll your siege attack damage at advantage.

Explorers

Explorers constantly seek the undiscovered, some to pillage or rule, others to uplift and aid, but most simply to see new worlds.

First Impressions. When arriving on a world you haven't visited before, your first reaction check is rolled at advantage.

Marauders

Not simply a well-run ship, but a vessel laden with warriors, ready to battle on-deck or planetside.

Hot-Bunking. Your ship can fit additional crew equal to **size** × 3.

Pilots

In the heat of combat, a steady eye and deft hand at the wheel can be more valuable than a dozen ballistae.

Ride the Wind. For one round per day, add your MVR to your ship's AC an additional time.

Pirates

Fearsome raiders, navies of freed men, or rebels against the ruling power, those who sail for plunder are rightly feared.

Inspire Fear. When enemies attempt to rally their crew during ship-to-ship combat, they do so at disadvantage.

Swashbucklers

Surprising their prey in stunning leaps through open aether.

Swing Into Action. When performing a boarding action from near, automatically succeed the check to swim the aether.

Crew Events

When?

Run one or more crew events while the PCs are returning from an adventure or other excursion (finishing the event before they return), or if they linger a long time in one place.

What Event?

Use the table below in port, a table from Shadowdark (SD 142-185) in the wilderness, or a specific event from the current adventure if one is available.

How Many Events?

During a normal adventure, a single event is appropriate, but if the players are gone for longer, or if they leave the ship in a dangerous area, consider rolling multiple events.

For multiple events, it is general best to treat all of the events as one overlapping event, either happening at once or in swift enough succession that the crew cannot rest and recover.

d12 Crew Events at Port

1	Stowaways are found in the hold
2	Locals went missing and suspicion falls on the crew
3	Tavern brawl got out of hand and three crew were jailed
4	Some crew took gold from the general fund for carousing
5	Love triangle in the crew is causing strife
6	Harbormaster's daughter wants to run away with the crew
7	Fire starts on the pier while half the crew is on-shore
8	Merchanter loses control and is drifting towards the ship
9	Local leader riled up a mob, claiming the crew are cultists
10	Group of thieves sneak aboard, trying to steal the ship
11	Wealthy merchant is trying to hire away the crew
12	City seals its gates due to rumors of treason

Ship Stats

Sailing on her every day, the ship becomes a friend, the creak of her boards comforting and familiar, the gashes on her hull as painful as your own wounds.

AC

Base AC is 8 + MVR. Functions the same as a creature's AC.

Spd & Spd Stat

A modifier to the check when trying to move more quickly, paired with the stat used when you make that check (30).

Mvr & Mvr Stat

A modifier to the check when trying to maneuver, paired with the stat used when you attempt to maneuver the ship (30).

Attacks (ATK)

Armed ships have a set number of attacks, the damage of which is determined by the ammunition used. A single PC can direct 1 attack each round (34).

Hull

A ship's hull points are similar to a creature's hit points.

Siege damage. Siege damage is dealt normally to the hull.

Regular attacks deal 1 hull damage for each 10 damage dealt, rounded down.

Damaged ships. If a ship is reduced to 0 **hull**, it is badly damaged. SPD, MVR, and siege-attack checks are made at disadvantage. Siege is dealt to the crew as casualties, and decks are damaged by additional hits.

Repair. Hull points are repaired, not healed. One week of work and one cargo of supplies repairs 5 hull points. Up to **size** supplies can be used to repair a ship each week.

Morale and hull points. If a ship is reduced to half **hull**, or as the GM deems necessary, the crew's morale fails until you rally them (33).

Size

A ship's size affects how many provisions the ship needs and how many upgrades it can have.

A ship's upgrades and empty decks determine how much capacity the ship has for cargo and crew.

If a ship is armed, the number of upgrades it can have is reduced.

Required Crew

The number of people a ship needs to operate normally, including player characters.

When operating normally, a ship can perform any amount of distinct actions, provided it has the other necessary resources.

At less than the required crew, a ship cannot move or make attacks.

Max Crew

The number of people that a ship can fit without additional upgrades.

Provisions Rating (PRV)

Based on the type of propulsion, this represents the fuel and supplies needed to keep a ship running, increasing the provisions requirement of the ship.

$PRV \times \text{size}$ is added to CRW when determining provisions used (32).

Cargo Slots

Without upgrades, a ship can fit cargo equal to $5 \times \text{size}$.

Trade goods, provisions, supplies, and ammunition are measured in cargo-slots. One cargo usually fills a large handcart. Split up and carried, a cargo slot of goods fills at least 30 gear slots.

Gear not designed to be packed as cargo, such as loot from a dungeon, is less dense. One cargo slot can fit 20 gear slots of regular items.

Landing Methods

Standard ships will slowly sink in water. Seaworthy ships require a check to land on solid ground (38).

Deck Space

Basic Deck Space

Regardless of what upgrades are added, every ship has:

- **Steering.** Where MVR checks are made. Wheels, levers, and various other controls, usually on a raised platform with good visibility.
- **Propulsion.** Where SPD checks are made. The system that pushes against aether to allow flight, along with controls, often in a small room with an arcanist or engineer.
- **Crew Space.** All ship classes have a max-crew stat that, before upgrades, is how many personnel can be aboard. This is usually hammocks that stow overhead for the crew, occasionally with cabins for key personnel.
- **Cargo Space.** All ships have $5 \times \text{size}$ cargo slots available (before modifications). These are usually crates and barrels crammed into corners or lashed to the open deck.

Upgrade Slots

A ship can have 1 deck upgrade per size (less if armed).

The size of each upgrade is the same as the ship's size. A cargo deck on a galleon is larger than a cargo deck on a sloop.

Other Improvements

In addition to deck upgrades, ships can add one type of armor, a single ram, and any amount of modifications and rare improvements.

Misusing Space

Any upgrade slot can be used to fit $\text{size} \times 2$ people or $\text{size} \times 2$ cargo, but doing so disables the upgrade.

Ship's Boats

Ships can carry other ships, if they have enough cargo space, but the carried ship's cargo and crew space is unusable while stowed. A dinghy fills 2 cargo slots and a pinnacle fills 6.

Ship Types & Activities

Type Descriptions

For each type of ship a few key differences are described. These do not affect gameplay, but can help the world feel real.

Maneuver describes how that type of ship is steered.

Speed explains how that propulsion method sends a ship through the aether.

Provisions suggests some of the unique needs that are counted in the ship's provisions rating.

Shipboard Activities

For a random activities on a ship, you can roll a d12, combining the below table for results 5-10 with results 1-4 from each specific ship. For an unarmed ship, only roll a d10, as results 10-12 only apply to armed ships.

d12 Arcane Jet Shipboard Activities

- | | |
|----|--|
| 5 | Swab the deck. Sweep, mop, and possibly even chisel away blood, muck, and aetherdust accretions. |
| 6 | Keep watch. Look fore and aft, port and starboard, above and below, vigilant for the many threats of the astral sea. |
| 7 | Prepare a meal. Chopping veggies, kneading dough, tending the fire, stirring the pot, a meal takes many hands. |
| 8 | Take some rack time. Everyone needs to sleep, or at least take a break, usually for a full watch each day. |
| 9 | Mending. Hammocks tear, ropes fray, clothes wear through, tools break, the hull gets nicked. It all needs to be repaired. |
| 10 | Check and rotate the stores. Cargo left to sit too long risks rot and infestation. |
| 11 | Disassemble, clean, grease, and reassemble siege weaponry. |
| 12 | Drill! Go through the motions of battle, so that you're ready when it's not just a drill. |

Arcane Jet

Spd Stat: INT, **Mvr Stat:** DEX,
Provisions Rating: 4 × size

Juicing A Jet. Cast an arcane spell as normal. Instead of the spell's effect, grant +2 SPD for 1 round per tier of the spell.

Overload. DC 15 INT, jets explode after **size** rounds for **size** • d20 siege and **size** • d3 casualties DC 18 INT to disable early.

Speed

An arcanist adjusts the runic flows, opening up as much throughput as possible without overloading the runic array.

Maneuver

A collection of levers alter the angle of various rune groups. Steering requires swiftly manipulating the levers. No one lever is a simple directional control as the position of each rune affects every other rune.

Provisions

Arcane jets need lots of grease or oil to keep the aether running smoothly to the runes, as well as sheet metal for patching conduit and shimming mis-alignments.

d12 Arcane Jet Shipboard Activities

- 1 **Check the feeds.** Inlets along the hull draw aether into the jet. Check that they're clear, chiseling away crystals.
- 2 **Adjust runes.** Switch which runes are enabled, so that they don't wear out from the constant flow of power.
- 3 **Patch conduit.** The aether is not gentle. Conduit running along the hull can be easily patched, if its caught early.
- 4 **Drain arcane effluvia.** Runoff pools in the bilge, congealed arcane toxicity. Glove up, hold your breath, and pump hard.

Crystal Sails

Crystal sails are woven from the shards of novae or the remnants of broken worlds. Their sensitivity to aether makes them swift in the astral sea.

Spd Stat: INT, **Mvr Stat:** STR,
Provisions Rating: 1 × size

Catching the Aether. Gain ADV on SPD checks in the astral sea, but suffer DISADV on SPD checks inside a normal world.

Speed

The many ropes attached to the masts, spars, and sails must be adjusted, angling the sails to better catch aether-currents.

Maneuver

A wheel with a second axis adjusts a pair of rudders, their relative tilt controlling the ship's rise and fall. The system is easy to understand, but difficult to move against a strong current.

Provisions

There are a vast amount of ropes used to keep the sails working, but little else is needed, the sails themselves being as sturdy as most things made from stars.

d12 Crystal Sails Shipboard Activities

- 1 **Adjust the rigging.** A single sail requires as many as a dozen lines to control its position, each adjusted regularly.
- 2 **Treat and coil ropes.** The hundreds of feet of rope must be treated to prevent aether crystals cutting the fibers.
- 3 **Scour the masts.** Cleaning aetherdust from upright masts is more involved than just swabbing the deck.
- 4 **Clean the sails.** Crystal sails may bend like fabric, but they are hard surfaces that accumulate aetherdust like any other.

Incantation

Spd Stat: CHA, **Mvr Stat:** STR,
Provisions Rating: None

Hard work. After 3 consecutive SPD checks, SPD checks are at DISADV for the day. Critical failures on SPD checks cause **size** • d3 casualties from exhaustion.

If crewmembers work multiple shifts in a day, the crew must make a DC 9 CON check or suffer **size** casualties.

Extra space. Has space for **size** × 3 additional crew.

More voices. For each multiple of the required crew chanting, gain +1 SPD (+8 max).

Speed

To get proper speed, the entire crew must maintain the incantations in perfect time, requiring a skilled leader to keep them focused.

Maneuver

Twin bronze tillers, heavy and difficult to adjust, control the ship.

Provisions

The primary resource for incantation is people. There is a little paint and lacquer to fix runes, but not enough to take much space in a cargo hold.

d12 Incantation Shipboard Activities

1 **Trace the runes.** Runes where incanters stand get scuffed and need to be carefully repainted.

2 **Laundry.** With people directly channeling the aether, it infiltrates clothing, the sharp crystals a pernicious threat.

3-4 **Carry the tune.** The vast majority of the work on an incantation-powered ship is simply maintaining the incantations that power the vessel. If too few sing, the ship will drift, aimless.

Arcane Battleship

This is the real deal. A full broadside of bottles, ready to fire; hardened magazines to keep the bottles intact; a solid runic plate at the back that pours rich, emerald flame into the aether. It's the standard in every navy that can afford it.

Of course, you'll also need a good source for spell-bottles, so not always the best if you're leaving civilization for long.

Size: 8 (arcane jet battleship)

Hull: 104 **Cost:** 151,200 gp

Spd: INT - 4 **Mvr:** DEX - 2

Min Crew: 18 **Max Crew:** 50

Prv: 32 **Cargo:** 16 slots

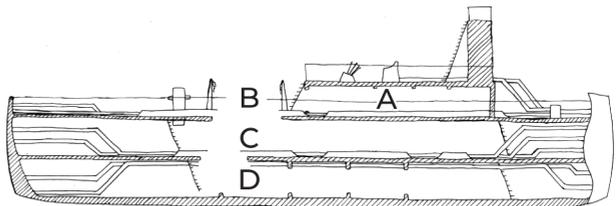
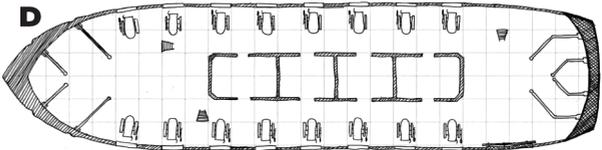
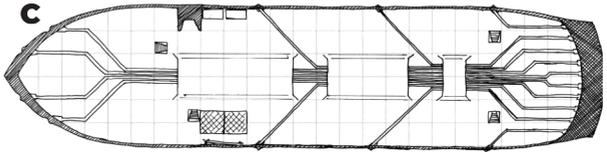
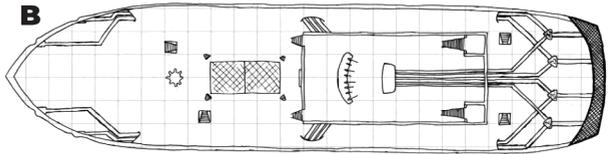
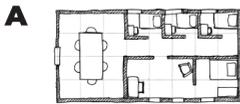
AC: 15 (steel)

Attacks: 4 (bombard)

Bombard Magazine: 48 slots

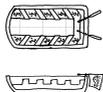
Modifications. Hull reinforcements × 3

Decks. Bombard battery × 3, magazine × 2, empty deck × 3



Cargo Skiff

Whatever else you're getting, you'll want a good skiff to fly into port, especially as you get to smaller places. It's a simple design, but it'll get where you need it to go.



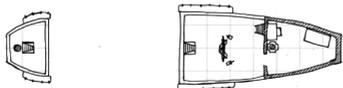
Size: 1 (incantation pinnace)
Hull: 8 **Cost:** 3,200 gp
Spd: CHA + 2 **Mvr:** STR + 2
Min Crew: 2 **Max Crew:** 11
Prv: 0 **Cargo:** 9 slots
AC: 8 + MVR (unarmored)
Modifications. Lands anywhere
Decks. Cargo bay

Crystal-Rigged Frigate

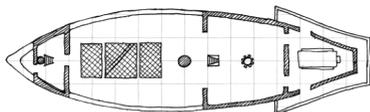
I hear explorers like that these can pose as old-fashioned water-ships, but they're also better on distance, if you need that.



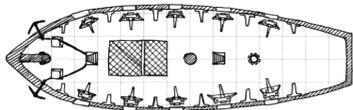
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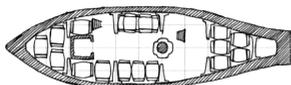
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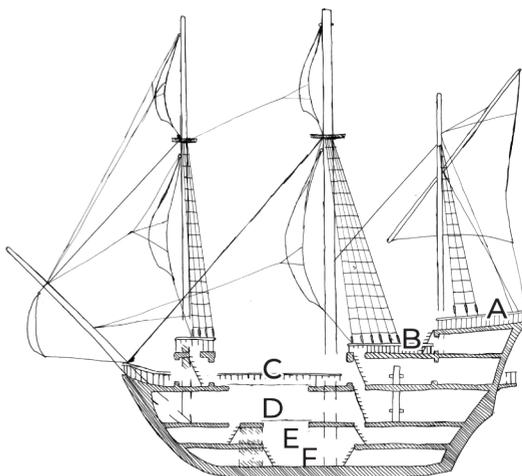


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Size: 5 (crystal sails frigate)
Hull: 35 **Cost:** 92,500 gp
Spd: INT - 1 **Mvr:** STR + 0
Min Crew: 10 **Max Crew:** 30
Prv: 5 **Cargo:** 25 slots
AC: 12 + MVR (inscribed bronze)
Attacks: 2 (ballista)

Decks. Ballista battery × 2, empty deck × 3



Explorer's Kakam

The kakam layout is popular for small crews, as the sails need less ropes, and the bulkhead through the lower deck means an accident is less likely to ruin all your provisions.

This one's basically a shell, everything stripped but the sails, ready for you to improve on.

Size: 3 (crystal sails sloop)

Hull: 15 **Cost:** 40,000 gp

Spd: INT + 2 **Mvr:** STR + 1

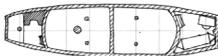
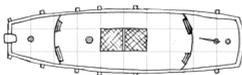
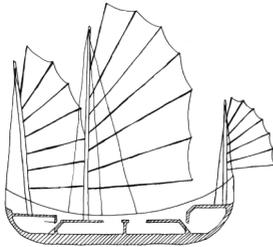
Min Crew: 3 **Max Crew:** 15

Prv: 3 **Cargo:** 15 slots

AC: 8 + MVR (unarmored)

Modifications. Seaworthy

Decks. Empty deck × 3



Longship

Careful with these, people will assume you're a raider. Of course, if you are, little beats a longship. You've got space for a decent crew, and if you fill the seats you can outpace a courier for a minute or two.

Now, keeping that crew sailing will mean lots of provisions, but if you pack it properly, quite a bit fits under and around the seats.

Size: 3 (incantation sloop)

Hull: 15 **Cost:** 21,000 gp

Spd: CHA + 4 **Mvr:** STR + 3

Min Crew: 3 **Max Crew:** 24

Prv: 6 **Cargo:** 6 slots

AC: 8 + MVR (unarmored)

Ram: 3d20 / 3d2 (blade)

Modifications. Streamlined hull, tight steering yoke, seaworthy

Decks. Empty deck × 3

