

Sunken Empire



*A roleplaying game of steampunk
undersea adventure powered by
Fate Core*

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Sunken Empire

The year is 1899, and a century that has seen humankind through some of its most incredible advancements is coming to an end. The great empires of earth have crumbled under the light of a poisonous sun, but beneath the waves, Britannia still rules. With miraculous technology and endless determination, the empire works to build a home in the most inhospitable place on earth. In sprawling underwater cities and isolated outposts, the poor struggle just to survive while the rich fight for ever-greater power.

You are a pirate, one of the last truly free people in the empire. Whether you're guilty of rising up against the aristocracy, enriching yourself through theft and violence, or just for being in the wrong place at the time, the

empire has declared you an outlaw and a traitor. Now you live a life of danger and adventure, seeking the freedom to live as you please and all the bounty the ocean has to offer. Will you fight to topple the corrupt empire, work to bring about reform from within, or simply do whatever it takes to keep yourself alive and comfortable? Will you offer those you capture a life of freedom and adventure outside the law, or a swift death and a watery grave? Will you sail in search of fame and fortune, or dive deep to uncover hidden knowledge and ancient secrets? Whatever path you follow, your choices will change the course of history and determine the final fate of the Sunken Empire.



Setting

A Short Timeline

◦1837: Fishermen discover fragments of strange luminescent coral in their nets, which they sell to the college of biological sciences in Cambridge.

◦1839: Scientists discover that the glow is caused by a previously undiscovered compound present in the coral, which they manage to extract. This compound proves to be an energy source of unrivalled potency. Other institutions begin offering substantial rewards for additional coral samples.

◦1840: Rates of sickness increase threefold during the summer months. Many blame their illness on London's infamous air quality, or lack thereof. Industrialists begin to consider coral extract as an alternative fuel source.

◦1842: An independent company mounts the first deep-sea expedition in search of coral samples. Their search uncovers only a few scattered sources, but indicates that many more might exist in still deeper waters.

◦1846: Summer brings another period of unusual sickness, this time observed across the northern hemisphere. Scientists researching the phenomenon conclude that it is somehow related to the proximity of the sun and, more worryingly, that it is slowly increasing in intensity.

◦1848: Business interests uncover the presence of extensive coral deposits on the ocean floor. Working with university scientists, they devise a plan to use coral-derived technology to establish a permanent settlement on the ocean floor.

◦1850: The poison sun phenomenon continues to intensify, though only humans and a few species of primates suffer its effects. Sensitive individuals suffer from the sickness throughout the year. Scientists discover that people working on building the underwater settlements seem to escape the phenomenon, but all attempts to replicate this protection on the surface fail.

◦1854: Noted biologist predicts that the poison sun will render the earth uninhabitable for humans within a few decades. The great powers of the world begin searching furiously for a way to avert the impending apocalypse.

Perhaps the most unusual thing about life underwater is how little it has changed from life on the surface. People still work, raise families, go to church, and generally get on with their lives just as they always have. The upper classes still hold all the power, and the lower classes are as oppressed as ever. The architects of Britain's great exodus sought to preserve their familiar society on the ocean floor, and by and large they have succeeded.

What has changed is that the people of the empire, great and small, are under more pressure than ever before. Resources like food, fuel, and living space are scarce, and the supply of irreplaceable surface materials dwindles by the day. The poor struggle just to hang on to life, while the rich and powerful fight harder and harder to stay in control. Life is cheap, and an icy death in the lightless ocean is only ever inches away. Cooperation is the key to survival on the ocean floor, but the old conflicts and divisions in society have never before run so hot. Something must change, and soon, or human nature will finish what the poison sun could not.

Underwater Cities

From a distance, the underwater cities of the sunken empire resemble the heart of old London, but shrouded in the darkness of a starless night. Streetlamps and bright windows illuminate the same Gothic or Renaissance revival architecture, with buildings packed together so tightly in rows that they merge together almost seamlessly. Some are shining masterpieces of gold and glass; others have lights that dim and flicker and walls that look in danger of collapse. But the night never ends beneath the sea, and creatures of the deep move freely through the empty streets where people cannot walk. Only the submarines that come and go at all hours can carry people beyond their ornate habitats, their spotlights briefly illuminating the endless expanse of the ocean floor before they, too, vanish in the darkness.

Britain's underwater cities are composed of hundreds, sometimes thousands of sealed buildings, linked together by a network of airtight tubes and tunnels. The structures

used by the rich and powerful are spacious and well lit, often decorated to give residents the impression of living on the surface. The lower classes live by the hundreds in dark, cramped buildings, crowded with machinery and refuse. Coral-powered devices produce light, heat, and oxygen to maintain a semi-comfortable climate, though excess humidity is a constant problem in all but the most luxurious spaces.

Even the smallest structures are built with redundant bulkheads and airlocks in case of a leak. In an emergency, entire building sections can be sealed off to prevent flooding, though anyone inside those sections at the time is doomed to drown. Proper protocol for such emergencies involves quickly repairing the breach from outside, then draining the sealed section to make it usable again. In practice, only the abodes of the upper classes receive such swift treatment. Most tenement buildings have several sections left flooded indefinitely, with only a thin bulkhead separating the poor from the drowned bodies of their friends and family. Particularly brave criminals sometimes don pressure suits to loot these flooded spaces, though with even a slight mishap they risk suffering the same fate as the waterlogged bodies they come to rob.

Outposts

The empire is ravenous, and moving underwater has not reduced its hunger in the slightest. Every day, each of the great cities must consume a staggering amount of resources just to keep the wheels of civilization moving.

◦1855: Queen Victoria secretly commissions a project to build underwater cities for all of Britain, suitable for indefinite habitation.

◦1860: The first underwater colony reaches completion. Queen Victoria and her family relocate to New Albion, to preserve the health of Prince Albert and build confidence in the grand undertaking.

◦1864: The second, third, and fourth cities are completed, beginning a general migration of the surface population. The increased labour force and establishment of large scale coral harvesting greatly accelerate the process of undersea settlement.

◦1869: Fifteen more major cities completed, including settlements to accommodate the population of British colonies. The majority of the empire's population now resides permanently underwater.

◦1872: The last migration mission is concluded. Anyone remaining on the surface is assumed to be beyond saving. The crown forbids further missions to the surface, save for scientific expeditions attempting to study the poison sun phenomenon.

Hundreds of small outpost habitats exist to supply the great underwater cities with everything they require, from food and drink to building materials and the all-important coral fuel that makes life on the ocean floor possible. Outposts may be owned by the crown or belong to private business interests, but they always exist to make profit.

Outposts are even smaller and more cramped than city spaces, and much riskier to live in. Workers sign on for 4-month rotations, during which they hot-bunk in rooms barely larger than closets, take three meals a day in dingy dining halls, and spend the rest of their time working like dogs in some of the most dangerous professions the empire has to offer. Outposts receive monthly visits from large cargo vessels which drop off supplies and new workers before returning with holds full of valuable resources. Most outposts aren't even connected to the telegraph network, which means that if someone goes wrong it might take weeks before anyone even knows they're in trouble.

Pirate Havens

While the Empire rules its territory with an iron fist, there are still enclaves of civilization that escape their grasp. Outpost workers occasionally revolt and claim the facilities as their own, while powerful and secretive factions within society all too often try to create their own habitats free from the burden of imperial law. The Royal Navy has decreed that all habitats that refuse to acknowledge imperial authority are to be considered pirates, and their inhabitants' lives forfeit under the law. In response, many of these enclaves have been forced to pirates in truth in order to survive.

The life of a pirate is harsh and dangerous, but offers a degree of freedom found nowhere else. Pirate enclaves are rarely lawless; most are run as small democracies, and only the largest few have any need for codified laws and behaviour. Most pirate outposts have no hope of standing up to the might of the Royal Navy, so they rely on secrecy instead. They build in hidden places, disguise their homes as sunken ruins, and cipher all of their maps and communication to make sure that the navy cannot raze their homes with impunity. Few outposts are self-sufficient, so pirates must prey on cargo ships for the supplies necessary to survive. This isn't to say that pirate enclaves never raid for wealth; piracy is a hanging offence at any scale, after all, so why stop at mere necessity?

The pirates claim only one true city: the legendary pirate fortress of Haven. The mysterious underwater city is said to house nearly half a million pirates, crewing thousands of independent vessels. The city opens its gates

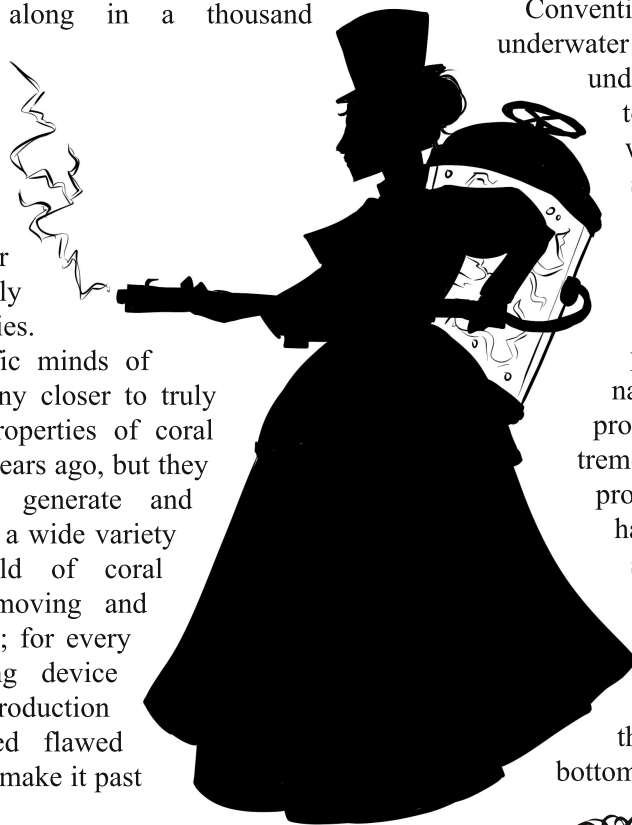


to any who seek to escape the stifling rule of the Empire, but asks that they protect and provide for the city in return. In Haven, pirates can sell their ill-gotten treasure and live like kings, or find themselves bound and indebted to any of the ruthless pirate lords who control much of the city. The Royal Navy has never managed to mount a full-scale assault on Haven, but only a few of its highest officers know why: Haven is no ocean-floor habitat; it's a city-sized submarine. Its mysterious ruler, known only as the Captain, guides her city through the hidden places of the ocean in search of treasures and secrets.

Coral Technology

Coral is the lifeblood of the Empire, the miraculous fuel that makes life on the ocean floor possible. Coal, the former driving force of imperial industry, is almost entirely useless underwater, leaving coral as the only viable energy source available. Vast industrial processing plants devour thousands of pounds of luminescent coral every day to produce the volatile liquid fuel that sustains the Empire. In every city and every boat, coral-powered devices recycle air, purify water, provide heat and light, and help life along in a thousand invisible ways.

Beyond providing for the empire's basic needs, the study of coral enables an ever-growing number of fantastic, nearly mystical technologies. The greatest scientific minds of the age are barely any closer to truly understanding the properties of coral than they were fifty years ago, but they know that it can generate and manipulate energy in a wide variety of ways. The field of coral technology is fast-moving and intensely competitive; for every brilliant life-changing device that reaches mass production there are a hundred flawed inventions that never make it past the prototype stage.



Underwater Warfare

Descending to live on the ocean floor rendered even

the most modern tools of warfare completely useless, but that did nothing to curb the empire's militaristic nature. Scientific minds wasted no time in exploiting the power of coral technology to create ever more terrifying weapons of destruction. The Royal Navy insists that continued weapons development is necessary to fight the growing threat of piracy, and, more importantly, to ensure that the empire can compete with other nations that might have survived the poison sun, whenever contact with them is re-established.

New trends in personal armaments favour weapons adapted for combat in the cramped confines of submarine vessels and underwater habitats. Muskets and black powder pistols are out of favour, owing to the way they pollute the air and risk a hull breach with every missed shot. In their place, coral-powered lightning weapons have become the de-facto ranged weapon for pirates and soldiers alike. The electrical blast from a lightning projector can kill just as effectively as a musket ball, while stray bolts ground themselves harmlessly into the water. For those who prefer not to rely on complex technology in battle, close combat with swords and knives has seen an upsurge in popularity, being well suited to fighting in enclosed spaces.

Conventional cannons are less than useless to underwater warships, and lightning weapons cannot fire underwater, so naval engineers have been forced to find alternate means of aggression. Most warships are equipped with some form of sonic weapon, sometimes called a Bellringer or a Wardrum, which uses focused sound waves to inflict crushing pressure on enemy vessels, crumpling their hulls like tin cans. Some ships attack with Clickers: coral-powered clockwork warheads that take their name from the distinctive sounds they produce in the water. These devices are tremendously destructive, but expensive to produce and prone to malfunction when handled improperly. Daring captains sometimes outfit their ships with breach cutters designed to pierce an enemy's hull and open way for a boarding party. Pirates in particular love these devices, which allow them to capture and loot their targets before sinking them to the bottom of the ocean.

Ancient Civilizations

In 1874, imperial explorers searching for new coral deposits discovered something impossible: an abandoned

underwater city that appeared to be thousands of years old, buried in an ocean trench. Further expeditions sent to study the city found writing that bore no resemblance to any known language, and coral-powered technology decades ahead of imperial science. Fearing that this revelation might undermine the stability of the empire, the crown swore to secrecy all who had visited the city, and established a secret organization within the Royal Navy to study and exploit its secrets. Over the following decades, more sites were discovered and subsequently covered up, though the empire has come to no closer to any real understanding of the vanished culture that created them.

Most subjects of the empire have no idea that an ancient lost civilization once thrived in the region they now call home. Those who come too close to discovering the existence of the ancients are either recruited or silenced. Among the pirates, however, rumours and gossip concerning the lost cities abound. Those in know say that the mysterious Captain of the pirate city has strong interest, bordering on obsession, regarding anything related to the ancient civilization, and that she offers lavish rewards to those who bring her intriguing artifacts or new knowledge.

Monsters

In the earliest days of undersea exploration, sailors often returned to the surface with tales of glimpsing immense creatures, mysterious and evasive, during their deep dives. Authorities dismissed these claims as the products of an overactive imagination, but the rumours would spread anew every time a vessel went missing during an expedition. After almost a decade of life on the ocean floor, a naval vessel returned to harbour towing the carcass of a sea serpent over 200ft in length, providing definitive evidence for the existence of the undersea giants. Since then, scientists have classified dozens of varieties of sea monster, ranging from passive to the ferociously aggressive. Every encounter with these creatures is carefully recorded and studied, but even the scientific authorities are no closer to understanding their true nature.

Naturalists who study sea monsters say that no creatures of that size should be able to survive at such a depth, where food and oxygen are so scarce. Many have drawn a link between this mystery and the creatures' habit of congregating near extensive coral deposits, theorizing that the sea monsters may somehow draw their energy from the coral itself. It's certainly true that many varieties of monster seem attracted to vessels and habitats containing large supplies of coral, which only adds

further fuel to the superstitions surrounding monster and coral alike.

In addition to the well-known variety of sea serpent, sailors have spotted monsters that seem to resemble enormous crabs, squid, octopi, and sharks. Those who encounter sea monsters are prone to embellishing their tales, of course, so it's difficult to estimate how many distinct forms the creatures may take. There are some who think that the different monster varieties don't represent separate species, but singular monsters seen many different times, each one completely unique in all the ocean. One variety, however, never fails to capture the imagination. A great blind whale-like beast, known as the Leviathan, may indeed be a unique creature. It is said to be peaceful, but of such immense size that it could swallow entire vessels whole. Some consider it to be a benevolent protector of the ocean, while others insist that it is only dreaming, and that one day soon it will awaken and destroy the undersea cities in a rage. Those who actually encounter the sea monster describe only a great sense of awe and majesty, feeling that the gentle giant before them is important in a way they cannot fully understand.



The Rules

Like other Powered By Fate games, the rules for playing *Sunken Empire* are easy to customize to fit your style of play. In addition to the normal Fate Core rules for creating characters, playing the game, and running campaigns, you can use the setting information and treasure hunting rules in this book to create exciting stories of exploration and adventure at the bottom of the sea. If you like, you can also take the treasure hunting rules from *Sunken Empires* and use them in all sorts of other settings. Mix and match as you see fit!

Below, you'll find some of the extra systems presented in other Fate Core books that we think fit easily into *Sunken Empire*, and some tips for incorporating them into your game. You can use all of these rules, none of them, or any combination that catches your interest. The important thing is to make sure that everyone in the group knows which of the extra rules you're using, if any.

Vehicles (Fate System Toolkit p. 170)

In the world of *Sunken Empire*, your ship is your key to adventure. Surrounded on all sides by an environment utterly inimical to human life, your ship isn't just your way of getting around, it's your entire world. The rules for Group Vehicles in particular are ideal for personalizing your group's favourite vessel. Consider giving every player character a new dedicated aspect, which they can use to describe their connection to the ship and its crew.

Gadgets (Fate System Toolkit, p. 154)

The almost miraculous (and deliberately ill-defined) properties of coral open the way for any number of fantastic mad science devices for PCs and NPCs alike. From lightning guns and sonic weapons to teleporters and invisibility devices, it's up to your group to decide just how weird and wild you want technology to be. Strange coral technologies are best modeled as Gadgets, and characters use the Science skill to understand, build, and modify them.

Wealth (Fate System Toolkit p. 69)

Whether hunting lost treasures or plundering merchant convoys, a pirate's life revolves around wealth. You may choose to track wealth stress for individual party members, or keep one stress track for the entire

group. Completing a Treasure Hunt always grants each character a parcel of wealth equal to the hunt's Peril rating, in addition to whatever other rewards it offers. At the GM's discretion, a particularly valuable or impressive treasure may permanently grant an additional wealth stress box. Serious expenses, such as repairing or refitting a ship, might require players to tick a wealth stress box to represent the cost. Extreme expenses, such as purchasing a new ship, may require permanently sacrificing a wealth stress box.

Treasure Hunting

Even the most reckless of treasure hunters usually like to decide just what treasure it is they're hunting before they dive off into the deep blue. Most treasure hunts start with a clue, which might be anything from a map left behind by a dying pirate to a coded message found hidden in a historical document. Whatever form it takes, the function of the first clue is to alert your players to the possibility of a treasure worth hunting. You can create this initial clue for your players to find, or let them decide what sort of treasure they're interested in and build a clue to match it. Players should consider their reasons for searching after this treasure. Some might seek greater knowledge, or the glory that comes from accomplishing the impossible. For those who lack such lofty goals, the promise of incredible wealth often provides sufficient motivation. Once you've established what you aim to hunt, and you have a clear idea of why you aim to hunt it, you can start planning out the hunt itself.

Preparations for the Group

The first step in designing a treasure hunt is deciding on an aspect that names the treasure you're hunting, something like "Seeking the Lost City" or "On the Trail of The Golden Whale." This aspect can set the tone of the entire adventure; "Seeking Treasure in the Dome of Sunken Stars" gives a very different impression from "We Must Find the Dome of Sunken Stars Before it is Too Late!" Ask your players how their characters feel about the upcoming hunt, and work with them to create



an aspect that fits. Treat this as a situation aspect that sticks around for as long as the hunt lasts. The hunt becomes a driving ambition for the entire party; players can invoke the treasure aspect to help them overcome obstacles along the trail, and the GM can compel it to force the players to put the treasure hunt before all other goals.

The second step is to choose a Rival to challenge the party on their hunt. The Rival is represented by an aspect like the one that describes the treasure, except that the Rival is there to stop the party from reaching their goal. The Rival may be a literal rival group that hopes to find the treasure before the party, or it might be an old enemy looking for revenge on one of the PCs. Players are encouraged to draw Rivals from their characters' backstories, or to design them based on their characters' aspects. Whenever the Rival gets involved or makes things harder for the PCs, generally no more than once per scene, the GM can compel the entire party at once with the Rival's aspect. Not every treasure hunt needs a Rival, but if you decide to go without one you should think carefully to make sure there's still plenty of dangers and difficulties to complicate the PC's pursuit of the treasure. If you can't think of any tied to the PCs, the Royal Navy is always a good default, because they have reason to oppose nearly everything the party does.

The third step is to prepare for the rigors of the hunt. In character, the PCs need to make sure that they have enough supplies, their crew is ready, and their mode of transport is working. Out of character, the players need to establish their Hunting Stress track. The entire party shares a single stress track representing their collective

dedication, the level of their supplies, and their overall ability to continue pushing forwards. Being taken out by Hunting stress means that your party can no longer keep up the pace, forcing you to abandon the hunt. If you ever get an opportunity to seek the same treasure again, it will pose a completely different challenge.

The Hunting Stress track starts with two boxes, plus one box for every character in the party with an aspect directly related to their exceptional determination or great experience in a relevant field. If your group is using vehicle rules, you can count your submarine as a separate character for determining stress boxes. Your Hunting stress track doesn't clear all its boxes at the end of each scene, only when you reach a milestone.

The party also receives blank slots for three special consequences: one Mild (-2), one Moderate (-4), and one Severe (-6). These treasure hunting consequences represent problems and complications that make it harder for you to pursue your goals. Treat them as regular consequences shared by the entire party, which can be compelled, renamed, and recovered like any other consequence.

Preparations for the GM

While the players are preparing their Hunting Stress track, the GM plans out the shape of the adventure. The GM needs to decide how long they want the hunt to last, how challenging it will be, and where it will take the players along the way. The GM should already know about the first clue that will start the PCs on their journey, so they need to decide how the hunt will go forward from there, and how it will end.

Every treasure hunt is measured in milestones, much like regular Fate adventures. Milestones give structure to the hunt, and mark the PCs' progress towards their goals. During the treasure hunt, the players will attempt to progress from one milestone to the next until they reach the treasure at the end. A short treasure hunt might have only one milestone, at the very end, while a long hunt, meant to be played over several sessions, might have a dozen milestones or more.

In planning out a treasure hunt milestone, the GM starts by deciding what change the milestone represents. Have the players uncovered some new information that puts them on a different track? Has the hunt lead them to a new area they need to explore? Milestones should open up new possibilities for the players to pursue, and move the hunt in a new direction.

The next step is deciding how difficult the milestone will be to reach. Every milestone has a skill called Peril, rated on the same ladder as other skills, which represents

Consequences

Mild Hunting consequences represent minor troubles that make your life less pleasant:

Nothing to Eat But Salt Pork and Hardtack, Crew is Feeling Antsy, The Engine is Making Funny Noises.

Moderate Hunting consequences represent major troubles that seriously hamper your progress:

Running Low on Food, Dangerously Superstitious Crew, The Engine is Smoking.

Severe Hunting consequences represent huge problems that can completely stop you in your tracks:

Everyone's Starving, A Mutiny on Our Hands, The Engine is Broken.

the amount of danger and hardship the party must face to reach the next stage of the hunt. A Peril rating set below the PC's skill cap won't provide too much difficulty, while a Peril rating set high above the skill cap creates a nigh impossible challenge. Each milestone has a Hunting stress track as well, which by default has a number of boxes equal to its Peril rating. A milestone may have between 0 – 3 consequence slots, at whatever ratings the GM assigns. Adding consequence slots to a milestone will extend the time taken to reach it without making the hunt more or less difficult otherwise. Milestone consequences take the form of useful leads that the PCs have uncovered, or assets they've gathered to help in their hunt.

The last step is to decide whether to the milestone should be Minor, Significant, or Major, as detailed in the Fate Core rules. Minor milestones can mark the end of short hunts, or important midpoints in longer adventures. Significant and Major milestones should be reserved for the end of longer hunts, or important midpoints in epic, campaign-spanning treasure hunts. The GM can also decide to use half-milestones, which clear all Hunting Stress boxes for the players and advance them toward the end of the hunt, but otherwise have no effect.

On the Hunt

Once the nature of the treasure hunt is well established, the PCs can begin their search. The players and the GM collaborate to tell the story of how the party reaches, or fails to reach, the treasure at the end of the line. The GM plans out where the story begins and ends, and details the important milestones on the journey, but it's the players who decide how they actually get there. It's important to keep in mind is that everything the players do in pursuit of their goal has the potential to bring them closer to the treasure. The GM doesn't need to invent clever puzzles of trial-of-breadcrumbs linked clues, and the PCs don't need to wander around trying to guess what the GM has

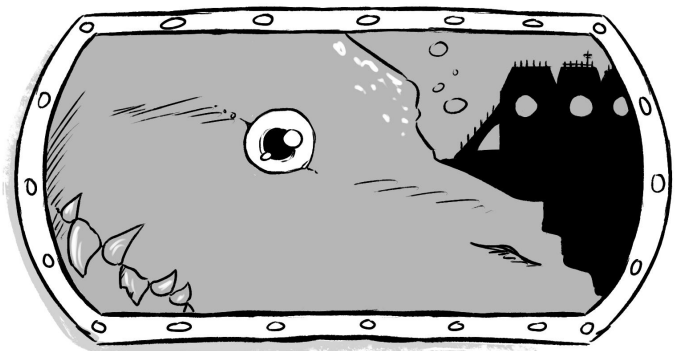
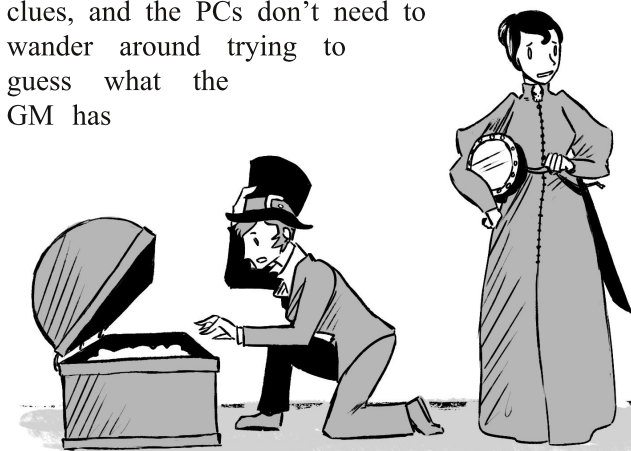
planned. This style of storytelling requires both the players and the GM to be ready to improvise, but it keeps the action moving forwards all the time.

Making Progress

When the hunt is on, it's the players' job to decide how they want to search for the treasure. They might start by gathering information, or following up on the clue that started the hunt in the first place, or they might just start knocking heads together and wait to see what happens. The players don't need to worry about whether or not they're choosing the right way to proceed, because whatever method they choose becomes the right way to proceed.

Once the party has decided on a course of action, it's the GM's job to turn it into an interesting conflict. The GM runs a Seeking scene, where they face a challenge in trying to accomplish their stated goals. Sometimes, the party's goals will present a clear challenge. If the PCs try to steal an old book from a baron's mansion, for example, they must sneak in and out without getting by his guards. Other times, the problem will be the result of unexpected circumstances; the party wants to buy a strange old compass, but a mysterious stranger beat them to it and now needs to be tracked down. The players get to propose what task they undertake, but it's always the GM who decides the conflict they face.

If, at the end of a successful scene, the party succeeded at overcoming the challenge, they get to move closer to their goal by making an Attack against the next milestone. The players and the GM should work together to decide what skill best defines the way they went about solving their problems. A scene focused on breaking into a guarded mansion might call for Stealth or Burglary, for



Rival Interference:

If you're facing a Rival on your treasure hunt, they do everything they can to keep you from reaching your goal. Sometimes, they provide the opposition in a Seeking scene, and you need to overcome them to progress. Other times, they intervene in some minor way to make an already challenging task even more difficult, which is treated as a compel on the group's Rival Aspect. Your Rivals might also decide just to try to beat you to the treasure during a Seeking scene. Unless you stop your Rivals from accomplishing their goals, you suffer a milestone attack against your Hunting Stress track at the end of the scene, in addition to the normal results of success or failure.



example, while an action scene might use Athletics, Fight, or Shoot, depending on how the PCs acted. Once the skill is decided, roll it as an Attack action against the Milestone using the highest rating in that skill amongst the party, with a difficulty equal to the milestone's Peril rating. Players can invoke aspects to improve their chances at this roll, so long as they have a strong justification for how the aspect helps bring them closer to their next goal.

If the attack fails, the party doesn't make any meaningful progress that scene. If the attack ties, the PCs get a free boost aspect in the form of a clue or some other advantage that they can invoke on a future Attack roll against the same milestone. A successful Attack inflicts stress on the milestone. If the GM elects to have the milestone take consequences to absorb the stress, name the consequences after important clues or accomplishments from the previous scene. If the PCs Take Out the milestone with the stress they inflict, they have the opportunity to advance to the next milestone and thus the next phase of the treasure hunt.

If the party fails to overcome the challenge presented by the Seeking scene, follow the same procedure, except that now the milestone makes an attack against the PCs. The milestone uses its peril rating to attack, and the PCs defend with the skill that best described their actions in the previous scene. Successful attacks inflict Hunting Stress on the party, which may force them to take consequences in order to avoid being Taken Out.

Whether the PCs succeed or fail at a seeking scene, they cannot select the same skill to roll two scenes in a row. For the players, the best way to work around this is

to make sure they try seeking the treasure in many different ways, giving each player the chance to show off their character's particular strengths.

Advancing the Hunt

When the PCs inflict enough stress on the current milestone to take it out, they can attempt to advance to the next stage of the hunt. Putting together everything the party has learned and accomplished, the GM sets the stage for a new scene, with a new conflict preventing the party from advancing. If the players succeed in overcoming this conflict, they advance to the next milestone. If the players fail at the challenge, the milestone makes an attack against them, just as if they'd failed at a Seeking scene. So long as this doesn't Take Out the party, however, they can always try again with a new scene and a new attempt to progress.

Once the players reach the final milestone, their hunt is over. The GM should plan out a scene where the party reaches the treasure, and finally gets their hands on whatever they were searching for. The GM may make this scene the climax of the game, presenting the party with one last challenge to overcome before they can truly claim their prize. Alternately, the GM may use the scene to resolve the game without a final challenge, giving the players their treasure without much struggle. This option is especially useful when the group agrees that an earlier scene makes a great climax in its own right. Either way, the party loses their Treasure and Rival aspects, and clears away their Hunting stress track. Any un-healed Hunting consequences they accrued remain, though they may need to be renamed to remain relevant once the hunt is over.



Storytelling

Running a treasure hunt as a GM requires constant improvisation, because you never know what direction your players will take things. Fortunately, there are a few things you can prepare beforehand to make it easier for you to think on your feet.

Stock Up on Hooks

Running an improvisational game means that you can't predict every decision your players are going to make to steer the plot, but it doesn't prevent you from giving them some subtle guidance. Before the game starts, come up with a number of interesting places and characters to act as hooks for the investigation. Put in just enough detail to make them seem like useful leads, but leave the rest undefined. You can fill in the blanks once you're actually running the game, to better fit the hooks to whatever story the players are helping you tell. Lots of your hooks will probably go unused, and that's alright; just quietly move on without bringing attention to them, and reuse them for another game down the road.

Prepare One Size Fits All Conflicts

Every seeking scene revolves around a conflict, so you'll need to be prepared to come up with a lot of them on short notice. You can't completely predict what kind of situations the PCs will get involved in, but fortunately, you don't need to. There are plenty of conflicts you can prepare ahead of time that work in practically any situation. The party's Rival is a good place to start. They might send hired goons to start a fight, steal something important and force the PCs to chase them down, or sabotage something the PCs have to fix. You can put together a few scenes like that before the game starts, and fill in the details to fit the specifics of the situation.

The important thing to keep in mind when designing conflicts is to stick to the essentials. Every conflict boils down to two elements: a goal that the PCs want to accomplish, and something that's preventing them from easily reaching their goal. Your players will tell you what their goal is before the scene even starts, so it's your job to make them work for it. If the PC's chosen course of action naturally suggests a certain kind of opposition,

build something around that. Otherwise, use one of your pre-made conflicts to provide an obstacle to overcome. For this system, the best conflicts are the ones with clear conditions for success or failure, because that makes it easier to tell if the PCs should inflict or suffer treasure hunt stress once the scene is over.

Buy Yourself Some Time

Fast-paced improvisational games force you to constantly think on your feet, so it's important to find time to catch your breath and organize your thoughts when you can. Sometimes, that means calling for a short break so that you can think while everyone uses the washroom, stands up to stretch, or grabs refills for their drinks and snacks. Sometimes, though, you want to buy yourself some time without disrupting the pace of the game.

You can take advantage of the lull in the action that comes whenever the players have finished a Seeking scene. Once the players have rolled to resolve treasure hunt stress and settled any consequences, take a minute to set a scene where all of the PCs have gathered together to discuss what to do next. Not only does this encourage the players to keep in-character while planning out their next scene, it also keeps the players active and engaged with the game in a way that requires little to no input from you. Let your players know that their first job is to choose their next approach so that you can start planning, then let them carry on roleplaying while you work. You still want to keep the game fast-paced, though, so try not to spend more than 5 minutes planning a scene. Once you're ready, wrap up the roleplaying and move on to the action.

Hooks into Stories, Stories into Campaigns

When you're running a longer game, try to throw in a few story hooks for you to use in future sessions. Listen to the questions your players are asking about the world, and when one that sounds like it could have an interesting answer, give them some hint that says "there's a story behind this." You don't need to come up with the answer

or the story right away, though. Make a note of the hint and figure out what it means later, once you have time to think. Once you've finished one game, you should have a number of new hooks that you can use to start the next one. Find the hooks the players are interested in and run with them, and you can improvise an entire campaign one game at a time.

Portraying the Empire

The setting of *Sunken Empire* is loosely based on the Victorian Era of British history, with elements of science fiction and two-fisted adventure tales. You can draw on any of these sources for inspiration in writing your games, but we've identified three key themes that we think are important to portraying the empire under the ocean as it's presented in this book.

Isolation

Living on the ocean floor means making a home in an alien world, a dark and hostile realm where humanity was never meant to live. Necessities like heat and oxygen, once taken for granted, are now scarce resources that might fail at any time. The sun no longer rises on the British Empire, and the only light to be found is that which you carry with you. A single mechanical failure or cut telegraph wire can strand you in a world of your own, because without a ship or a pressure suit, a distance of mere meters outside a habitat might as well be a span of a thousand miles.

When you need to add conflict or danger to a scene, you can always take the opportunity to remind the PCs just how precarious their underwater existence really is. Every submarine voyage relies on a hundred different things consistently not going wrong, so even a minor accident can have big consequences.

Pressure

The *Sunken Empire* is a civilization on the edge of ruin, never more than one wrong move away from disaster. Those who live under its shadow feel the crushing weight of impending doom pressing down on them like a thousand fathoms of ocean. The poor struggle daily just to survive. The wealthy and powerful keep a white-knuckled grip on their authority, fearing the day when the Empire slips free of their control and descends into chaos. Free pirates must parasitize the Empire's infrastructure to get by, all with the looming threat of the Royal Navy breathing down their necks.

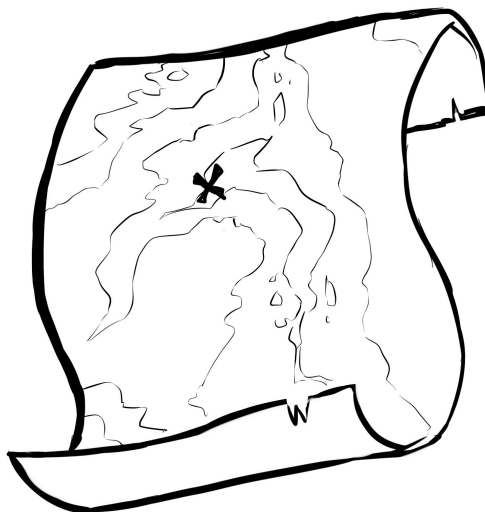
This atmosphere of constant pressure means that, no matter what they do, the PCs should never be completely

safe or comfortable. Let them have their victories where they've earned them, but make sure there's always some new conflict to ramp up the tension and motivate them to action. If having a resource like food or spare parts becomes important to the story, tell the players that they don't have enough of it. If the PCs need to do something time-intensive, invent some impending threat or other complication that gives them less time than they need. Provide enough challenges and complications to keep the PCs on their toes, but not so many that victory always seems out of reach. You want your players to feel like they're facing down a world that's out to get them so that, when they do win, it feels that much more triumphant.

Inequality

The pressures of life underwater have reinforced all the worst aspects of the British Empire, leading it to become more authoritarian, xenophobic, and avaricious than ever before. The aristocrats treat anyone who isn't British as a resource to be exploited, and barely consider the poor of their own country to even be human. The status quo holds women as inferior to men, and sets stark limits on the activities and associations they are permitted. Some of the aristocracy have campaigned for social reforms to benefit the oppressed, but in doing so they risk being labelled as radicals and effectively exiled from so-called polite society.

The grotesque inequalities of Victorian society drive conflict in *Sunken Empire*, and as pirates and rebels the PCs will have plenty of opportunities to encounter the worst of it. Society still holds that great and bold undertakings are best done by white Christian men, so PCs who don't quite fit that mould while they run off and seek great treasures are challenging the empire just by existing.



Seeds of Adventure

Dreadnought

Rumour has it that the Royal Navy is secretly building the biggest, most heavily armed ship ever to sail the lightless depths. Codenamed "Dreadnought," this vessel has the potential to completely overturn the balance of power in underwater warfare, rendering all lesser warships obsolete. The precise details are shrouded in mystery, but one thing is clear: the Navy cannot be allowed to wield such power. You must find the navy's newest super weapon and destroy it before they can use it to crush the pirate resistance once and for all. Or, more daring still, steal it for your own.

The First Clue: You come into possession of a coded naval dispatch containing information on the *Dreadnought*.

Milestones: Find the hidden shipyard, infiltrate the secret base.

The Widow's Locket

Wealthy widow Lady Elizabeth Wallbright has been robbed, and the authorities have been unable to catch the perpetrator. The jewellery and gold taken can be replaced, but she is reaching out to the seedier elements of society for help in recovering one particular object: a brass locket, given to her by her late husband General Wallbright. The reward she's offered for the locket's safe return is substantial, and surely the brigand who's stolen it will have other wealth worth plundering.

First Clue: Encountering Lady Wallbright, or her representative, in the slums of New London

Milestones: Discover the identity of the thief, find (or reach) the thief's lair.

Optional Bonus: Hidden behind the portrait in the locket is a scrawled note from General Wallbright, which hints at the existence of some even greater treasure. Can be used as the first clue of a new hunt.

The Gosschalk Device

The unconventional scientist Prof. Herbert Gosschalk believes he's found a way to manufacture synthetic coral. He was prepared to sell his secrets to Haven until the Royal Navy stepped in to arrest him, intent on keeping his genius to themselves. In the right hands, his formula could solve everyone's energy needs permanently, and open the doors for a better way of life in the sunken

empire. The Navy will certainly dispose of him once he gives them a working prototype, so unless someone acts quickly, his discovery will only serve to support the status quo.

First Clue: One of Gosschalk's assistants escapes the Navy's clutches, and asks you to help her rescue the professor before he outlives his usefulness.

Milestones: Rescue the scientist, test his formula, create a synthetic coral machine

The Wreck of the RMS Kindness

The RMS Kindness was one of the first heavy submersible vessels ever designed, built to ferry the wealthy and their treasures from the surface during the exodus to the ocean floor. She disappeared under mysterious circumstances during her first descent voyage, and has been the subject of legends and tall tales ever since. The stories all agree that she's still out there somewhere, with a hold full of priceless surface treasures, waiting for a daring adventurer to discover her secrets.

The First Clue: You come across a photograph depicting the unmistakable silhouette of the *Kindness*, nestled amidst a mass of glowing coral on the ocean floor.

Milestones: Discover the source of the photograph, track down the location of the *Kindness*, travel through dangerous waters to reach the wreck.

Captain Wolfe's Treasure

The legendary pirate captain Thaddeus Wolfe waged a bloody war against the empire for almost a decade, plundering dozens of ships outposts, and even a city habitat. In his twilight years, he gathered his greatest treasure onto his flagship, the *Cry of Hades*, and vanished into unknown waters. Countless pirates, hungry for gold or glory, have sailed off in search of Wolfe's treasure, but all have returned empty handed. Until now.

First Clue: A mortally wounded pirate stumbles into the tavern, whispering madly of danger and betrayal. He gives you the map as he dies, and charges you with discovering its secrets.

Milestones: Find a vessel and crew that handle the journey, sail into unknown waters, seek out the *Cry of Hades* in the belly of the titanic Leviathan.

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Find your fortune... ...or a watery grave

Sunken Empire is a tabletop roleplaying game of steampunk undersea adventure powered by Fate Core. Play a dashing rogue or a ruthless corsair in an underwater civilization on the brink of social collapse, rediscover ancient magics, and struggle to survive in an inhospitable world of danger and mystery.

This book contains a complete setting that reimagines the late 19th century in a world where the British empire has retreated underwater to escape a poisoned sun, as well as rules for creating fast-paced, player-driven treasure hunts with minimum GM preparation compatible with any Fate Core game.

What You'll Need to Play

- This book
- A copy of the Fate Core rules, available from the Evil Hat Publishing store or the free online SRD.
- At least two players
- A set of FUDGE/FATE Dice or D6s

