

Tides of Aether Lore Summary v2

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Aether, the Tides, and Visions

Ever since the birth of the universe, the aether has always existed, another plane standing alongside the material. It is a dimension of infinite energy, only accessible by living beings. When life touches the aether, it shifts around the will of the one who touched it, creating swirls that both mirror and alter the material plane. If enough wills are bent in one direction, the aether shifts with it, sending an enormous wave of power crashing through the universe - a Tide.

There are many kinds of Tides - localized Tides that could be from a simple shared aspiration from a husband and wife, country-wide Tides from a day of sorrow or rejoicing, astrological tides that bring visions from beyond the stars, and anything in between, forming a sea of what could be called "emotional weather." The Tides affect living beings' use of the aether - many powerful feats can only be done in high Tides, when one is aligned with the wills of many.

All living things can see the aether, but its infinity is impossible to comprehend - each mind resolves it differently, into a surreal vision that depends on their view of the world. In general, children only see formless grey mist, but as they age, other visions develop - typically a small clearing of some sort, surrounded by the infinite. A wall of white mist that shifts and colors as the Tides move in the distance; a small island surrounded by gently lapping waves that stretch into the horizon in every direction; a clearing in the forest, its leaves rustling in the wind of the Tides; a field of columns that is never in the same configuration twice.

Magic

As all things can see the aether, they can touch it. Even animal instinct and subconscious thought can shift the aether, but mankind has developed systems and training methods to refine these into systems and tools that are generally called magic. Magic permeates every part of society, as basic magic is simple and ubiquitous enough to teach to every child. Much of what we would consider important scientific or medical research is set aside, as magic from people or trained animals can fulfill all the needs of a society. For example, all injuries, no matter how severe, can be healed if done shortly after the injury. Firearms aren't as impressive when your warriors can throw fireballs. High-speed communication technology is less appealing when there are birds that can teleport thousands of kilometers in minutes.

Magic, however, has important rules and limitations to it. First of all, as already mentioned, only living things can use magic. Magical machinery can be made, set with patterns that guide the will along certain paths, but it is useless without a user. In the same way, the strongest wizard is a normal man while asleep.

Second, you can only use magic as far as you can see in the aether - its range is limited by your ability to comprehend it, fading out gradually over 50 meters or less. Less skilled and less intelligent creatures have smaller ranges; plants have especially small ranges, usually centimeters. Because of this limitation, objects created wholesale from aether disappear if their creator leaves the immediate area. The source of this limitation is interference from other living creatures - the aether thins in particularly sterile environments such as the void of space.

Third, although the aether is infinite, the mind's ability to harness its energy is not. Using magic places mental strain on the user, and overuse can lead to exhaustion. Sleep and eating large amounts of food are typically sufficient for even a long day of using magic, but especially powerful techniques are too dangerous to use often. Using magic to heal or strengthen one's body doesn't bypass this limitation - those who do this soon slip into long periods of sleep while they recover. Especially large creatures that cannot consume enough food, such as ancient animals known as titans or the dragons that plague the world, must spend long periods of time hibernating.

Fourth, each being has a spirit, or *wave* in the aether, a reflection of the truth of their existence, bending the aether in response. It is the core of that truth, what makes them *them*. It is an ideal, an echo of being, a personal vision, a stake claimed in existence. Waves shift and move over time, shadowing the being that created them. When that being's body dies in the material plane, its wave burns, reaching out instinctively with all its might, wishing for nothing but survival, finally guttering out as the physical no longer anchors it in the aetheric. Waves that have died and inanimate objects are called *wakes*. In practice, living things are resistant to magical change, but objects are not. In addition, increasing or altering something already that is already real or true is easier than denying it.

Fifth, no two living things are able to truly comprehend each other's mind - all attempts at telepathy, mind-reading, and other similar magic have met with failure, madness, or death.

Finally, time is a constant. While perception of it can be changed, all attempts to alter or travel in time have met with failure. Those who tried have only reported that the past no longer exists, and the future does not yet exist.

Strand and Ancient History

Tides of Aether is set on the planet Strand, in the Fulcrum system, named for its sun. Fulcrum has one moon, Peak, locked similarly to Terra's moon so that only one side is faces it. Strand is a large, terrestrial planet, with large amounts of water and a climate similar to Terra. Its rotational period is significantly longer than Terra's, with 30 hours per day. The people of Strand use the metric system to calculate distance, and the same time measurements as Terrans.

At some point in the distant past, the people of Terra sent out a colonization effort, borne in plant-arks behind spaceworthy titans, great whales of colossal fortitude, raised over hundreds of years to carry its children to the stars. Three titans originally reached Fulcrum, Azure Hope, Bowhead, and Dawn. They landed on Sapphire, a world covered in water and small islands.

After an unknown period of prosperity in their new home, problems arose. A civil war began, devastating the planet and draining its resources. The knowledge of the ancient Terrans birthed living weapons, capable of flying over the seas and diving under them, then crushing any who opposed them: dragons.

Those who came with Dawn decided to, in secret, undertake the great task of raising Dawn to the stars again, making for Strand, the second planet in the system, cooler but still habitable. Again, only myths tell of this Exodus, but it is said that many of the plant-arks were lost on its ascent, and many died defending its launch. As it made its final ascent through a column of water reaching into the sky, the black dragon Sumir-Ten and many other, lesser dragons latched onto it, and it tried to kill Dawn as it made its way to Strand, three days of terror and fear.

As Dawn entered the atmosphere, it fell towards the center of what is now known as the continent of Exodus.

The plant-arks descended, scattered across the planet, many in danger from the surviving dragons. Dawn and Sumir-Ten landed in a lake in the center of the continent, and fought for a further three days, eventually culminating in a massive explosion that killed both and left a crater in Exodus. It is unknown to this day which mighty beast caused it.

However, the dragons remained, and those that survived made Exodus their home. The refugees had thought the pattern of hibernation and short bursts of action typical of dragons would keep them safe as they attempted to salvage what they could, but only a few short years later, the first Tide was felt from Sapphire - a Tide of hatred and anger that awoke the dragons, crushing the barely surviving Exiles and destroying much of what they had brought in the arks, leaving only a few scattered remnants across the planet. From then on, Sapphire was known as the Dragonstar, and its dark Tides still plague Strand to this day, coming at random intervals - sometimes ten years, sometimes fifty, sometimes only two.

Although much scientific, magical, and cultural history was lost, some remained. Many Terran languages, religions, and famous artistic works have survived. A similarly wide mix of racial diversity exists, and it has gotten stronger as Strand's human population has risen. Although there are a few million people on the planet, the vast majority of it is trackless, uncivilized wilderness, as only a few places have sufficient resources to protect themselves from dragon attacks.

Continents, Places of Interest, and Organizations

The Crown is a cold land, with a more temperate, agrarian southern region. The northern half is almost entirely covered by the Great Northern Forest. The Pine Primordial, a colossal, ancient tree, stands near the town Sosna in the forest, near the splitting of the two rivers in the western half of the continent. On the southeastern shore, the walled port city of White Bastion stands on a high cliff, a waterfall separating it from the nearby mountains. Inside White Bastion is the Basilica of St. Peter, the center of the Catholic faith on Strand. White Bastion is known for its fierce independence, its mighty paladins and their dragon hunts, and its navy, the jewel of which is the airship *Pegasus*.

Dusk has a wide variety of climates, ranging from the scorching Deep Sands in the south to the verdant Waterwood in the north. There is a large population here, and the continent is very civilized. It is ruled by the Empire of Stars, a monarchy with a reputation for bureaucracy and intrigue. It's been in on-and-off wars with the competing Britannian Confederation to the south, supposedly over land claims.

In the Deep Sands lies the Moon Fortress and its Crescent Moon assassins, a secretive society that claims to act with the good of the world in mind. The river that cuts through the north of the Deep Sands has created a massive canyon known as the Fissure. Set into the walls of the Fissure there is a monastery known as Duskhold, where abyssals and others with dangerous magic who are unwelcome elsewhere can live in peace.

On the northeastern shore lies Sunset Cove, a relatively lawless place where pirates and adventurers gather. It's only tolerated because of the skill of its leaders and its shipbuilders, who produce much of the ships for the Empire. Farther to the west is the Ebony Primordial and its grand Archives, the nearby town of White Pool, and the high plain where many unusual beasts roam.

To the west is a large, mostly uninhabited island. There are persistent tales of a secret order of mages named the Constant and their Institute centered around here, but none have been confirmed. The largest set of falls in the world, Mirror Falls, lie here, and also a wide variety of unusual flora and fauna.

Britannia is a land of green plains and lush forests, ruled by the Britannian Confederation, a republic that

spends much of its time and resources competing with the Empire to the north. The Confederation used to be an empire as well, but a fairly recent shakeup has changed the form of government - in word at least. Practically, its long history of nobles and their ambitions continues the same as before. Outside of the Confederation, they're known as the Wolves, due to their flag.

On the western river lies Lincolnia, the capital, also known as the City of Metal or the Shining City. It's covered in fantastic architecture crafted by skilled geomancers, rising thousands of meters above the ground. Lincolnia is built around the Oak Primordial, and the sight of skyscrapers surrounding its leaves is a true wonder of the world. Another Primordial lies to the southeast, the Ash Primordial and its city Fraxinus. Its noble kings lead crusades against the dragons, wielding spears granted to them from the Ash itself.

On the northeast coast lies the Tomb of the Exiles, a great archive and center of learning for all things magical. There are deep catacombs underneath it, burrowed out by some unknown creature long ago that are yet unexplored.

Exodus is the land of dragons, an incredibly dangerous place in the best of circumstances. The only inhabited places are the archipelago between it and Britannia, and the rainforest on the southeastern coast, whose inhabitants are experts at the mysterious art of shifting, using it to survive in that dangerous place. The rainforest continues across the mountain range to cover much of the southern half of the continent.

All across Exodus can be found Exile ruins, which could contain valuable mystical, cultural, or historical information lost to the dragons. Legends tell of entire cities lost to the forests, but most who venture there never return. In the center of Exodus is the crater Dawn's End, where the bones of Dawn and Sumir-Ten still lie on the ocean floor. The most ancient of dragons have never forgotten their defeat that day, and those who venture into the crater do not long survive.

Covering the north of the continent is the vast Scouring Desert, a waste of shifting sand dunes, and two mountain ranges, the Dragon's Back on the eastern coast and the Dragon's Teeth on the north coast, the highest mountain range in the world. It is said that Exile ruins are here as well, and those who survive will be very well off indeed. On top of one of the Dragon's Teeth is the Thousand Steps monastery, a secluded place that only the powerful are able to reach.

The Land of Veils is so named because its inhabitants are secretive and not much is known about them, besides that their inhabitants all have training in strange magic that are rare or unheard of in other places in the world. One of the few places that does communicate to outsiders is the Academy of the Hand, on the southwestern coast. It is a place of learning for all those who use elemental magic, set on a caldera with an active volcano, the Furnace, nearby.

To the northwest is a vast, ancient forest known as the Spiritwood. Tales tell of strange, xenophobic natives clad in living wooden armor that kill or drive away all that approach. These Guardians have some secret communion with the forest, letting them grow shelter, instead of building it. They refuse to engage in official trade or diplomacy. Legends speak that those who live there are half tree, and sleeping in the Spiritwood can lead to seeing maddening visions.

To the south are the Golden Plains, a vast and lightly-populated area. Floating just above the Golden Plains is an enormous floating disk, a mobile city entered around the Nexus, a city-state and magical academy all in one. The Nexus is self-sufficient - half of the disk is farmland, the other densely packed housing and commercial buildings, with a tower in the center. The tower is a famed place where astrologers perfect their craft, and it is a featureless cylinder bereft of windows or doors - one must be able to teleport to even enter it. The Nexus creates and sells many complex magical machines, distributing them across the world with its small fleet of airships.

The Rose is the smallest continent on Strand, but it may be its most impressive - it is entirely artificial. Soon after the Exodus, a tremendous act of geomancy was done, raising it from the seafloor in a matter of weeks. It is a symmetrical spiral of terraces split into four parts, broken by the Thorn mountains and the Stem rivers.

Much of the Divine State of the Rose is covered by the Spires, a gleaming, metropolitan center of commerce, art, and development of all kinds. The entirety of the Rose is heavily regulated - one can suffer severe penalties for breaking laws or carelessly using magic without the proper license. Just as regulation flourishes, however, so do criminals whose business is bypassing it, notably the international criminal syndicate known as the Spider. It's said that the right bribe can get you anywhere in the Rose - anywhere but the Forbidden City.

In the center of the Rose lies the Forbidden City, home of the two Divines, its sole rulers. The Divines have been alive as long as anyone can remember, far surpassing the lifetime typically possible, even for those blessed with great magical power. Through some unknown mechanism, they have achieved immortality. Though they rarely interact with the government of the Spires, they are adored - some would say worshipped - by its inhabitants. Other religions are not banned in the Spires, but they are not welcomed either.

In times of crisis or great discontent, a Divine will show themselves, displaying power well beyond that of even the most heroic adventurer. One story still told from three hundred years ago is how a Divine took down an ancient dragon single-handedly, leaping onto its back, forcing it to crash in the Southern Harbor of the Spires, and split it in two with a massive golden lightning bolt.

