

# Gateway Falls

By Ben Reyes © 2005

Some say Primates (or First Ones, High Ones, etc.) are a myth. Others are true believers. The legends passed down by the Ocean Folk say that while animal kind was yet savage, Primates came full circle with their penchant for creating things and changing their environment. In order to design a device by which the dense, hot shroud of Venus could be instantly siphoned off to the sparse, cold Martian vale, they had to produce an artificial mind smarter than their own. Afterward, Primate and Progeny united and uplifted to some incorporeal plane of consciousness, passing the torch of sentience to the other Earthlings as a parting gift or inheritance, leaving no apparent trace of themselves behind. No trace except for three habitable planets where once there was one, each connected by six Gateway Falls. Beasts call the three planets the Triune World or Triunuum, composed of The Red World, The Blue World, and The Yellow World (which Cold Blooded Folk arguably call The Green World).

The six Gateway Falls are set upon the North and South Poles of the three planets. The ocean tides flow strong toward the magnetic poles of each world, leading to a vast mist-shrouded vortex. Ships drift into the mist at a quick pace and fall toward a gravity field just like a waterfall, and exit at the opposite pole of the next, closest world over. From there, steady winds take the ships to port. The 'closest world over' changes with the seasons and passage of years. With these changes in tides and winds the Earth has taken a more primordial form, dominated by treacherous seas and tropical islands prone to sink or rise often with the forces of erosion and volcanism. A few backward tribes of land dwellers live there but the Blue World (Earth) is primarily home to the Sea and Bug Folk and those who make their living at sea (be they native to Red or Yellow Worlds). Red World (Mars) bears the likeness of an Ice Age Earth, given to vast glacial wastelands, dotted by well-forested, ruddy tundra along the equator. This is the cherished home of many Woodland Folk. Yellow World (Venus) is a dichotomy of desert mesas swept by blistering, rending winds overlooking lowland valleys of vast steamy jungles enshrouded with saffron mists. Here is the home of the predatory Cold Blooded and Avian Folk, a fact for which the people two worlds away are grateful.

The journey across worlds is an uncommon venture only an experienced crew should attempt. Most ships are torn apart or lost forever. Ships captained by adherents to the Monasteries of Obedience, initiates to the Secrets of the Shipwrights whose sworn allegiance is to the High Navy, mysteriously never succumb to the danger. The secret is this: By studying a master-crafted Orrery, treasured by the Illuminated skipper or a Navigator assigned by the Brethren, ships can be guided beyond the Gateway Falls, keeping track of planetary movements and the seasonal ebbs and flows of the currents. Furthermore, the Orrery is gravitationally entwined with the motion of the planets and while under the cloak of a vortex's mist, the ship can rise from the water and fly! Indeed, under the cover of darkness, when dire need arises, such ships can travel aloft amidst the clouds. Knowledge of science is not an easy thing to come by however.

Less often with the passage of time, illusory shadows of what believers claim are Primate consciousnesses take form within the Monasteries of Obedience, to instruct esoteric Beasts in the “Humane Ethic” and the “Summoning of the Swarm”—“Humane” is assumed by most to be the name of the Primate Author or an order of Primate. These reverential creatures, in turn, instruct champion knights and warrior priests in the skills needed to enlighten and protect the populace. The Clerics dispense the knowledge of science in restricted portion out of The Holy Schematics, which to most Beasts is an unintelligible tome of cryptic iconography. Therein The Rule of Thumb is encoded in its unabridged form. Some claim the elemental formulae for the essence of life lie within its pages, as are the Secrets of the Shipwrights. Like the medieval clergy, the Clerics are fearful hoarders of this knowledge, maintaining a code of laws enforced by Inquisitors acting under a dogmatic policy of arrested development, keeping the denizens of the Triune Worlds locked in a Medieval Age.

## The Rule of Thumb

This is The Rule of Thumb in its simplest form. It bears a deeper meaning which only the Eldest Illuminated Clerics can understand as a perfect symmetry of science and in it a plethora of metaphoric meanings applying to every asset of

/ Beasts That Grasp Shall Wield,

Only Beasts That Rear Shall Stride,  
Only Beasts That Hunt Shall Reason,  
Only Beasts That Hearken Shall Summon.

The Canine, Feline, Ursine, Musteline, Procyon and Rodent are the common denizen for they are well suited to grasp, rear, hunt, and hearken. The savage masses and brutal strength of Insects and Aquatic creatures en masse comprise the Swarm, with the exception of the Cetaceans, whose ways are strange to the land folk. The Pachyderm, Bovine, Equine and Porcine Folk, though dimwitted, are masters at invoking the Swarm to their defense. Those not inclined by nature to heed the Humane Ethic are called the Ornery Ones. Only by harkening the Voice of the Primates as taught in the Monasteries of Obedience can one be empowered to summon the Swarm to obey their will. Eager also for new adherents are The Dark Summoners who would oppose them, bearing ambitions of tyrannical domination of the Triune Worlds.

## Recent Events

Recently, prospecting colonist, families, from the Blue and Red Worlds attempted to settle the mineral rich cliffs of Yellow World. They were savagely ravaged without warning by a Reptile army enforced by back-bred Saurian behemoths. Unexpected Avian Raiders led by a Dark Summoner Master, a Crow named Carnes, thereafter squelched a retaliatory force of High Navy ships, thus disseminating the Secrets of the Shipwrights. This gave rise to the Viking Drakkars and Pirate Hordes that infest the Blue World's oceans and skies!

War now looms over Triunuum and its cornerstone, The Red World's Gateway City. The Gateway City was founded as the Red World's first colony. Now it is a refuge and guard post. On an ancient wooded island formed from an immense volcanic rim, it stands as doorway through which all ships must pass beyond the Gateway Falls at its center.

## The Red World

Gateway Island is not the seat of civilization, merely the threshold. Several Feudal Kingdoms dot the temperate belt of the ruddy planet. There are no oceans, but there are a great many lakes and rivers, some flowing below the planet's surface (indeed Bat and Mole Kingdoms are rumored to exist). Typically Dukes rule realms as dictated by the King, that King having been appointed by the Clerics. These are the current, five Kings in order of power: The Lion Red Mane VI, the Wolf Alpha Primus X, the Bear Reverend Mother Ursirus II, the Wolverine Queen Rose I, the Badger Precious Maximus I, and the Tiger Malcori the Lesser.

A common practice among the realms is the partitioning of the citizenry into zones of wealth. The poor remain among the poor and the rich with the rich. Only when a citizen is found straying beyond this boundary or attempts to cross the territory of the other, does that creature become prey. However, wealthy citizens can acquire a valuable Writ of Protection and perhaps an armed escort from the Duke or King. Criminals who take prey among their own kind and are subdued by the authorities are branded with The Mark of Prey, making them fair game to all creatures. Fortunately, Red World is rich with edible Swarm Kind and other dimwit creatures.

## The Blue World

The tranquil oceans of Old Blue are no more. Chaos is the order of the day. Pirate, Viking and Navy ships clash over world domination, especially control over the Gateways. When the positions of the planets change it is truly a horrific event as forces are torn between attempting to take the next world or falling back to protect their own! The islands are also places of war. Warlords have taken to conscripting natives of weaker civilizations. However several greater island kingdoms have declared their land neutral zones where ships can be repaired and crews restored to health. Storms, volcanoes and tsunamis are also a common threat.

Below the mayhem, the Sea Folk—Whales, Dolphins, Seals, Octopi, etc.—try to steer clear. Often, a member of a Pod is caught in the crossfire, or worse, killed for food. Also, some Sea Folk Clans are Revered Guardians of victimized Islands. In either case, few ships survive the infamous Cetacean Vendetta. The unyieldingly vengeful nature of the Sea Folk occasionally has divided them. The dissolution of the Pod or the Herd will be the undoing of their kind. What the Sea Folk need is a central united government, which is a concept altogether alien to them.

At any given time the gateway to the north is lit by the beautifully Aurora Borealis or by fierce lightning storms. To the south, the gate is deep within a vast network of dangerous, mysterious caves that few navigators know the way through. Bat Folk and other strange beings are rumored to be cloistering there in great numbers.

## The Yellow World, or ...

Like dragons resting upon hoarded treasure, the Avian Lords roost upon bejeweled and gilded cliffs. Hawks, Eagles, Vultures, and other such raptors claim the High Aviary Kingdoms. Like the Dukes of Red World, minor warlords are granted the Low Volary Domains. Unlike Red World, there is no refuge for woodland folk. Only the mightiest of Land Folk dare go there. To the north, their vortex gate becomes roaring rapids cutting through a maze of canyons filled with jagged stones. No ship has a chance to survive the trip without a map or guide.

## ...The Green World

Even the fearless Birds of Prey are apprehensive over recent developments in the jungles below. The roar and stomp of mighty creatures are heard. The barbaric Cold Blood raiders have amassed back-bred monsters to serve as mounts and siege works. What sort of power they obey is not clear. They are all of like mind and goal, perhaps needing no leader or governance, as they all agree to one goal, domination of the Triunuum and the consumption of things. Their southern gate is surrounded by gator-infested swamplands and winding, shallow rivers lined with broken ships—timber and bone slowly being digested by the twisted overgrowth.

## Red World Fortress

Red World Fortress, or just “The Fortress”, is the seat of the combined military strength of all the Red World Kingdoms and the Monastic Order. Here at Red World’s South Pole, the Shipwrights build fighting craft and forge Orrery under a dark shroud of secrecy. Little is known about the Fortress. The long canal that stretches over a vast wasteland leads to the Southern Gateway, which is lined with towering walls brimming with canons. One cannot even see the Fortress beyond the walls. Only a lock, like the

one at Gateway Island but ran by a small contingent of silent conclave of monks, serve travelers and bid passage to the Red World beyond.

## Gateway Island

Gateway Island is at the exact Northern Pole of the Red World. The warm air coming from the vortex keeps the isle and the surrounding region warm despite the rest of the hemisphere's icy clime. The more temperate latitudes are reached via icebreaker ships or the Wind Riders, ships set upon great skates—a lucrative operation ran by very clever Seal and Penguin entrepreneurs. The Gateway City was carved out of the ruddy Martian stone and so is often called Redwall. It was the workstation of the Primates when the Gateway Falls was activated. How the work was done is a mystery as there are no ancient machines, nor crafts, nor tools anywhere. The only contrivance is a steam driven Lock through which vessels come and go or even dry-dock for maintenance, suspended by hooks and cables. The city is actually built upon a web of stone and timber bridgeworks spanning the archways in which the Lock's two enormous doors are set. The Lock keeps the flow of the Redwall River in check; otherwise it becomes a violent torrent that may threaten the foundations of the Lock and thus the city itself.

### Map Legend

- a. Fangs of Asmodeus
- b. Lighthouse Monastery
- c. Gateway, the Redwall Valley City
- d. Orchard Wood
- e. White Fields Farm & Granary
- f. Reedy Bog
- g. Deep Dark Forrest
- h. Far Fall Cliff
- i. Sunny Beach
- j. Feathered Friends Aviary
- k. Cold Blood Swamp
- l. Mother Lode Mines
- m. Gateway Battery
- n. Swirling Lake & Gateway Mist
- o. The Next World Over

*The names Redwall and Asmodeous are my tribute to one of the inspirations of this work, Brian Jacques's Redwall series. Thank you Mr. Jacques! No plagiarism is intended.*

## **Risus: The Anything Role Playing,**

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Gateway Falls will follow the Risus RPG rules for character creation. To Design a Beast character, choose its Genus, Hearken, Trade dice, 2 thru 4 (up to 6 if experienced) for a total of 10 (more if Hooks & Tale warrant). The Beasts are meant to be just anthropomorphic enough to be playable, but this is also up to the players. Pumping these clichés is allowed and any can be chosen as Double Pump Clichés if the game master determines the characters Tale shows it to be uniquely gifted.

**Genus** is its specific animal type such as Lion, Wolf, Cobra, Hawk, etc. Doing anything that the chosen Genus could do requires a roll of the allotted dice. For example, a Tiger (4) requires 4 dice to pounce or bite.

**Hearken** is the ability to call forth the Swarm and the extent to which the beast lives according to The Humane Ethic, thus surrendering its feral and self-preserving nature as taught at the Monasteries of Obedience.

**Trade** is simply the character's current or past occupation. Other clichés or multiple trade clichés are optional but the current occupation of the character ought to be the one given the most dice.

Only beasts within their own **Weight Class** can engage in direct combat. When beasts combat opponents outside their Weight Class, it's typically an Improprate Cliché (Risus, page 3). For example, if a cat and mouse fight, and the mouse wins, the cat was not defeated by mouse bites, but perhaps by running into a wall as the mouse slides into its hole, costing the cat three dice. As a guide to Weight Class, Light Beasts can be carried by a human all day (i.e., mice, anoles, sparrows), Medium Beasts for short distances

(i.e., lynxes, tortoises, eagles), Heavy Beasts can't be lifted but may be budged (i.e., lions, alligators, ostriches), and Massive Beasts can't be budged (i.e., whales, elephants, sauropods).

The Monasteries are likened to *Shaolin* Schools, where The Humane Ethic and refined fighting techniques are taught. Swarms called for Evil must be satiated, even if the Dark Summoner falls victim, while Swarms called for Good will peacefully abate when released. Most weapons are of no use against the Swarm, though fire, smoke, and less often water, may be employed. Summoners are considered Novice at 1 or 2 dice, Expert at 3 or 4 dice, and Master at 5 or 6 dice.

Summoning is not magic, though less enlightened, superstitious Beasts believe otherwise. The catalyst of Summoning may be any combination of subsonic calls or mimicry, movements like dances or gestures, or elements from nature and even concoctions and potables that allow the Summoner to emit pheromones of swarming animals. As much as the means of Summoning is not common knowledge to the Triunuum (nor are some secrets between Summoners), so should the science behind it be a mystery to the players. The Swarm can only be put to one task or attempt per Summoning.

A Summoner rolls its Hearken Cliché against the Swarm's Cliché (which is of any value the Summoner wants or what he think he can handle; see Teaming Up, Grunt Squad rule on page 3 of Risus) as in a battle of wills until one side wins as per typical Risus conflict. Summoning can take a few turns of dedicated concentration and the Hearken dice must be recovered with rest, as it is exhausting. If the Summoning succeeds, that is, once the Swarm is subdued by the Summoner it is considered "defeated" in game terms, but this pseudo-damage heals immediately and the Swarm is ready for action. Failing means no Swarm answers if the attempt was for Good, but if summoned for Evil, the swarm will still come but will be uncontrollable. The Swarm Cliché cannot be "Pumped" but the Hearken Cliché can.

Take note of the environment. You can't summon fish in a desert or scorpions at sea. Use common sense. Only one Swarm can exist in a venue at a time or they will become uncontrollable. Alternatively another can be called to combat the first (i.e., wasps vs. bees).



Some—not nearly all—common Invocations of the Swarm, that is, ways in which a Swarm can be manipulated are as follows:

**Blight** (Locust: whole villages can be left desolate)

**Consume** (Piranha: enemies can be devoured)

**Destroy** (Termites: structures can be felled)

**Guide** (Butterflies: the lost might find their way)

**Heal** (Maggots: cleans wounds and to nourish the infirm)

**Illuminate** (Lightening Bugs: dark places can be revealed)

**Plague** (Flies: enemies can be infested with diseases)

**Plenty** (Bees: hive wax and honey, pollination)

**The Blizzard.** This is a special summoning skill available only to Rodents—being the most disadvantaged of beasts. An army of white rodents can be called that have the Summoner’s Harken dice added to their Swarm Cliché. These white creatures are will not communicate with the Summoner; in fact their sentience is questionable.

## Basic Character “Trade” Cliches

-  
**Cleric** (Illuminati, Inquisitor, Monastic)

**Explorer** (Tracker, Trailblazer, Wilderness Guide)

**Healer** (Herbalist, Alchemist, Veterinarian)

**Merchant** (Entrepreneur, Prospector, Trader)

**Noble** (Bigwig, Benefactor, Celebrity)

**Sailor** (Cannoneer, Rigger, Navigator)

**Vagrant** (Pilferer, Swindler, Tramp)

**Warrior** (Constable, Knight, Barbarian)

## Currency & Possessions

Precious metals and rare gems are typically accepted as money. Forging arms is difficult, whether due to weight or intricacy, no matter what the intended beast’s size is, thus the cost is the same regardless of scale, from mouse to elephant. It is assumed that characters begin with tools and paraphernalia pertinent to their trade, and wealth to suit. As listed below, items and services are rated from 1 to 6 dice. Using higher or lower dice

valued tools will increase or decrease the skills of the user respectively, by the difference. For example, if a Locksmith (5) uses Locksmith Tools (6), she'll get a 1D bonus.

Most characters doing well at their trade can afford items of equal value to their cliché dice. No tracking of money is needed. To bargain for a better item or service, characters can make haggling roles as a conflict with the owner, adding the difference between what they can and can't afford to the owner's dice. For example, for a Warrior (3) to buy a Musket (5) add two dice to the merchant's cliché and make conflict rolls. If the merchant loses, the item becomes affordable. The Warrior (3) acts as a Warrior (5) when using the musket. Otherwise, he can dream about it as he hones his skills to qualify to earn a better wage.

1D.... Terrible: Cheaply Made, Poorly Kept, Second-Hand Items or Terrible Services

2D.... Poor: Low Quality Crafted Items or Poor Services

3D.... Common: Typically Crafted Mediocre Items or Common Services

4D.... Good: Professionally Crafted Items or Professional Services

5D.... Excellent: Expertly Crafted Items or Compulsory Royal Services

6D.... Magnificent: Invaluably Unique Master Crafted Items or Devotedly Royal Services

## Designing Ships

Ships are built to suit the various Beast sizes. The same principles can be used on ships in combat as per characters. For example, a ship made for and by mice would have sails and cannons of Light Beast scale too and could not combat a ship made for bears and vice versa. Small ships accommodate Light Beasts, while medium ships Medium Beasts, and big ones fit Heavy Beasts. As for Massive beasts, big ships can transport them if needed (i.e., war elephants, whaling ships).

Attacking by Broadside, that is, running parallel to a target ship and blasting it a close range with every facing cannon, is a Pumped Cliché. The downside, reflected in the Pumped Cliché's Heal rule, is that all the cannons on that side must be rearmed or the entire ship turned to present the opposite battery of arms. Either action takes an amount of rounds equal to the ship's cliché dice value. Remember that these vessels are made of handcrafted timber and subject to threats of fire and termites. Ironclads are a rare pirate aberration on par with the scaly, Reptilian Viking Drakkar.

Ships have three classifications, each with three values, which, when totaled, determine the ships cliché dice. A ship over six dice value (see Currency & Possessions above) is a very expensive vessel, typically of High Navy Commission:

**Size:** Small 1D, Medium 2D, Big 3D

**Speed:** Slow 1D, Cruising 2D, Fast 3D

**Design:** Trader: 1D, Scout 2D, Warship 3D

For example, a ship might be “HNS Simba” a Lion Built, Big, Cruising Scout (7). The type of ship is left up to the designer. The Simba might be a Carrack, a Frigate or a Galleon. There are too many types, from too many cultures to list, and usually the names are a factor of design more than a comparison of attributes (four masts, low draft, oars, square sailed, etc.).

## The Orrery

The Orrery is fastened to the inside of the ship, typically in the map room, by means of an intricate masterwork of ornate gold mountings. The four crystal orbs (typically Ruby, Sapphire, Emerald and Topaz) composing it are filled with fluctuating fluids in order to reveal the current tidal conditions of the Triune Worlds and even the Sun. The mock orbit of Red World spans about six feet. The gyroscopic sockets and axes upon which they hang are marked with encrypted alphanumeric codes, which only the Illuminated Captain or Navigator can read. When the array is adjusted, gravity from the current world is focused through its crystal duplicate like a lens and emitted back causing a wave interference effect, nullifying gravitation, and allowing the ship to be carried aloft by updrafts. It is not yet known how the Dark Summoners have unlocked the Orrery’s secrets. Might they have found another way to bring ships to flight?

Calculating and tracking which world is accessible through what polar vortex when, is too tedious a task. Instead, every season there is a 50% chance (roll a die, flip a coin, arbitrarily decide... whatever) the alignment of worlds takes either of two forms. Reading left to right as north to south, the configurations are: 1) **B R Y B** or 2) **B Y R B**.

For instance, in configuration 1, the Blue World's South Pole links to the Red World's North Pole and the Yellow World's North to the Red's South.

## Play By Web or Email

If you're interested in online gaming visit the **Gateway Falls** board at [PlayByWeb](#) or email me at [sir\\_bruen@yahoo.com](mailto:sir_bruen@yahoo.com)