



## TENETS OF THE AETHERIC KNIGHT

A KNIGHT SERVES FIRST THEIR OATH

TO ENSURE TOMORROW AND PRESERVE OUR PAST

A KNIGHT SERVES SECOND THE NEXUS

AS MANY BECOME ONE, ONE BECOMES MANY

A KNIGHT SERVES THIRD THEMSELV

IN EACH A HEARTH TO BE KINDLED

A KNIGHT SERVES ALWAYS ESKHARA

UPON HER BREATH WE DRIFT ETERNAL

**ABSOLUTE  
TABLETOP**



**CORE RULES V1.4 • NOVEMBER 2024**  
**POWERED BY THE MECHA HACK • MADE WITH THE BLACK HACK**

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# INTRODUCTION



You were not born a knight – you were born to become one.

In your foggiest memories lie scattered moments of intense clarity, glimpses into the currents of magic twisting through reality. Elders scolded you for “drifting off,” sinister shadows plagued your dreams, and over time, you discovered within yourself strange and wondrous abilities.

Through training, tribulation, or a twist of fate, you unlocked these unique gifts – revealing an affinity for magic and a tether to the Dream Sea that lies beneath all things. Many feared you, some sought to harness your gift for their own purposes, but a few saw you as a flame to be tended.

For you are one of the few who bear an unbreakable tie to the Aethereal – a bond that grants you unknowable strength, yet burdens you with a dire quest. You are both mage and soldier, guardian and destroyer, one and many.

For you are an aetheric knight of Eskhara, and tethered to your mighty Apparatus, you will shape the future of a shattered world.

## KNIGHTS OF ESKHARA

In *Aether Nexus*, you and your fellow players portray knights sworn to protect a sundered world. Tethered mind and body to a towering suit of mechanized armor called an Apparatus, you will forge an unbreakable bond with your allies and stand together against obliteration.

Knights of Eskhara embark on perilous quests with noble aims:

- Defend Eskhara from threats within and without
- Reclaim lost knowledge, artifacts, and sacred places

- Delve into crumbling ruins in search of the long-buried past
- Parlay with myriad factions to uphold the tenuous peace of the realm
- Chart paths across the drifting Fragments and the chaotic currents of the Aethereal
- Battle skyships, lay siege to fortresses, and clash with enemy legions
- Lead the desperate charge against the invasive hives of the Oghdra

## GETTING STARTED

*Aether Nexus* is a roleplaying game, a collaborative storytelling activity wherein a group of players narrate the actions of their characters and roll dice to determine the outcome.

Each player creates an aetheric knight and embodies them in play, speaking and making decisions as the character would. One player, known in *Aether Nexus* as the Seer, manages the overall narrative of the game, coming to the table prepared with a quest for a group of knights to undertake.

As a **PLAYER**, you should start by reading through *Eskhara: A Broken World* (page 4) and the *Rules of Play* (page 9). Then, follow the guidelines found in *Knights & Apparatus* (page 19).

As a **SEER**, you should familiarize yourself with everything listed above, plus the additional rules found in *Supplemental Rules* (page 49) and *Foes* (page 67). The *Seer's Augury* (page 114) provides more in-depth lore and idea generators, while a selection of pre-written *Quests* (page 89) allow you and the Nexus to jump right into the game.

# ESKHARA: A BROKEN WORLD



Once, Eskhara was whole, and her kin prospered. Eskharans pierced the veil of reality, venturing into the vast and enigmatic realm of the Aethereal. There they uncovered the secrets of aether, an arcane element rich with both power and knowledge. Wielding aether, Eskharans entered an age of wonder and prosperity. Magic was abundant, aether-powered technology lifted life to utopic heights, and a vast, equitable commonwealth spanned the world.

## THE HIVE WARS

Amidst the roiling depths of the Dream Sea, Eskharans encountered the chattering legions of the Oghdra, conquerors born of the Abyss who had devoured worlds beyond counting. Seeking further conquest and hungry for war, the Oghdra burrowed through reality to invade Eskhara. The ensuing Hive Wars raged for untold ages, and much of the world-that-was fell away. Centuries of progress and prosperity were reduced to ash.

From the crumbling ruins of the realm, aetheric knights rose with their mighty Apparatus to stand against the Oghdra, waging desperate battles across Eskhara and the infinite expanse of the Aethereal. By the latter days of the calamitous Hive Wars, Eskhara lay broken and strewn in her Fragments, but her kin clung to hope.

In the face of extinction, Eskharans rallied for a final offensive. In a desperate charge led by the aetheric knights, the Oghdra were beaten back and driven deep into the Abyss, their malignancy vanishing into the crushing darkness from which they first crawled.

With time, the grisly wounds of war became scars, and though Eskhara was forever shattered, the scourge of the Oghdra faded into legend.

**LORE SIDEBARS:** Look for blue sidebars like this one throughout the book to learn more about the world of Eskhara and discover her secrets.

## APPARATUS: RELICS OF WAR

Helmed by warrior-mages with innate links to the Aethereal, these towering suits of mechanical armor turned the tide of the Hive Wars and ensured the survival of Eskhara and her scattered people.

Since the end of the Hive Wars, the use of Apparatus has grown costly and dangerous, with few skilled enough to maintain the unstable machines and even fewer knights trained to helm them. Many surviving 'Ratus now find purpose in labor, honorific sport, or piracy, while others languish, forgotten in vaults, littering scrap yards, or displayed in the homes of the opulent.

## THE NEXUS: FIGHTING AS ONE

A Nexus is a band of aetheric knights and their Apparatus, all moving and fighting as one. Tethered through the Aethereal, an aetheric knight experiences their comrades' thoughts, emotions, and even memories. While each warrior acts individually, the Nexus grants its knights peerless insight, negating the need to speak in the heat of combat. Against the Oghdra, who think and act as one, the Nexus is Eskhara's most formidable weapon.

## AETHER: FLUID THOUGHT

Aether is an arcane element rich with energy and potential. Flowing with the primordial laws of creation, aether powers skyships, mighty Apparatus, and countless other marvels.

Most often, aether manifests as vapor, flame, or liquid, aglow with flickering, prismatic light; a substance both cool and warm to the touch that hums with a fluttering breath all its own.

Aether seeps into reality through fissures and can be found in near-infinite abundance within the Aethereal itself, where it flows in rivers and collects in oceans of pure, churning knowledge.

## THE FLUX: ESKHARA'S BREATH

Rings of turbulent heat and gravitational energy, the Flux circles around the Korsun, Eskhara's molten heart. The shattered landmasses of the Fragments float in sprawling circlets amongst the ever-chaotic rhythm of exhalation and inhalation of the Flux, known also as "Eskhara's breath." These rhythms and the natural climatological patterns which follow them can be tracked and predicted with great effort by gifted mages who often serve aboard skyships as naviseers.

## FACTIONS & FRAGMENTS

As Eskhara drifts broken, her people survive upon scattered pieces of land known as Fragments. Some kin find solace in ancient culture and tradition, while others look to the horizon and foster newfound community in the ruins of the old world.

## KORWARD HOUSES

The Flux brings the Inner Shards into the embrace of the Korsun, which provides light, warmth, and koradium, a resilient metal forged within its molten heart. The Korward Houses of the Inner Shards reap these benefits, reigning over prosperous dominions brimming with crops, lumber, and metal. Ambition, however, rules above all, and conflict simmers eternal between rival houses.

## CINDER CLANS

The kin of the Outer Drifts cling to far-flung Fragments, forging a bitter yet proud frontier at the edge of Eskhara's embrace. Far from the light of the Korsun, the Outer Drifts "huddle for warmth," gathering in tight clusters of even tighter communities. The Cinder Clans are bound not by blood but by necessity, a bond made unbreakable by struggle. Despite their camaraderie, scarce resources and even scarcer landmass often sparks aggression between the clans.

## OTHER FACTIONS

Beyond houses and clans, countless other groups and entities affect the push and pull of Eskhara's Fragments.

- **AETHEREAL AUTHORITY:** The Authority is an ancient order of mages overseeing the harvest, refinement, and export of raw aether from the Aethereal. The Authority also maintains the slippgates, which allow for safe passage down known Aethereal currents. But in controlling aether, the Authority hoards knowledge as well as power, and many see the faction as a tyrannical body that holds itself above Eskhara.
- **CHITIN CONCLAVE:** The cult-like Conclave believes that Eskhara is long-doomed and that the Oghdra represent the only salvation for the shattered world. Utterly devoted to their cataclysmic aims, the Conclave seeks to throw wide the gates to the Aethereal to allow for a new incursion of Oghdra.
- **EDICT ETERNAL:** A reclusive and regimented order of knights who have remained vigilant since the dark days of the Hive Wars and are eternally sworn to destroy the

Oghdra – with little regard for the cost. Though their numbers are few, they move now with renewed vigor and unshakable purpose, given the whispers of the Oghdra's return.

- **FREETIDE CORSAIRS:** Unbidden by house, clan, or creed, the roving Freetide bands swear no fealty, instead serving those with sufficient riches or worthwhile aim. Corsairs are nomadic by nature, living and working aboard skyship flotillas and moving “with the tide,” answering only to the Flux. They scavenge and scrape by with the detritus of Eskhara and the Aethereal, often hawking trinkets, weapons, and lore scavenged from the ruins.
- **HEWER'S GUILD:** Primarily a trade and labor union, the Hewer's Guild oversees much of the mining and logging that happens across Eskhara, as well as the transport of those resources across the Fragments. Though far from a military power, the guild maintains its own fighting force of battle-ready skyships and rugged Apparatus to defend its resources and skyships from pirates.



## TERMS TO KNOW

Following is a non-exhaustive list of important names and terms specific to the Fragments of Eskhara and the Aethereal.

- **ABYSS:** A mysterious null space beneath and beyond the Aethereal, from which the Oghdra are said to have originated, and into which their remnants were exiled after the Hive Wars.
- **AETHER:** An arcane resource containing and empowered by knowledge from across all of time and space – everything from the primordial laws of existence to the secrets of magic to the dreams of the downtrodden.
- **AETHEREAL:** Also called the Dream Sea; the inter-dimensional space into which all knowledge and memory flows. Impossible to chart, the Aethereal comprises infinite rivers and seas brimming with potent aether.
- **APPARATUS:** Commonly called 'Ratus. Living armor powered by aether, bristling with weapons, and originally forged to combat the Oghdra. The knight within is bonded to both their armor and their fellow knights – a connection called a Nexus.
- **CASTERS:** Common ranged weapon in Eskhara; lodestone charged with aetheric energy hurls discs of stone or metal at devastating speed.
- **CATALYSTS:** Engines powered by refined aether, used commonly in skyships.
- **ESKHARA:** A world shattered by calamity, Eskhara is a realm of floating landmasses home to myriad kin. Not all Eskharans are native to the world, but all share the same remarkable, indomitable spirit.
- **FISSURE:** When aether bleeds into Eskhara, it does so through fissures in reality. These chaotic ruptures allowed Eskharans to first venture into the Aethereal, while also granting the Oghdra access to a world ripe for conquering.
- **FLUX:** Eskhara's breath; the ever-changing field of heat and force that controls the orbit of Eskhara's landmasses around her exposed molten core.
- **FRAGMENTS:** The landmasses of Eskhara, remnants of a world sundered during the Hive Wars and held in orbit around the Korsun by the Flux.
- **HIVE:** The link between all Oghdra that allows them to share thoughts and knowledge.
- **HIVE WARS:** A series of destructive conflicts beginning with the Oghdra invasion of Eskhara and ending with their exile into the Abyss.
- **INNER SHARDS:** Larger Fragments controlled by Eskhara's most prominent houses, which orbit nearer to the light and warmth of the Korsun.
- **KIN:** The proud and rugged people of Eskhara, comprising myriad species and cultures.
- **KORSUN:** Eskhara's core, a sphere of magma and flame that lends its light and warmth to the Fragments and the kin living upon them. The Korsun is both sun and moon, cooling and warming in a cycle not unlike day and night.
- **KNIGHTS:** Warrior-mages who helm Apparatus and take oaths in defense of Eskhara and her kin.
- **LODESTONE:** Stone infused with aether, which harnesses the Flux to lift skyships, float Apparatus, and hurl projectiles at enemies.



- **MENDERS:** Arcane mechanics who repair, maintain, and modify Apparatus and other aether-powered tech.
- **NAVISEERS:** Pathfinders who reach out with their aetheric mind to chart courses across the Flux and through the Aethereal.
- **NEXUS:** A fighting squad of knights, aetherically bonded and fighting together as a single unit.
- **OGHDRA:** Abyssal conquerors who have invaded and obliterated worlds beyond counting. Linked together through the Hive, the Oghdra are directed by an unseen, malevolent presence to ceaselessly proliferate, consume, and evolve.
- **OUTER DRIFTS:** Small, scattered Fragments which orbit far from the warm embrace of the Korsun.
- **SKYSHIPS:** Vessels that can traverse the skies of Eskhara as well as the Aethereal. Skyships are the only reliable method for traveling

between Fragments. Their scale varies from small ferryboats to huge barges.

- **SLIPGATES:** An arcane portal that opens a controlled fissure in reality, allowing for safe passage into the Aethereal and through other slipgates across Eskhara.
- **TETHER:** A knight tethers themself to their Apparatus to take control of it. To be tethered is to become the machine, to exist simultaneously in Eskhara and the Aethereal, and to link oneself to the Nexus.
- **TETHERPOD:** Each Ratus has a tetherpod in which the knight helms the machine. Tetherpods were originally built using Oghdra remains, utilizing the innately collectivist properties of the Hive to create the Nexus.
- **WEAVERS:** Mages capable of both threading and unraveling aether, harnessing the secrets contained within and restitching them into new ideas.

