

Head in the Clouds

Island town



One minute you're on your feet and the next you're falling down, down, down... Farther than should be possible and into an endless blue sky. It looks like you've got your head in the clouds.

As your instinctive terror fades away into something abstract you take a moment to recall how exactly you started tumbling.

Jumped

You took a leap of faith of your own accord. Whether motivated by reckless abandon or great misery your resolve has been tempered into something truly formidable. From now on once you set your mind on something very little can dissuade you for better or worse.

Tripped

Through bad luck or comical incompetence your descent was funny enough to gain the attention of any onlooking spirits. You'll find that they send you surreal experiences and just enough good fortune to see you through in one piece with another unlikely tale to tell.

Pushed

Was it accidental, was it attempted murder? You were shoved you into this blue abyss and you'll be damned if anyone ever pushes you around again. Throwing yourself into the fray and jostling to get what you want is second nature at the expense of gentler manoeuvring.

As you begin to consider that you might fall forever you glimpse a decidedly solid blur rising to meet you. Before you know it you've landed on what appears to be an island floating in the sky. You tally your aches and pains as you wonder how you made your grand entrance.

Boneheaded

Your throbbing temples confirm that you managed to hit the ground head first. Some sort of magic slowed you down at the last second but even so that should have hurt more. Your newly thick skull and sturdy bones will take the bite out of blows that come your way.

With Catlike Tread

You shake as much from amazement at your acrobatics as from the jarring shock to your knees. From now on you know you can walk the walk as well as you can talk the talk. Pride going before the fall will be quite literal as any doubt sees your feline grace desert you.

Personal Padding

Someone's groaning but after your soft landing you have a hard time believing it's you. Sure enough, some unlucky sod is sprawled beneath you. There'll always be another person about to take the fall for you and they'll never be as resentful as maybe they should be.

The locals soon gather round to lift you back on your feet and introduce you to this strange new world. As you saw on the way down it's an endless sky dotted with islands and interdimensional immigrants like you are a rare but recognised event. The ground feels solid enough but some part of you still reeling from vertigo demands assurance that it won't go right back into freefall.

Primitive Praxis

Your brain shuts off somewhere around the second speech about runecraft, apparently so has everyone else's because you don't see a single piece of tech more advanced than the early middle ages. Maybe it's because you don't care to ponder it that magic is at its strongest here.

Age of Sail's Sense

Something about the arrangement of balloons and sails sounds almost plausible. With the creak of timbers and groan of rigging it sounds like there's work going into holding you up. Your age of sail surroundings seamlessly splice magic and mundane together.

Industrial Inspiration

Ah, combustion, compression coefficients and facts facts facts! You don't understand the specifics but you're sure someone somewhere does. The puffs and diesel fumes and steam are signs of the highest tech you'll find around, a pity magic's a bit put out by comparison.

Of course they tell you that the effort that goes into keeping this rock afloat increases along with its bulk. It also defines the size of communities with higher tech islands usually being more densely populated. Peering at the edge is an unpleasant prospect but by doing so you get a sense of scale.

Homely Hamlet

This is a tiny cay holds just enough land to support a few homesteads. The effort needed to keep it bobbing along is minimal and with some know-how it can be nudged on any course you like. While it can't match a true flying machine seclusion on a sliding scale is quite a perk.

Vibrant Village

Most islands in the sky are around this size, housing a little above or below Dunbar's number. It's sleepy most of the time but bursts to life on market days and fairs. Whenever villagers aren't preparing the next they're visit neighbouring settlements and plotting to outdo them.

Tireless Town

You can barely see the edge at all, as much for crowded buildings as sheer distance. Here there is always the buzz of happy productivity and more strangers only mean more friends to meet. "The sky's the limit" is so often a platitude but here it feels true.

With the dirt beneath your feet out of the way you stare past the edge and up at the sky around you. You're told that the Eye, a permanent updraft about which islands orbit, is the heart of civilisation. It's time to see where you stand.

Outer Limits

Most of the isles are crammed into one hemisphere of the sky. The Eye is far away from this outpost, it feels like you have the whole world to yourself. Other specs are further away but these are isolated or unclaimed, the final frontier is yours to expand and explore.

Whirling Periphery

The gradient from the edge of civilisation to its centre is smooth here, peace and excitement are a short trip either way. Most islands dance their slow orbits here and often do so with partners they come to share a deep history with over the generations.

Heaving Core

Isles seems studded equally in all directions so near the churning force of the Eye. This is less the region of isles and more of endless seeking easy lift. Expect as many visitors as your home can handle and to surf the winds of change or else be blown away by them.

It occurs to you that have another axis to deal with, not all the isles sit at the same height. Sure enough when you look up and down the density of isles shifts as it did to and away from the Eye.

High Wilderness

Most of the world bobs below you, truly open sky unfurls itself overhead. Your breath mists in the crisp air as you gasp at the stars, brighter than they've ever been. You might feel untethered looking at the little people below but is that a terrible thing at the edge of heaven?

Shallows Archipelago

Empty air is just that, empty. It's the little jewels of mud and stone that humanity clings to and it's those that fill your world. Hamlet motes drift up and swollen towns sink down but most bob along in this temperate swarm of neighbours.

Deep Blue Sky

All the isles above can't draw your attention away from what lies beneath, cloud seethes rumbles in a vaporous ocean that stretches past the horizon. A glimpse of hidden lightning warms your heart, who knows what might was up on these strange shores?

With the rough description of your new surroundings out of the way the locals go into how they'll make it your home. It turns out that having so little land makes feeding everyone a challenge and after some heated disputes the people settled on making drop in immigrants like yourself citizens of wherever they fell. There'll be some paperwork to submit to the nearest authorities followed by a minor ceremony and you'll be a bona fide denizen of this little patch of the open skies.

Few very large settlements last long before coming apart or sinking beneath the cloud sea. Those that attempt heavy-handed hegemony have gone under all the quicker but most still monopolise the niche of contract arbitration and census keeping. You're off to the big city with a chaperone.

Smokestack-city

Isles unlucky enough to drift above the towering columns of smoke complain bitterly of this "wandering smear" but they go quiet when you point out the origin of most of their manufactured goods. Worker conditions aren't Victorian but unions are still having a field day.

Tilt Town

Here you can see what it takes for an island to survive the ages. The city is spined and lumpen by turns where its axis has twisted and towers have become jetties and towers again. For a place so misshapen the inhabitants are jolly, making the most of things until the next shift.

Chiconautla

Primitive population density ensures that most cities are of late medieval era at least. The crowded plazas and stepped palaces of this place are a marvel unlike any other. Bringing up rumours of barbarous religious practices will offend the otherwise talkative locals.

Lago Azul

A sparse but large island that became a power by accident when a depression at its centre filled with rainwater. Some imported aquatic stock and an effective marketing campaign later and it has more money than it knows what to do with. Swim and eat seafood while you can.

Evereast

Islands on eccentric paths often take pains to shift onto orbits that keep closer to civilisation. This flying mountain has the bulk to happily endure periodic isolation and always engages eagerly as drifts into society until its path carries it away again.

Singularity Sky

This pretentiously-named place is one of a few entirely artificial islands and one of the even fewer not to immediately crash. Here wonders unlike anything else are made and here they'll stay. City scientist-officials are polite but quite firm that their technology never be studied.

Your shiny new certificate lets you trade, travel and do other inter-island things but you'll only really have a home once you go through your initiation. Fear of falling will become an ever-present anxiety wherever you go so it's best you get over it now. The same magic that turned your initial fall from earth into trans-dimensional travel kicks in whenever you reach terminal velocity, you'll appear at the nearest island with a nasty bump but otherwise none the worse for wear. The locals yell this to you from the dock because they're not letting you back on the island until you've made your leap of faith. Even the weakest heart won't falter, the only thing between you and your home is a lack of will.

You made it. All the fear was in the anticipation, the fall itself was almost exhilarating. You don't even ache from a poor landing, you appeared just above a crowd who were waiting to catch you. Between cheers, hugs and praise an older resident comes forward with a welcoming gift.

Drop Stone

The magic that saved you from an endless descent can never be taken from you but is only useful in a select few cases. You'll still hit things at fatal sub-terminal velocities, only land with only your clothes and can be stranded on isolated isles. Not so with a Drop Stone, with this on your person you can choose to keep falling or to land early and carry some cargo along.

Ticket to Ride

Ships are expensive things and seeing all those distant islands out of reach might become painful. Citizens have pooled their funds to buy you a pass that grants cheap passage across as much of the sky as you care to see. Be aware that most isles have strict vagrancy laws and you'll still be making most of your money at home. Be sure to bring back some stories!

Lift your Spirits

A common unspoken rule is that "you lift it, you claim it". Sensing that homesteader's ambition in you the locals have given you some of the enchanted stones, cloudsilk sails or thrumming motors that they favour. Nothing says "standing on your own two feet" like having engineered the very ground that they're resting on.

You'll need to get productive fast if you want to repay your neighbours for the trust and support they'll be investing in you. Your chaperone steps forward to offer you a job to keep you occupied until you're ready to strike out alone and two other members of the community are eager to help you any way good friends can.

Greta

Even the smallest isle needs a dock and even the sleepest dock needs stevedores, customs officers and clerks. Greta's workload varies by the island's size and location but on her off hours she's always eager to speculate about the contents of suspicious crates and share stories of the stranger ships she's seen.

Bartimaeus

A small garden has grown to feed a great many thanks to his green fingers and long experience. His daughter Beatrice has recently returned from the academy enthusing about aquaponics and vertical farming but he'd rather stick to what he knows. They argue frequently but still clearly love each other, maybe a fresh farmhand could reconcile them?

Miriam

Many artefacts poke through the soil but unless they display the glimmer of magic they are discarded. Miriam hoards these obsessively and has come here to write her treatise on the secret history of the isles. She's as uninterested in locals as she is fascinated by their past. Her research assistant will help her connect with the present as much as they collate her notes.

Old Yau

Yau is the island's joint butcher and exterminator, a fact his customers prefer not to think about. His traps and methods of handling their prey are works of genius and he's eager to pass on his skills to a student with a strong stomach as he gets older. Learn his ways or just befriend him and you'll never go hungry or lack for black comedy.

Emile

When islands drift close to each-other cable cars are often set up between them, anchoring them is careful work involving advanced knowledge of soil consistency and the handling of a massive harpoon gun. Emile secretly wishes he was a dashing gunner, navy or pirate, doesn't matter. He contents himself by reading cheap adventure novels at his post and daydreaming.

Adanna

When she engaged in an unplanned lithobrake here decades ago she climbed from the wreckage of her aeroplane and decided she didn't feel like leaving. The grizzled flygirl runs a bar from her retouched fuselage and always needs a waiter. People come far and wide to drink "ignition" cocktails blended in the semi-functional propeller engines.

Olaf

Shifting worlds can be a traumatic experience and many turn to religion to help make sense of their new lives. Drop-ins from different times and places ensure that an inclusive spirituality is the norm though Olaf's chapel can call on a hierarchy to support his congregation. The tasks he gives you are as much about helping you as anyone else. He cares about you, they all do.

Kaede

When she heard stories of the hot springs near the home of her drop-in grandfather she decided to bring this wonder to the skies. Unfortunately a lack of geothermal energy and her insistence that it not just be a bathhouse makes this challenging. So far she's rediscovered hydrogeological cycles and replicated geysers, recent earthly experience is needed.

Johnny

He's a stubborn sort, on a large advanced island he has just about the resources and space to indulge his passion for motorcycles. Anywhere else and he's stuck wrestling the local physics or trying to race around tiny stretches of road but still he doesn't give up. His garage either blows away competitors or persists where its unexpectedness makes it all the more valuable.

Dizzy

Another recent arrival, an adrenaline junky skydiver you'd guess. She's obsessed with human powered flight and has already made great strides with wingsuits. Turns out that that falling magic makes parachute development a low priority for anything lighter than cargo. Aiding her will involve stopping her with common sense as much as joining her logical leaps.

Sveta

For someone tasked with the heavy responsibility of keeping their home afloat Sveta has a remarkably light personality. It's eerie hearing her discuss catastrophic failure in the same breezy tones she uses to tell you about her nephew's birthday but she seems to know what she's doing. Other folk respect for your choice of job that sends you to dark, cramped tunnels.

Miguel

Every island has a coop of critters to communicate with primitives who can't pick up radio and as a larder in bad times. Some might call Miguel too bird brained to be postmaster but that's only because he applies his full attention to his "feathered babies". He's an expert breeder and canny card player but would be grateful for a co-worker to sort letters with.

Jacob

Skygazing is a time honoured profession, both to monitor the drift of isles relative to their expected movements and to scout out new ones rising from the clouds mirk or approaching from beyond the outer limits. Jacob peers at these horizons and watches the stars besides. He knows every constellation and is eager to share whenever he's awake at his odd hours.

Stranger

There are many others across the endless skies besides those described here or maybe someone you knew on earth fell with you and has been by your side all along. Either way you may take one companion of your own imagining as long as you take one other companion less and describe them in your build.

Solitary Ambition

You dismiss the kind offer of easy employment and instead announce your grand plan for immediate self-sufficiency. Listeners are impressed and as another cheer goes up you notice three more neighbours approaching to offer friendly assistance. They'll hardly throw you off the side of the isle if you fail but it might be hard to live down your overconfidence.

Over the coming weeks you get the sense that people were particularly celebratory about your arrival, interesting times always around the corner and you just might be a good omen for the next challenge.

Terra Incognita

New land has been sighted, a grand opportunity at the outer limits or a bizarre rising nearer the Eye. The scouts are ready and anchor tools armed, the race is on to claim it before any neighbouring isles. Beware any hitch-hiking passengers from the wild blue yonder.

Winds of Change

A world in the sky is more at the mercy of the weather than most but people adapt and make it part of their daily lives. Once in a while truly extraordinary forces manifest themselves, you'll be dealing with falling stars, waves from the cloudy oceans and hurricanes.

Pirate Menace

With drop magics piracy is more a matter of wrestling and tossing than the bloody melee you might expect. Still, while some are unofficial privateers and popular heroes others are just as much a plague as ever. A band of thieves think your home is an easy target. Prove them wrong.

Mysterious Ruins

Many islands show signs of pre-human habitation and house relics with power that transcend human notions of machinery and magic. Your home is either blessed with prominent megaliths that have recently activated or secret tunnels that are freshly unearthed.

Cast Adrift

It's natural for isles to wander from one clime to the next but yours is shifting at an alarming rate. For those of middling height and centrality it's a matter of retooling the economy but most risk being caught in the Eye's updraft, the cloud sea's wave or worse without correction.

Half-Baked Hegemony

Despite repeated examples of empire ending poorly some ambitious settlements just have to put their jackboots to use. This may or may not be your local city and it may or may not be violent but at the very least you can expect regulations to be handed down from on high.

Nothing is guaranteed but in a world where everything is in flight your spirit soars and your possibilities look as limitless as the horizon. If heaven is what you make of it you have your little patch to work on, time will tell what it amounts to.

