

THE LAST LIGHT AT KESTREL

A FREE FRONTIER MISSION

For 4–6 characters of levels 5–7

One failing beacon. One incoming convoy. One discovery worth protecting.

Strange worlds. Hard choices. One good crew.



DESCENT TO KESTREL



FIELD NOTE

Kestrel turns beneath you like a worn copper coin.

MISSION AT A GLANCE

The navigation beacon on Kestrel has gone dark six hours before the medical convoy Mercy Bell enters the moon's charged dust belt. Without the beacon, twelve colony transports must attempt a blind descent or turn back with medicine that Havenport cannot wait another month to receive.

The crew is hired to land, cross the storm flats, and restore the signal. At the beacon they find an injured maintenance team, a corporate order to overload the transmitter, and a migrating field of luminous organisms using the tower's energy to reproduce.

The easy repair will kill the organisms. The careful repair takes time the convoy does not have. The crew must decide what Kestrel's last light is for.

FORMAT

- **System:** Designed for the 2024 fifth-edition rules and compatible with SRD 5.2.1.
- **Characters:** 4–6 characters, levels 5–7.
- **Length:** 4–6 hours, or two short sessions.
- **Primary pressure:** A six-segment Convoy Clock.
- **Core play:** Piloting, repair, exploration, negotiation, and optional combat.
- **Tone:** Tense, practical, humane, and ultimately wondrous.

WHAT THE CREW KNOWS

- Havenport is a young mining and research settlement on Kestrel.
- The Mercy Bell convoy carries antibiotics, pressure seals, and replacement water filters.
- Sable Meridian Transit owns the navigation beacon and most of Havenport's debt.
- The beacon stopped transmitting fourteen hours ago.
- A two-person maintenance team went out and has not returned.

CONTENT NOTE

The mission includes environmental danger, an injured worker, corporate coercion, and the possibility of nonlethal conflict. It does not require horror or character death.

RUNNING RUGGED WONDER

This mission is built around capable people under pressure. Let expertise matter. When a player names the right tool, asks a practical question, or uses a background well, reveal useful information before asking for a roll.

THE CONVOY CLOCK

Draw six empty segments. Each segment represents roughly one hour when a delay advances the Clock. Fill one when the crew:

- Suffers a major failure during landing or travel.
- Takes a Short Rest.
- Spends significant time returning for forgotten equipment.
- Chooses a slow but careful solution at the beacon.
- Triggers a complication that needs a separate scene to resolve.

At three segments, Mercy Bell enters Kestrel's outer dust belt. At five, the convoy must commit to descent or abort. At six, the lead transport begins a blind approach.

Long Rest: A Long Rest requires at least eight hours and cannot finish before the convoy arrives. If the crew attempts one, fill the Clock to six. Mercy Bell must abort or begin a blind approach before the rest is complete.

Do not fill the Clock for every failed check. A failure should first cost position, supplies, trust, or Stress. Advance time only when the consequence truly consumes it.

FAILURE FORWARD

- A failed piloting check gets the ship down but damages a landing strut.
- A failed repair check restores partial function while exposing a second problem.
- A failed social check reveals what an NPC wants but makes the price higher.
- A failed survival check reaches the destination but costs a supply or adds Suit Stress.

THE MOMENT OF AWE

Do not reveal the heliographs as monsters. First describe light moving beneath the dust like a sunrise trapped underground. Then show dozens of crystal sails unfolding into the storm, each one catching static and answering the others with color.

THE CREW'S SHIP

The characters arrive in their own vessel. If the group does not have one, use the **Wayward**, a patched courier with a cargo bay too large for its engines and a galley table carved with the names of former crew.

VEHICLE STRESS

The ship and rover each have a separate Stress track. A vehicle begins with zero Stress and can take three. Mark one when the crew accepts vehicle damage instead of another consequence.

At three Stress, roll or choose one effect. It lasts while that vehicle has three Stress:

1. Landing gear locks; the vehicle cannot take off until repaired.
2. External sensors fail; ability checks relying on them have Disadvantage.
3. Life support overheats; after another hour aboard, each occupant gains one Suit Stress.
4. Cargo restraints release; one carried supply is inaccessible until recovered with 10 minutes of work.
5. Maneuvering jets fire late; Dexterity checks to pilot have Disadvantage.
6. Communications fill with static; Charisma checks made over comms have Disadvantage.

A character can clear one Stress with 10 minutes of work and a successful DC 14 Intelligence check using Tinker's Tools. On a failure, the Stress remains, and another attempt requires a replacement part, a new approach, or a meaningful cost. Dropping below three Stress ends the system effect.

TECHNICAL CHECKS

When a task involves repair, electronics, or calibration, the GM chooses the ability that fits the approach. A character proficient with Tinker's Tools can add their Proficiency Bonus when using those tools. Navigator's Tools can apply to route plotting and instrument navigation. If a relevant skill and tool proficiency both apply, the character has Advantage and adds the Proficiency Bonus only once.

CREW RESERVE

Place three tokens in the middle of the table. After another character fails an ability check, a player can spend one and describe how their specialty helps. The failed character rerolls and must use the new roll. Crew Reserve cannot affect an attack roll or saving throw, and it cannot be combined with Heroic Inspiration on the same check. Return one token when the crew accepts a meaningful complication to help someone else.

Reskinning a spell or feature changes only its description. It never changes action cost, range, target, components, duration, damage type, or another rule.

COLD OPEN: DESCENT TO KESTREL

Kestrel turns beneath you like a worn copper coin. Lightning moves inside the dust belt in silent blue veins. Havenport is a handful of warm lights on the night side, and somewhere beyond it the navigation beacon is dark. Your comm panel repeats the same clipped message: Mercy Bell convoy, arrival in six hours. Medical priority. No safe approach without ground guidance.

Flight control gives the crew a narrow landing corridor. The storm has shifted since the last chart update, and the ship must descend through a moving seam between charged clouds.

DESCENT CHALLENGE

The crew needs three successes before two complications. Use DC 13 for sound plans and DC 15 for risky ones. A character cannot repeat the same approach twice.

- **Pilot the seam:** Dexterity check using Navigator's Tools.
- **Read the storm:** Wisdom (Survival) or Intelligence (Nature).
- **Tune the sensors:** Intelligence (Investigation); Tinker's Tools can apply.
- **Balance the ship:** Strength (Athletics), or an Intelligence check using Tinker's Tools in the machinery space.
- **Call Havenport:** Charisma (Persuasion) to keep a frightened controller focused.

COMPLICATIONS

Choose one per failed check:

- Mark one ship Stress.
- A landing strut jams and must be repaired before departure.
- The rover loses one of its two spare power cells.
- Fill one Convoy Clock segment.
- The crew lands six kilometers from Havenport and must approach through the storm.

CLEAN LANDING

If the crew succeeds before two complications, Havenport's controller, **Mara Venn**, grants priority access to the colony machine shop. The crew gains one automatic vehicle or suit repair later in the mission.

OPENING QUESTION

Ask each player: **What small repair aboard your ship have you promised to finish after this job?** Return to one answer during the epilogue.

HAVENPORT

Havenport is a crescent of pressure habitats built into the lee of a basalt ridge. Its greenhouse windows shine green through red dust. Cargo loaders stand idle because their power cells have been moved to the clinic.

MARA VENN, FLIGHT CONTROLLER

Mara is direct, exhausted, and unwilling to lose another ship. Her younger brother is aboard *Mercy Bell* as a navigation officer. She provides the rover, storm route, and colony frequencies.

What she wants: The beacon restored before the convoy reaches the inner belt.

What she knows: Maintenance chief Tovan Rusk reported an unusual power draw before communications failed.

DIRECTOR OREN VALE, SABLE MERIDIAN

Vale appears by tight-beam transmission from orbit. He is calm, polite, and focused on liability. He orders the crew to use an emergency overload code if normal repairs take more than one hour.

What he wants: The route open and the company's contract protected.

What he hides: The overload will burn out the lower field coils and sterilize everything within three kilometers of the beacon.

DR. SENA ORI, XENOGEOLOGIST

Sena has spent three years cataloging Kestrel's electrical geology. She noticed repeating light patterns near the beacon but lacks proof that they are biological.

What she wants: Data before anyone destroys the phenomenon.

What she offers: A harmonic scanner that grants Advantage on one ability check to analyze energy, weather, or signal behavior.

CONTRACT AND SUPPLIES

Havenport offers each crew member 500 gp, credits, or the campaign's equivalent upon the convoy's safe arrival. If the convoy aborts but the crew returns the maintenance team or its data, Havenport pays each crew member 200 gp or equivalent.

The crew may take three supplies: sealant foam, medical kit, climbing rig, spare power cell, harmonic scanner, portable shelter, drone override key, or emergency transmitter. Use the spoiler-safe Supply Requisition handout. Every item left behind may become a later tradeoff.

HAVENPORT



FIELD NOTE

A handful of warm lights under a charged sky.

ACROSS THE STORM FLATS

The beacon stands 42 kilometers east of Havenport. The rover trip normally takes 90 minutes. The charged storm makes the route uncertain and turns exposed metal into a lightning target.

ROUTE

Havenport -> Split-Rock Cut -> Mirror Flats -> Relay Camp -> Beacon Spire

The crew can choose one route:

THE CUT

Sheltered by basalt walls, the Cut protects the rover from lightning but contains a recent rockfall. Clearing it requires time, climbing, explosives, telekinesis, or heavy engineering. Fill the Clock only if the crew cannot produce a quick solution.

THE FLATS

The direct route saves time but crosses conductive mineral crust. Run the Charged Flats challenge. A clean success reaches Relay Camp without advancing the Clock.

THE OLD SERVICE TUNNEL

Sena knows an unmaintained cable tunnel beneath the flats. It is too narrow for the rover. On foot, the crew avoids the storm but must manage suits and carry equipment. Each character begins with one Suit Stress unless the group brought the portable shelter or spends a power cell warming the tunnel.

FRONTIER DETAIL

Ask one player what personal object hangs from the rover's dashboard. During the journey, another character notices that it has stopped rattling. The sudden silence is the first sign that the storm's electrical field has changed.

DISCOVERY BEFORE DANGER

At the midpoint, sensor static resolves into evenly spaced pulses. A successful DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation or Nature) check shows that the pulses are moving against the wind. On a failure, the crew still notices the pattern but cannot yet tell whether it is geological, mechanical, or alive.

THE CHARGED FLATS

The ground ahead looks wet until the rover lights strike it. Then the whole plain flashes back: black mineral glass under a skin of red dust. Blue sparks climb the antenna in branching threads. Far below the surface, something answers with a slow amber glow.

Run this as a group challenge. The crew needs four successes before three consequences. A character cannot repeat the same approach twice.

APPROACHES

- **Pilot between strike zones:** DC 14 Dexterity check using Navigator's Tools.
- **Read field buildup:** DC 14 Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Survival).
- **Ground the rover:** DC 13 Intelligence check using Tinker's Tools.
- **Reduce the profile:** DC 13 Strength (Athletics) to retract or secure external gear.
- **Map the buried pulses:** DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation); on success, also gain one Heliograph Insight.
- **Keep everyone working:** DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) or Wisdom (Insight).

CONSEQUENCES

Choose one each time the group earns a consequence:

- Mark one rover Stress.
- Lose a spare power cell or one selected supply.
- A suit seal overloads; one character gains one Suit Stress.
- **Lightning strike:** One exposed character makes a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw, taking 10 (3d6) Lightning damage on a failed save or half as much damage on a successful one. The discharge ends immediately and does not repeat unless chosen again.
- The rover becomes stuck on fused glass. Clearing it fills one Clock segment.

SUIT STRESS

Each character can take two Suit Stress. At one, the suit shows a visible seal, temperature, or display fault but imposes no penalty. At two, the character has Disadvantage on ability checks made in the open until repaired.

A character clears one Suit Stress by spending sealant foam, or by working for 10 minutes and succeeding on a DC 13 Intelligence check using Tinker's Tools. On a failure, the Stress remains, and another attempt requires a replacement part, a new approach, or a meaningful cost.

HELIOGRAPH INSIGHT

For each Insight earned, reveal one relevant card from the Heliograph Field Notes when the crew encounters its clue. See **The Heliographs** and **Critical Clues**.

ACROSS THE MIRROR FLATS



FIELD NOTE

Blue sparks climb the antenna. Amber light answers below.

RELAY CAMP

The maintenance rover is wedged beside a collapsed sensor mast two kilometers from the beacon. Tovan Rusk lies inside with a broken leg. Apprentice **Ilyan Cho** is outside, manually grounding the shelter with a cable and a metal shovel.

THE RESCUE

Reaching Ilyan safely requires a successful DC 13 Dexterity (Acrobatics) or Wisdom (Survival) check. On a failure, the character reaches Ilyan but gains one Suit Stress.

Stabilizing Tovan requires a successful DC 13 Wisdom (Medicine) check, a use of the medical kit, or magic that restores Hit Points. A failed check does not kill him; it means he cannot be moved without the medical kit or a stretcher improvised from the climbing rig.

WHAT HAPPENED

Tovan and Ilyan restored the beacon's primary coil. When they powered it, hundreds of translucent structures rose from the dust around the spire. The signal scattered. Sable Meridian ordered an overload. Tovan refused, shut the beacon down, and tried to return to Havenport. A strike toppled the mast across their rover.

TOVAN'S FIELD LOG

The rover automatically plays Tovan's last recorded report when the crew restores power. It remains available if Tovan is unconscious, distrusted, or left behind.

- The structures moved away when his cutting torch regulator dropped to a lower frequency.
- They gathered around a dropped battery without attacking the crew.
- The downloaded overload directive predicts a three-kilometer thermal sterilization zone.

TOVAN RUSK

Tovan is practical, stubborn, and angry at being called sentimental. He wants the beacon repaired without the overload and fears the convoy will be lost because of his refusal. His credentials automatically unlock the beacon's maintenance logs.

ILYAN CHO

Ilyan wants to prove Tovan was right but will not gamble twelve transports on a theory. They volunteer to accompany the crew if Tovan is stabilized.

THE CHOICE TO PAUSE

The crew can evacuate Tovan to Havenport, filling one Clock segment, or secure him in the shelter. Leaving him is safe if he is stable and has heat, power, and communications. Compassion does not need to become punishment.

RELAY CAMP



FIELD NOTE

Competence matters most when someone is waiting for help.

THE BEACON SPIRE

The beacon is a 60-meter lattice tower rising from a shallow impact basin. The air shimmers with static. Luminous shapes cluster around its buried field coils.

1. SERVICE APRON

A low platform holds tool lockers, a crane, and a disabled cargo crawler. The crawler's power cell can replace a lost spare, but removing it disables the crane.

2. CONTROL SHELTER

The console displays three faults: primary signal scatter, lower-coil heat rise, and harmonic feedback. Opening the overload authorization automatically displays its predicted three-kilometer sterilization radius. No check is required to learn that cost.

A successful DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals that lowering the carrier frequency reduces signal scatter. Tovan's credentials provide this result automatically.

3. LOWER COIL VAULT

Heliograph filaments have grown through the cable channels without damaging them. Working here safely requires grounding the coil or shutting down local power.

The first time in a round that a creature touches an ungrounded control, it makes a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw, taking 10 (3d6) Lightning damage on a failed save or half as much damage on a successful one. The discharge ends immediately and resets at the start of the next round.

4. TOWER GANTRY

Climbing the tower gives line of sight to Mercy Bell but exposes the climber to the storm. Reaching the top requires a successful DC 14 Strength (Athletics) check or the climbing rig. On a failed check, the climber reaches the gantry but takes 5 (1d10) Bludgeoning damage from a hard impact. An emergency transmitter can provide manual guidance from the top.

5. HELIOGRAPH BASIN

The basin is Difficult Terrain but is not hazardous unless attacked or overloaded. A character who moves slowly sees the organisms bend away from each footstep and return after the vibration passes.

Changing the pitch of any powered tool automatically makes the nearest sails fold toward or away from it. This reveals that frequency can guide the organisms without requiring a check.

USE THE SPACE

Let the crew split tasks across levels. Cross-cut between them, but use the phased climax procedure before combat begins.

THE HELIOGRAPHS

One by one, the shapes unfold. Each begins as a handspan of crystal beneath the dust, then rises on threads finer than wire. Translucent sails open toward the tower. Amber light travels across them in measured waves, answering distant flashes until the whole basin becomes a map of living stars.

The heliographs are a colonial life-form built from silicate plates, conductive fibers, and microbial films. They harvest static electricity during Kestrel's seasonal storms. The beacon's field coils imitate the electrical signature of a mature colony, drawing them into the basin.

They are not intelligent in a human sense, but they communicate field strength, direction, and reproductive timing through light. Their coordinated movement and recovery from disturbance are automatic evidence of complex native life.

STUDYING THE COLONY

A character can take the Study action and make a DC 15 Intelligence (Nature or Investigation) check. The DC is 13 with Sena's scanner. Each success reveals one unrevealed fact:

- Lowering the beacon's carrier frequency will make the sails fold and migrate.
- Unguided migration takes about 40 minutes.
- A spare power cell can attract and guide a cluster safely.
- The repeating light pulses point beneath the eastern ridge.

On a failed check, reveal no additional precision, but repeat one automatic clue from the site or Tovan's log. A failed study check never hides the central choice.

FIELD NOTE CARDS

Before play, cut the Heliograph Field Notes into six cards. Reveal a card when its associated clue appears. Do not hand out the uncut sheet.

SCIENCE SIDEBAR: SPECULATIVE, NOT MAGICAL

Kestrel's dust storms create charge through friction between fine particles. The heliographs use conductive structures to collect that energy, much as terrestrial life uses sunlight or chemical gradients. Their crystal sails are fictional, but the ecological logic should feel testable and consistent.

AWE REWARD

The first character who stops working long enough to simply watch gains Heroic Inspiration. A character who already has Heroic Inspiration can give this instance to another character who lacks it. Ask what the display reminds them of.

THE HELIOGRAPHS



FIELD NOTE

The whole basin becomes a map of living stars.

HELIOGRAPH FIELD PLATE



FIELD OBSERVATION

Native electrical life. Silicate plates unfold during Kestrel's seasonal storms.

- [] Harmonic response
- [] Guided migration
- [] Overload vulnerability
- [] Eastern signal

CRITICAL CLUES

Never require a successful check or one cooperative NPC to reveal the existence of the choice. Checks provide precision, speed, or an advantage, not permission to understand the scenario.

THE HELIOGRAPHS ARE ALIVE

Use any three:

- Tovan's field log describes purposeful movement and attraction to a battery.
- Their sails bend away from footsteps and return after the vibration passes.
- The colony communicates in repeated, coordinated light patterns.
- A successful study check identifies the microbial films and reproductive cycle.

THE OVERLOAD WILL DESTROY THEM

Use any three:

- The control shelter automatically displays the three-kilometer sterilization radius.
- Tovan's downloaded directive includes the same thermal prediction.
- Sena's scanner shows that overload heat will fuse the silicate plates.
- Vale refuses to discuss ecological effects and pressures the crew to act before recording data.

HARMONIC RETUNING CAN MOVE THEM

Use any three:

- Tovan's log records their response to his cutting torch's lower frequency.
- Changing a powered tool's pitch makes nearby sails fold and turn.
- The control shelter shows reduced signal scatter at a lower carrier frequency.
- A successful study check models a safe migration band.

MANUAL GUIDANCE CAN SAVE THE CONVOY

Use any three:

- The tower gantry has direct line of sight to Mercy Bell.
- Mara confirms that a strong line-of-sight signal can replace the beacon for one descent.
- The emergency transmitter is built for short-range guidance.
- The crew can use its own ship as a relay at the cost of two ship Stress.

IF A SOURCE IS MISSED

If Tovan is unavailable, use his field log. If Sena is absent, use the scanner's automatic display. If every study check fails, the crew still knows the overload's cost and the two safe alternatives. The checks determine how quickly and cleanly those alternatives work.

PRESSURE AT THE SPIRE

Once the crew understands the problem, Director Vale contacts them. The convoy has entered the outer belt. He orders immediate overload and offers each crew member a 250 gp or equivalent hazard bonus.

At the same time, Mara reports that Mercy Bell cannot hold outside the storm much longer. Tovan asks for one careful attempt. Sena begs the crew to preserve the only known life on Kestrel. No faction is allowed to make the decision for the players.

FACTION TRUTHS

- **Havenport:** The clinic has three days of antibiotics and one working water filter. If the convoy aborts, people will suffer.
- **Sable Meridian:** The overload will work. Vale is concealing the ecological cost because he believes one unstudied organism cannot outweigh hundreds of colonists.
- **Maintenance crew:** Tovan's refusal created the immediate crisis, but it preserved a discovery no one else noticed. He accepts responsibility if the convoy is lost.
- **Science team:** Sena is right about the heliographs' value. She is also asking working colonists to risk medicine for a discovery she cannot yet fully explain.

RUNNING THE CLIMAX

Use four sequential phases so the GM never tracks every subsystem at once.

1. **Frame the decision:** State the Clock, the known costs, and the available paths. Let the crew debate without initiative.
2. **Secure the site:** If Vale deploys drones, resolve the encounter, override, or negotiation before a repair procedure begins.
3. **Execute one plan:** Track only the Convoy Clock, that plan's successes and complications, relevant supplies, and the active Stress track.
4. **Show the cost:** Resolve the convoy, colony, payment, and relationships. Do not add another roll unless the players create a new uncertainty.

OPTIONAL COMPLICATION: CORPORATE DRONES

If the crew openly refuses Vale and physically blocks the overload, or if the session needs action, Vale sends maintenance drones into the coil vault. Use **Sable Maintenance Drone** and **Drone Encounter Scaling**. The drones attack only characters who physically interfere. Resolve this phase before starting Harmonic Retune, Field Shepherding, or Manual Descent.

FOUR WAYS TO BRING THE LIGHT BACK

Players may invent another plan. These are reliable starting points.

1. EMERGENCY OVERLOAD

Authorization takes one Utilize action at the console. The beacon immediately reaches full strength, and the convoy lands safely. The heliographs shatter into inert glass. Havenport receives its supplies, Vale pays the hazard bonus, and evidence of native life survives only in the crew's recordings.

2. HARMONIC RETUNE

The crew needs four successes before two complications. Use DC 14. A character cannot repeat the same approach twice.

- **Set the carrier:** Intelligence check using Tinker's Tools.
- **Model the resonance:** Intelligence (Nature or Investigation).
- **Align the tower:** Strength (Athletics), or an Intelligence check using Tinker's Tools.
- **Track the migration:** Wisdom (Perception or Survival).
- **Coordinate the crew:** Charisma (Persuasion) while another character works.

A player can spend one Heliograph Insight to reduce one check's DC to 12. On success, the beacon restarts and drives a slow, harmless migration. Fill one Clock segment.

COMPLICATIONS

Choose one when a check fails:

- **Coil heat:** Each creature in the vault makes a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw, taking 14 (4d6) Fire damage on a failed save or half as much damage on a successful one. The heat pulse ends immediately and does not repeat unless chosen again.
- **Tower lightning:** One creature exposed on the gantry makes a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw, taking 10 (3d6) Lightning damage on a failed save or half as much damage on a successful one. The strike ends immediately and does not repeat unless chosen again.
- One selected supply is consumed.
- Fill one additional Clock segment.

IF TWO COMPLICATIONS OCCUR

The lower coil locks. The crew can consume one supply and fill one Clock segment to continue with its existing successes, or abandon the retune and choose another path. This decision ends the failed procedure; there are no consequence-free retries.

HARMONIC RETUNE



FIELD NOTE

The careful solution becomes a path of light.

OTHER WAYS TO BRING THE LIGHT BACK

3. FIELD SHEPHERDING

The crew places spare power cells or the rover along a route away from the basin. It needs three successes before three failures. Use DC 13; a character cannot repeat the same approach twice.

- **Guide the rover:** Dexterity check using Navigator's Tools.
- **Tune the cells:** Intelligence check using Tinker's Tools.
- **Move the equipment:** Strength (Athletics).
- **Plot a safe route:** Wisdom (Survival).

On each failure, either strand one power cell or mark one rover Stress. On success, the organisms follow the improvised field source, the beacon restarts normally, and the work fills one Clock segment.

If the crew reaches three failures, the colony scatters across the route. The crew can disable the rover by sacrificing its power system, or fill one Clock segment to regroup and continue with its existing successes. If it accepts neither cost, the attempt ends and the crew must choose another path.

4. MANUAL DESCENT

One character climbs the tower with the emergency transmitter while the crew powers and aligns it. Resolve three DC 14 checks:

1. **Establish contact:** Intelligence check using Tinker's Tools, or Charisma (Persuasion) to cut through convoy traffic.
2. **Read the storm:** Wisdom (Survival).
3. **Guide the transports:** Dexterity check using Navigator's Tools.

On the first failed check, the crew chooses: one transport is damaged but its passengers survive, or fill one Clock segment. On a second failed check, Mara orders an abort unless the crew accepts a severe cost: mark two ship Stress and consume one supply to relay guidance through its own vessel. If the crew accepts, finish the final check. The heliographs remain untouched, but the beacon still needs a permanent solution.

CREATIVE SOLUTIONS

Spells, class features, drones, portable generators, signal magic, or ship systems can solve part of the problem. Establish the relevant facts, name the cost of failure before the roll, and require no more than three checks. Failure changes the cost or outcome; it never hides the next step or demands an identical retry.

SABLE MAINTENANCE DRONE

Medium Construct, Unaligned

AC 16 **Initiative** +2 (12)

HP 75 (10d8 + 30)

Speed 30 ft., Fly 20 ft.

STR 16 (+3) **DEX** 14 (+2) **CON** 16 (+3) **INT** 6 (-2) **WIS** 12 (+1) **CHA** 5 (-3)

Saving Throws Dex +4, Con +5

Skills Perception +3

Damage Resistances Lightning

Damage Immunities Poison

Condition Immunities Poisoned

Senses Darkvision 60 ft.; Passive Perception 13

Languages understands Common and Sable machine code but cannot speak

CR 4 (XP 1,100; PB +2)

TRAITS

Grounding Chassis. The drone has Advantage on saving throws against environmental effects caused by electricity.

Nonlethal Directive. A creature reduced to 0 Hit Points by the drone is Stable. The drone does not attack an Unconscious creature.

Remote Directive. A creature within 5 feet of the drone can take the Utilize action to make a DC 14 Intelligence check using Tinker's Tools. A drone override key grants Advantage. On a success, the drone's Speed becomes 0, it has the Incapacitated condition until the end of its next turn, and it gains one override success. At two override successes, it shuts down for 1 hour. A failed check removes one accumulated success.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The drone makes two Tool Arm attacks.

Tool Arm. *Melee Attack Roll:* +5, reach 5 ft. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) Bludgeoning damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 13 Strength saving throw or be pushed 5 feet.

Arc Welder (Recharge 5–6). *Dexterity Saving Throw:* DC 13, each creature in a 30-foot-long, 5-foot-wide Line. *Failure:* 21 (6d6) Lightning damage. *Success:* Half damage.

DRONE ENCOUNTER SCALING

The drones are a low-to-moderate pressure encounter, not the adventure's boss fight. Each drone is CR 4 and worth 1,100 XP. Use the party's level and size:

LEVEL 5

- 4 characters: 2 drones, 2,200 XP.
- 5 characters: 3 drones, 3,300 XP.
- 6 characters: 4 drones, 4,400 XP.

LEVEL 6

- 4 characters: 3 drones, 3,300 XP.
- 5 characters: 4 drones, 4,400 XP.
- 6 characters: 5 drones, 5,500 XP.

LEVEL 7

- 4 characters: 4 drones, 4,400 XP.
- 5 characters: 5 drones, 5,500 XP.
- 6 characters: 6 drones, 6,600 XP.

Use one fewer drone if the crew is badly depleted or Arc Welder can easily catch multiple characters. For four or more drones, divide them between two shared Initiative counts to reduce bookkeeping.

TACTICAL DIRECTIVE

- **Round 1:** Drones move toward the console and use Arc Welder only if characters block the route.
- **Later rounds:** They push blockers aside and keep moving. They do not focus fire or attack Unconscious creatures.
- **Override:** A shutdown, physical barricade, false order, or severed remote link can end a drone's part in the encounter.
- **Crew defeat:** Drones restrain or bypass the crew, then begin a three-round overload countdown. The characters can still escape, override the controls, or accept the overload. Losing the encounter does not end the adventure.

Do not add an initiative-20 storm strike by default. If the environment needs to matter, use an existing retune complication after the drone phase ends.

CONSEQUENCES, REWARDS, AND CONTINUING PLAY

IF THE CONVOY LANDS

Havenport celebrates with reheated coffee, crowded corridors, and the sound of replacement pumps starting for the first time in months. Each crew member receives the 500 gp or equivalent contract payment, adjusted as follows:

- **Preserved heliographs:** Sena names the first mapped colony after the ship or a crew member. The crew gains scientific reputation and access to a future survey contract.
- **Used the overload:** Sable Meridian pays the additional 250 gp or equivalent hazard bonus. Tovan resigns. A child in Havenport makes a glass sculpture from the fused basin, not knowing what it represents.
- **Manual descent:** Havenport pays 250 gp or equivalent immediately. Mercy Bell's captain guarantees the remaining 250 gp as a favor or future contract while Sable disputes the unfinished beacon repair.
- **Exposed Vale:** Havenport's council challenges its transit contract. The crew gains allies and a corporate complication.

IF THE CONVOY ABORTS

Havenport pays each crew member 200 gp or equivalent if the crew returns the maintenance team or its data. The colony survives, but the next month is difficult. The crew can organize rationing, make a second run, or carry priority medicine aboard its own ship. Failure becomes another job, not an ending.

ADVANCEMENT

Completing the mission counts as a significant story milestone, regardless of the chosen solution. If the campaign uses XP instead, award each character 750 XP at level 5, 1,000 XP at level 6, or 1,300 XP at level 7. This replaces XP for noncombat challenges. Add drone XP only if the crew directly defeats, overrides, or outmaneuvers them.

At the start of the next session, each surviving character gains Heroic Inspiration if the player can name one person, place, or possibility changed by the crew's decision. A character who already has it can give this instance to another character who lacks it.

THE EASTERN SIGNAL

Heliograph pulses point beneath the eastern ridge. A later expedition finds a warm cavern where electrical organisms have built a continent-scale pattern into the stone. It may be a migration map, a weather memory, or a message formed over thousands of years.

OTHER HOOKS

- Sable Meridian sends auditors to recover the crew's recordings.
- Mercy Bell carries a passenger who knows why the medicine was delayed.
- Tovan offers to join the crew if they protected the basin.
- One heliograph attaches itself harmlessly to the rover's power housing.

GM QUICK REFERENCE

SCENE FLOW

1. Descend through the storm.
2. Brief at Havenport and choose three supplies.
3. Choose a route across the flats.
4. Rescue Tovan and Ilyan at Relay Camp.
5. Explore the Beacon Spire.
6. Discover and understand the heliographs.
7. Frame Vale's order and the Convoy Clock.
8. Resolve any drone pressure.
9. Choose or invent a solution.
10. Show the changed future and return to one promised ship repair.

CLOCK

- 0–2: Mercy Bell is six to three hours away.
- 3–4: The convoy enters the outer dust belt.
- 5: The convoy must descend or abort.
- 6: The lead transport begins a blind approach.
- Short Rest: fill one segment.
- Long Rest: fill to six; it cannot finish before arrival.

CORE NPCS

- **Mara Venn:** Save the convoy; her brother is aboard.
- **Oren Vale:** Protect the route and company; conceals the overload cost.
- **Sena Ori:** Preserve and study the heliographs.
- **Tovan Rusk:** Repair without killing native life; his log replaces him if needed.
- **Ilyan Cho:** Prove the truth without gambling lives.

DEFAULT DCS

DC 13 is routine under pressure, DC 14 is demanding, and DC 15 is risky or poorly equipped. Reduce the DC or grant Advantage when the crew brings the right tool, information, or assistance. Use an ability check with Tinker's Tools for repair and electronics, and Navigator's Tools for route plotting and instrument guidance.

CLIMAX PHASES

Frame the decision -> secure the site -> execute one plan -> show the cost. Never run drones and a repair challenge simultaneously by default.

GM CLUE AND PACING REFERENCE

RUNNING SHORT ON TIME

- **Three-hour run:** Resolve descent in two checks, use the Mirror Flats, summarize Relay Camp after one rescue check, reveal two Heliograph cards automatically, and omit drones.
- **Four-hour run:** Run descent and one travel challenge, keep Relay Camp, omit drones unless the crew causes the confrontation, and reduce the chosen solution by one required success.
- **Six-hour run:** Use every scene. Add drones only when they express a player choice, not merely to add combat.

CRITICAL CLUE FALLBACKS

- **Alive:** Tovan's log, observed movement, coordinated pulses, or study.
- **Overload kills:** Console safety pane, downloaded directive, scanner prediction, or Vale's concealment.
- **Retune moves:** Torch log, powered-tool response, console graph, or study.
- **Manual guidance:** Gantry line of sight, Mara's confirmation, transmitter function, or ship relay.

If every related check fails, give the automatic clue and attach a cost to precision or speed. Never remove a resolution path because of one roll.

SUPPLY REVEALS

Give the neutral Supply Requisition at Havenport. Reveal specific uses only when the crew discovers them. Cut the six Field Note cards before play and reveal them individually.

TRACKERS

Track ship Stress and rover Stress separately. Track Suit Stress per character. Crew Reserve rerolls only failed ability checks, requires the new result, and cannot combine with Heroic Inspiration on the same check.

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PLAYER HANDOUTS

Seven true-size US Letter sheets follow. Give them to the players only at the indicated point in the mission.

-
- 01 Mission Brief - mission start
 - 02 Crew Operations Board - keep on the table
 - 03 Surface Route - Havenport briefing
 - 04 Supply Requisition - choose three supplies
 - 05 Emergency Overload - reveal at Beacon Spire
 - 06 Heliograph Field Note Cards - cut apart, then reveal by clue
 - 07 Crew Decision Record - final choice

PRINT NOTE: The following pages are US Letter, not 6-by-9. Print at actual size for the intended table layout.

MISSION BRIEF



PRIORITY MEDICAL - SIX HOURS TO ARRIVAL

Kestrel's navigation beacon has gone dark. The Mercy Bell convoy carries antibiotics, pressure seals, and replacement water filters for Havenport. Twelve transports cannot descend safely without ground guidance.

YOUR JOB

Land at Havenport, choose three supplies, cross the storm flats, find the missing maintenance team, and restore a safe route before Mercy Bell commits to descent.

OPENING QUESTION

What small repair aboard your ship have you promised to finish after this job?

CREW OPERATIONS BOARD

CONVOY CLOCK

☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3 OUTER BELT	☐ 4	☐ 5 COMMIT	☐ 6 BLIND
----------------------------	----------------------------	--	----------------------------	--------------------------------------	-------------------------------------

CREW RESERVE ☐ ☐ ☐	SHIP STRESS ☐ ☐ ☐	ROVER STRESS ☐ ☐ ☐
---	--	---

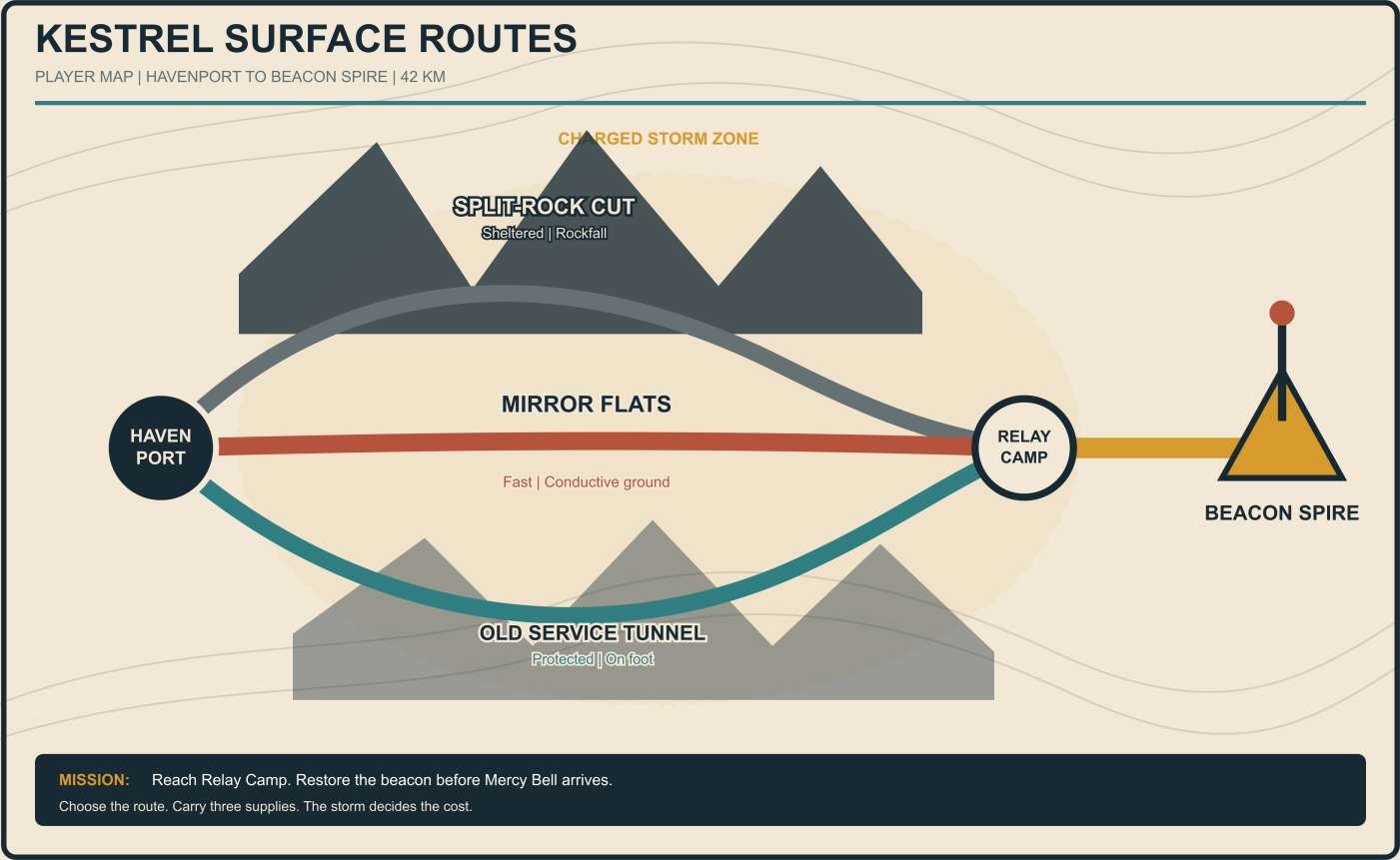
SUIT STRESS

NAME: _____	☐ ☐
NAME: _____	☐ ☐
NAME: _____	☐ ☐
NAME: _____	☐ ☐

SELECTED SUPPLIES - CHOOSE THREE

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Sealant foam | ☐ Medical kit |
| ☐ Climbing rig | ☐ Spare power cell |
| ☐ Harmonic scanner | ☐ Portable shelter |
| ☐ Drone override key | ☐ Emergency transmitter |

SURFACE ROUTE



[] **SPLIT-ROCK CUT**

Sheltered from lightning. A recent rockfall blocks the route.

[] **MIRROR FLATS**

The fastest path. Conductive glass makes every strike matter.

[] **OLD SERVICE TUNNEL**

Protected and on foot. Suits, heat, and carrying capacity matter.

CREW ROUTE NOTES

HAVENPORT SUPPLY REQUISITION

[] SEALANT FOAM

Clear one Suit Stress or seal a damaged pressure surface.

[] MEDICAL KIT

Stabilize or move an injured worker without improvising equipment.

[] CLIMBING RIG

Reach a high structure or build a secure stretcher.

[] SPARE POWER CELL

Power one field device or replace a depleted cell.

[] HARMONIC SCANNER

Gain Advantage on one check to analyze energy, weather, or signal behavior.

[] PORTABLE SHELTER

Protect the crew from exposure during slow travel or field work.

[] DRONE OVERRIDE KEY

Interface with compatible Sable Meridian machinery.

[] EMERGENCY TRANSMITTER

Establish a strong short-range or line-of-sight signal.

EMERGENCY OVERLOAD

REVEAL AT THE BEACON SPIRE

TO: CONTRACT RESPONSE CREW

FROM: DIRECTOR OREN VALE

PRIORITY: MEDICAL ROUTE RESTORATION

If normal beacon repair exceeds one hour, execute the emergency overload sequence. Full carrier strength will be restored immediately. The Mercy Bell convoy and Havenport supply contract take priority over unverified ecological or geological anomalies.

AUTHORIZATION: VALE-7-KESTREL

CREW ACKNOWLEDGMENT: _____

ACTION TAKEN: _____

HELIOGRAPH FIELD NOTE CARDS

FIELD NOTE 1 - CONTROLLED REVEAL

LIVING COLONY

REVEAL AT THE BASIN

Coordinated movement and recovery reveal complex native life.

.....
WHAT DOES IT REMIND YOU OF?

FIELD NOTE 2 - CONTROLLED REVEAL

HARMONIC RESPONSE

REVEAL WHEN A TOOL CHANGES PITCH

The sails follow a narrow harmonic band, not heat or radiation.

.....
WHAT DOES IT REMIND YOU OF?

FIELD NOTE 3 - CONTROLLED REVEAL

SAFE MIGRATION

REVEAL FROM STUDY OR CONSOLE

Lowering carrier frequency makes the sails fold and migrate.

.....
WHAT DOES IT REMIND YOU OF?

FIELD NOTE 4 - CONTROLLED REVEAL

GUIDED SHEPHERDING

REVEAL FROM TOVAN OR STUDY

Unguided migration takes 40 minutes. A power cell can guide a cluster.

.....
WHAT DOES IT REMIND YOU OF?

FIELD NOTE 5 - CONTROLLED REVEAL

OVERLOAD COST

REVEAL FROM CONSOLE, LOG, OR SCANNER

The overload will destroy the colony and fuse the basin.

.....
WHAT DOES IT REMIND YOU OF?

FIELD NOTE 6 - CONTROLLED REVEAL

EASTERN SIGNAL

REVEAL FROM STUDY

The light pulses repeat a direction beneath the eastern ridge.

.....
WHAT DOES IT REMIND YOU OF?

CREW DECISION RECORD

WHAT IS KESTREL'S LAST LIGHT FOR?

☐ EMERGENCY OVERLOAD

Immediate full signal. Known ecological cost.

☐ HARMONIC RETUNE

Careful engineering and study. Costs time.

☐ FIELD SHEPHERDING

Move the colony with portable field sources.

☐ MANUAL DESCENT

Guide Mercy Bell directly. Beacon still needs repair.

☐ CREW-CREATED SOLUTION

Use the facts, equipment, and expertise you earned.

THE FUTURE WE CHANGED

MAPS AND SCHEMATICS

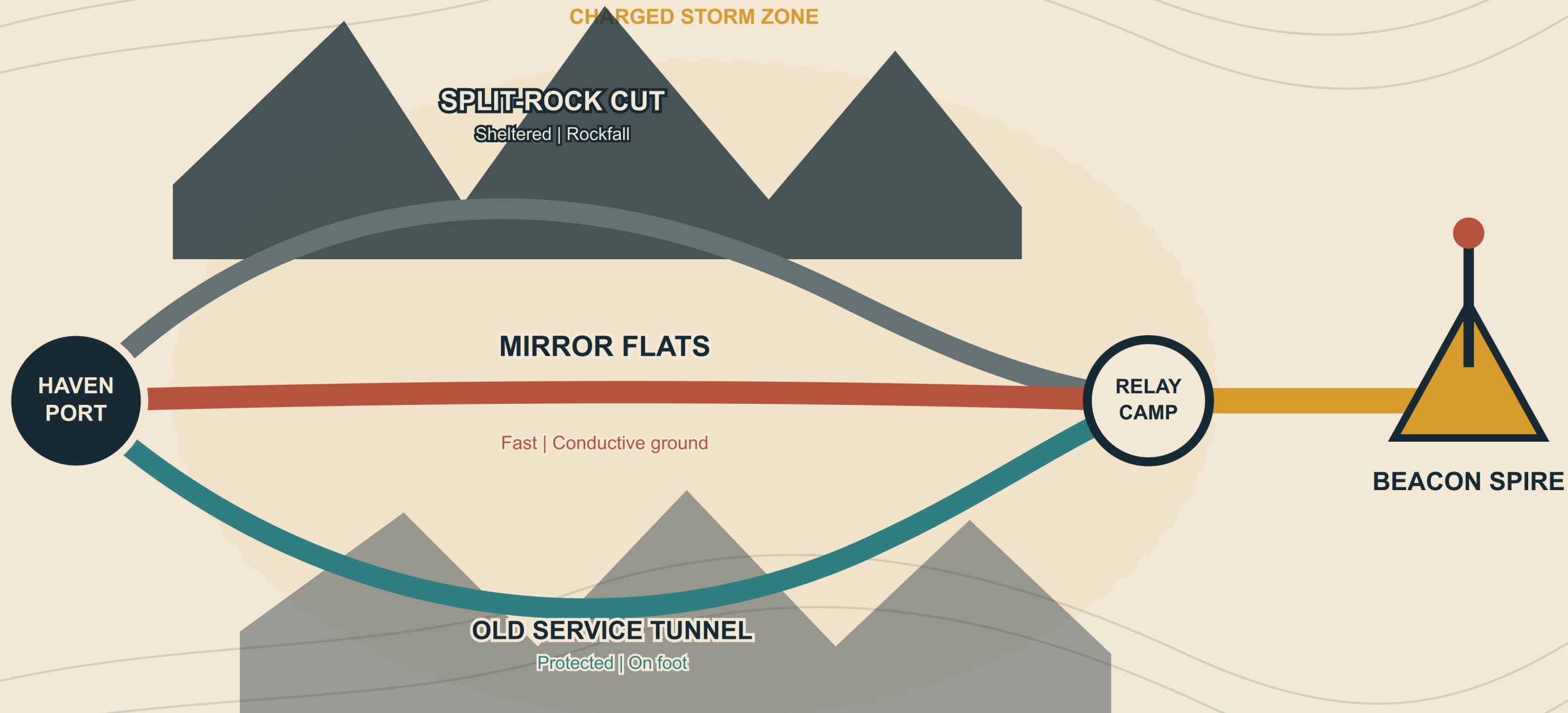
Five true-size 11-by-17 landscape sheets follow. Player and GM versions remain separate to preserve hidden information.

- 01 Kestrel Surface Routes - player map
- 02 Relay Camp - player map
- 03 Relay Camp - GM annotated map
- 04 Beacon Spire - player map
- 05 Beacon Spire - GM annotated map

PRINT NOTE: The following pages are 11-by-17 landscape. Encounter-map grids use 5-foot squares.

KESTREL SURFACE ROUTES

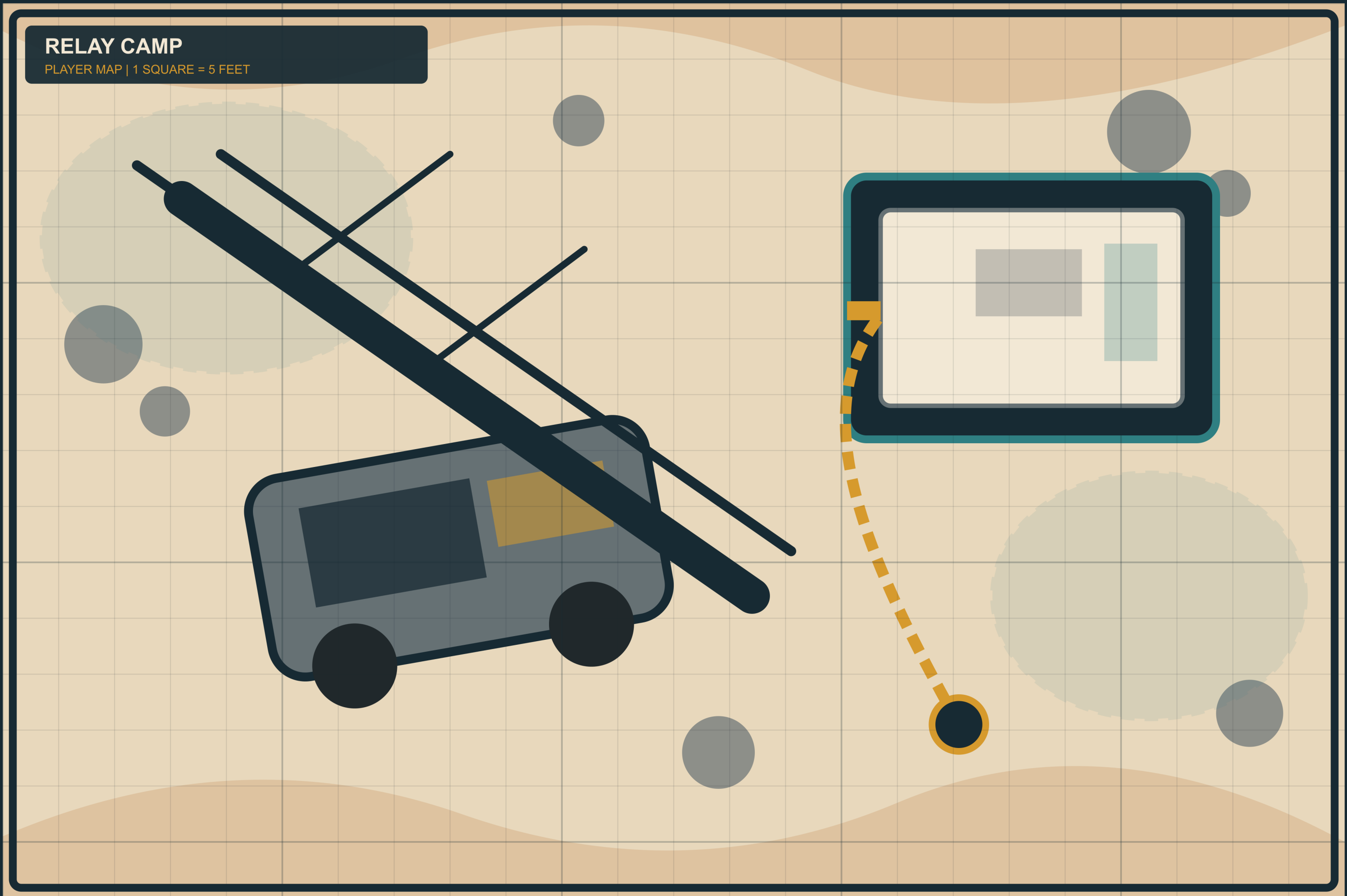
PLAYER MAP | HAVENPORT TO BEACON SPIRE | 42 KM



MISSION: Reach Relay Camp. Restore the beacon before Mercy Bell arrives.
Choose the route. Carry three supplies. The storm decides the cost.

RELAY CAMP

PLAYER MAP | 1 SQUARE = 5 FEET



RELAY CAMP

GM ANNOTATED | 1 SQUARE = 5 FEET

1 COLLAPSED SENSOR MAST

2 STORM SHELTER

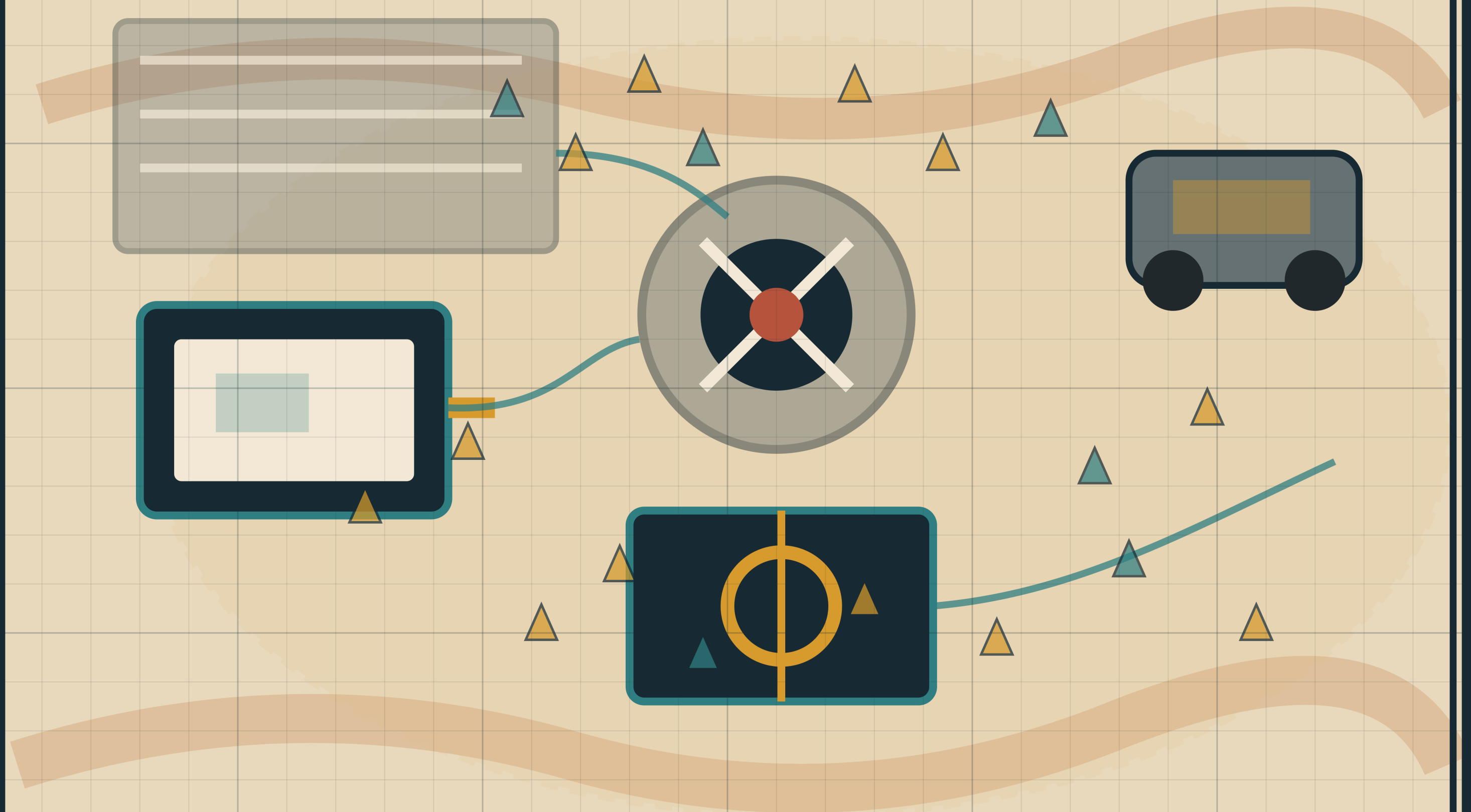
3 MAINTENANCE ROVER

ARRIVAL EDGE 5

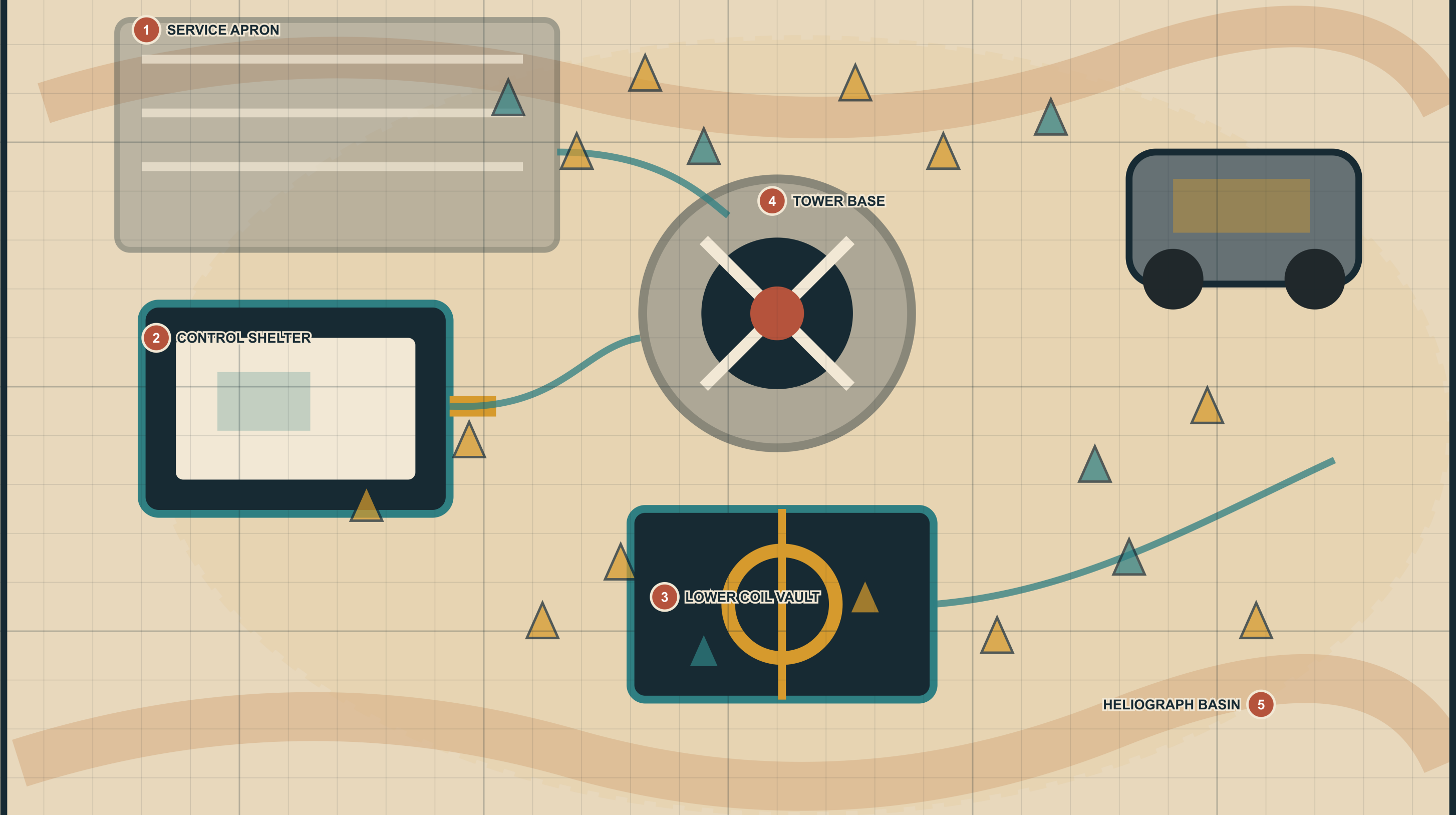
4 GROUNDING POINT

BEACON SPIRE

PLAYER MAP | 1 SQUARE = 5 FEET



BEACON SPIRE
GM ANNOTATED | 1 SQUARE = 5 FEET



**STRANGE WORLDS.
HARD CHOICES.
ONE GOOD CREW.**

A RUGGED WONDER FRONTIER MISSION

SUPERNOVA PRESS