FLOTSAM

Adrift amongst the stars

By JOSHUA FOX

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Credits

For Nick.

"You're in a room. A really, really big room. In space."

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FLOTSAM: ADRIFT AMONGST THE STARS

What is this?

Flotsam is a roleplaying game about outcasts, misfits and renegades living in the belly of a space station, in the shadow of a more prosperous society. The focus of the game is on interpersonal relationships and the day-to-day lives and struggles of a community that lacks the basic structures of civilisation.

Imagine the Belters of the Expanse watching as Earth and Mars shape their lives; the civilians in Battlestar Galactica living with the decisions made by the military; and the folk of Downbelow in Babylon 5, abandoned to destitution and squalor by those who built the station. This game is about characters like that.

When you play *Flotsam*, sometimes you'll play a single character, called your *Primary*, and focus on portraying them and making decisions for them. Sometimes you'll play a constellation of problems and threats, called your *Situation*, and focus on making that situation feel real and putting pressure on the *Primaries*. And whichever of those you're focusing on, you'll also help describe the world, making it feel real and colourful; and you may sometimes frame scenes, deciding where and when they happen and what they should focus on, and take on *Secondary* characters, bringing them to life.

Primary characters are created using *Playbooks* (see pages 73–103). The Play*books* are:

> — The *Thunder*, a gang leader or law enforcer.
> — The *Spider*, a trader, spy, or criminal.
> — The *Voice*, a cultist, community leader or demagogue.
> — The *Cast-Off*, a drifter and freelancer.
> — The *Sybyl*, a prophet with uncanny powers.
> — The *Hybrid*, a blend of human and something else
>   (AI, alien, god).

— The *Scum*, an ordinary person with connections in the community
— The *Outsider*, someone from outside the station now trapped here.
— The *Vapour*, an AI, spirit or demon.

Situations are described in full on pages 105–113. You could push forward a *Situation* like:

— The *Community's* social strife and internal divisions
— The relentless effects of *Poverty*
— The *Gangs* who run things down here
— The *Above*, a more prosperous and powerful society
— The *Spirits* who inhabit this place
— The people and things that come and go from *Outside* the station
— The *Resistance* to forces oppressing the Below.
— The effects of a *War* that is raging near the station.

Flotsam uses a system of *Moves*, discrete interventions in the direction of the game's fiction. There are *Primary Moves* (see page 34), which trigger when your *Primary* character takes a specific type of action; and *Situation Moves* (see page 54), which define what you can do when you play your *Situation*. Once you've made a *Move*, things take on a life of their own, and further *Moves* may be triggered as a result.

Flotsam also uses *Questions* (see page 32) to build the details of the world and the characters in it. As a general rule, when you want to create a new character, location, custom, rumour, or other element of fictional stuff, you don't do it yourself: you ask someone else a *Question*. When you're asked a *Question*, it's your job to answer it truthfully, according to your idea of what the game world looks like.

The game provides clear and straightforward guidance on not only the *Procedures* of play (see pages 17–59) but also the *Principles* you should use to guide your contributions (see pages 61–71). The *Procedures* tell you what to do, the *Principles* tell you how to do it.

YOU WILL NEED

— A copy of the Teaching Guide
— The *Playbooks*
— The Scenario sheets
— One-page rules summary (optional)
— Names list (optional)

These are all available to download and print at
https://blackarmada.com/flotsam-downloads/.

Additional items you will need:

— Pencils and erasers for making notes
— Extra paper or index cards
— Tokens (4 per player ought to be more than enough)

Playing the game – overview

When you play *Flotsam*, you start off by focusing on the *Primary* characters and their daily lives. As the game proceeds, you'll quickly build up a picture of them and their world, and this will include the problems and threats captured by the *Situations*. Increasingly, the story will be driven by the *Situations* and the *Primary* characters' reactions to them. But when things go quiet, you'll often fall back on the daily lives of the characters as the lodestar for the game.

Every scene in *Flotsam* is framed with a particular purpose in mind, with the time, place and cast for the scene chosen accordingly. The scene may develop and change, perhaps going beyond that original intent or heading in an entirely different direction. You finish a scene when it feels done, or when you can see it's not going anywhere.

Scenes always include at least one *Primary* character (probably more than one) and may also include *Secondary* characters. If your *Primary* character is in a scene, you'll spend most of your time focusing on them, saying what they say and do, and making *Moves* for them. Otherwise, you may focus on your *Situation*, saying how it develops and making *Moves* for it, especially if your *Situation* seems highly relevant for the scene. Finally, anyone may also play *Secondary* characters, saying what they say and do; but this is mostly done by people not currently playing their *Primary*. If you need to recharge, you can choose not to take part in a scene at all: just watch and listen, stepping in if you feel like it.

The *Procedures* of the game are described in more detail on pages 17–59, but here's the short version:

— **When you're playing your *Primary***, you say what they are saying and doing. You also describe the immediate effects of their actions.
— However, other players may introduce *Complications* that modify what you say in some way, making your character fall short of what you hoped for, or pay a cost to succeed.

— Your *Primary* has *Strengths* that represent their skills and abilities. When you use your *Primary's Strengths*, you can spend *Tokens* to cancel *Complications* and get exactly what you wanted.

— Your *Primary* also has *Weaknesses* that represent their flaws and problems. You get *Tokens* by activating a *Weakness* and asking another player to make trouble for you.

— When your *Weakness* causes trouble for you, you get to *Mark* it; and when you show another character who you really are, or how you really feel, and they agree that it changed your *Relationship* with them, you get to *Mark* the *Relationship*. When a *Weakness* or *Relationship* has three *Marks* on it, you get to improve your character and rewrite the *Relationship/Weakness*. Then the cycle begins again.

— **When you're playing your *Situation***, you describe the world and introduce *Threats* that could cause problems for the *Primary* characters.

— As noted above, you'll create new things – characters, locations and so on – by asking the other players *Questions*, then build on the answers and bring them to life.

— When the game is going well and the *Primary* characters are having great conversations, you'll mostly watch and respond to what they do. Any threatening elements are introduced gradually, giving plenty of time to react.

— When things go quiet, or if the *Primaries* are ignoring an obvious encroaching *Threat*, or if they activate a *Weakness*, you'll start to push forward the *Threats* that have been introduced forward and cause problems for the *Primary* characters.

And all of this – saying what your character says and does, gaining and paying tokens, making *Moves* – you do following a set of *Principles* (see pages 61–71). The *Principles* aren't rules, but guidelines – and the *Procedures* are designed to nudge you in the right direction without needing to consciously try. Each *Playbook* also has some unique *Principles* that help guide the person playing that character to explore the particular issues which that *Playbook* is focused on.

Facilitating the game

Realistically, not everyone who plays this game will read these rules.
Since you're reading them, you're in a great position to act as *Facilitator*,
teaching the players how it works and helping to make sure the rules are
adhered to while people are learning the game.

I've tried to make the *Playbooks* and *Situation* sheets intuitive and clear, so that
anyone who picks them up can more-or-less work out what to do. To make life
even easier for you, there's a *Teaching Guide* at the back of this document (pages
159–171). Print it off and read it out loud when you first play, or if someone
needs a refresh, so that everyone has the basics of how to play. It doesn't go
into depth: so it's up to you, the person reading these rules, to answer any
more detailed questions the other players may have, and to watch out for
opportunities to explain the nuances when they're relevant.

You might also want to use the one-page summary (in the reference sheets
available at https://blackarmada.com/flotsam-downloads/) to help explain
the flow of the game. It's a helpful reference throughout the game.

As *Facilitator*, you will also need to make sure that the *Procedures* are
adhered to, and the *Principles* broadly followed. The other players haven't
had time to read and absorb the rules, they're just going on what's in the
Teaching Guide. So – while it doesn't matter if everyone perfectly follows
the rules all the time – it's your job to look out for people who might not
be doing things quite right, and let them know. You can do this straight
away or, if doing so would spoil an in-character moment, you can wait
until the end of the scene. But don't shrink from doing it!

Particular things to watch out for early on are:

— Players doing something difficult or risky. The first few times this
  happens, call it out and invite everyone to contribute *Complications*.
  (See page 34.)

— Players introducing *Complications* that imply the *Primary* character is incompetent, especially when using their *Strengths*. Ask them whether they really think a character with that *Strength* would make that mistake?

— Narration that seems like it might be contentious, even if you yourself agree with it. Invite anyone to *Object* if they disagree. (See page 35.) You may even want to deliberately narrate something potentially contentious early and give people a chance to *Object* to it.

— People creating stuff all by themselves, rather than asking *Questions*. (See page 33.)

— Players bringing in directly threatening material without warning or build-up. Remind them that they shouldn't do that unless someone activated a *Weakness*. (See page 42.)

— Players bringing in world-shaking stuff that might draw the game away from small-scale, personal stories. Remind them what the game is meant to be focused on.

Procedures

Discuss your preferences

It's a good idea, before you start the game, to talk about what you want the game to be like. *Flotsam* is a game where all players contribute to every aspect of the game. That's good, because it means every aspect of the game will be a unique product of your collective imaginations. But it does mean there's less control over the fiction for any one person. So if there's stuff that you really want to see, or really don't want to see, talking about it up-front at the start will increase the chances that you get what you want.

There's no one right way to do this, but here's one approach:

— Discuss tone – do you want your game to be more realistic-feeling, or cinematic? Should it be very bleak, or go a bit easier on the unsavoury elements of the setting?

— Is there any particular fiction that you'd like the game to draw on for inspiration?

— Write down a list of story elements that you want "in" or "out". "No wise pointy-eared aliens". "Yes to synthetic humans". That kind of thing.

— Discuss the reasons for your preferences, so everyone is clear what's driving them.

— Be open to other people's ideas and preferences. This is a collaborative game, so it's not going to be exactly what you imagined at the start.

Safety

Roleplaying games allow us to explore all sorts of imagined scenarios. You open your mouth and describe situations – that's real power. Everything you say is part of your story. That power has a downside, which is that you might begin to steer the story down a path that someone else at the table finds traumatic or upsetting, or that just plain squicks them out. Sometimes the discomfort created by this sort of content can be fun, but that discomfort should be fully consensual. The people at the table and their real-life feelings and safety are more important than the imaginary story you're telling together, so it's helpful to have tools at the table to steer away from anything that's going to ruin the experience for one or more of you.

There are lots of great tools available for this, some of which are summarised below:

— The initial tone conversation (discussed above) can and should include a discussion of the sort of content the game might include, and agreement of boundaries.

— As part of that, you can explicitly agree to ban particular content. You can agree that this content is not included in the game at all, or that you will "fade to black" over such content. This is sometimes called "lines and veils", as in "lines we don't cross" and "things we draw a veil over".

— The X-card is a tool that enables players to indicate when they want to retroactively erase content they found uncomfortable, upsetting or triggering, by simply touching a card. We don't discuss it or question it (except perhaps to clarify what is to be erased), we just act as though it never happened and move on. You can find more detail at http://tinyurl.com/x-card-rpg.

— Script Change is another useful set of tools. The core of Script Change is a set of keywords you can say. "Fast forward" means you

want to skip over some content. "Rewind" means you want to go back and change something that just happened. "Pause" means you need a break. There's full details at http://briebeau.com/thoughty/script-change/.

— A final simple technique is the Open Door, whereby you agree that anyone can leave for a breather if things are getting too uncomfortable for them. They're pausing play, not ending it. You might want to agree that you don't follow someone using the "open door".

Setting up your Primary

Each player has a *Primary* character, who comes with a *Playbook* that provides a specific but flexible set of characteristics to help you get started straight away with a colourful, engaging character. The *Playbooks* are on pages 73–103. At the start of the game, read out the introductory text from each *Playbook*. Each *Playbook* can only be chosen by one person.

Once you've chosen your *Playbooks*, select options from the multiple choice lists and choose three *Strengths* and two *Weaknesses*, preferably including at least one *Flaw*. The option lists may include how you ended up in the Below – see the Origins (page 102). *Strengths* marked with an [R] are *Resources* (see page 38 for more on this). Then introduce your *Primary* to the other players, however you wish. If you prefer, you may create your own options to replace those on the lists.

When everyone's introduced their *Primary* characters, take turns asking the relationship and history questions on your *Playbook*. You must ask at least one of the relationship questions about other *Primary* characters, but the other may be asked of whoever you like – including *Secondary* characters you've invented for the very purpose. If you ask a question of a *Secondary* character, you decide on a name and a broad role, and then ask someone to answer the question for them. So: "Mercy is my younger brother, a bit of a tearaway. Greg, how has Mercy betrayed me?"

The history questions are broader questions about your character. You can choose to answer these yourself (and keep control over what might be quite major aspects of their background), or ask them to another player (and let them surprise you).

These questions may also help you to decide on some starting *Relationships* (see page 24) – you can fill as many of your slots as you like at this point.

Setting up your Situation

Each person also owns a *Situation*, which comes with a *Situation* sheet that provides a focused but flexible set of issues for you to push into scenes for the *Primary* characters to contend with. The *Situations* are on pages 105–113. Before you choose *Situations*, you should each name one *Situation* that you'd like your *Primary* to grapple with in the game; these *Situations* will automatically be put in play.

Now everyone chooses a *Situation* to play. Start by allocating the ones that were chosen above, so you can ensure that they are allocated to a different player than the one(s) that wanted to grapple with them in play; then add any others to ensure everyone's got one. Choose a *Situation* you're excited about and have a strong vision for, if possible. Any *Situations* that aren't allocated to a player can still come up in play, but may be a bit more sketchy and won't have one person pushing them forwards all the time. Put their sheets to one side.

Once you've allocated the *Situations*, select options from the multiple choice list(s). These are designed to allow you to define the big picture of what your *Situation* looks like at the start, and to develop the rest in play. Now introduce the *Situation* to the other players.

MAKE THEM YOUR OWN

The lists and questions on your *Playbook* and *Situation* sheet are there to inspire you, not constrain you. If you want to choose more than one option from a list, to invent one that seems appropriate but isn't on the list, or to tweak one of your questions, you should do that. Run it past the group first, just to be sure everyone is cool with it. The choices you make provide the seed of details about your character and *Situation* – flesh them out with your own ideas.

Relationships and history questions

Every *Primary* character has four *Relationship* slots. These may each be occupied by one other character, who might be another *Primary* character or a *Secondary* character. When you fill a *Relationship* slot, write down the name of that character and the nature of the *Relationship*, as your *Primary* character perceives it.

For example:

CLUBS	soulmate and lover
SORROW	rival and drinking buddy
ASH	confidante
BARTER	I don't trust this bastard

The nature of the *Relationship* does not limit how you can interact with that character; it simply tells you how you have interacted in the past and what your expectations of them are.

It can happen that you have two *Relationships* with a *Primary* character, one written on your *Playbook* and one on theirs. The one on your *Playbook* tells you how your character perceives the *Relationship*, the one on theirs tells you how their character perceives it. Interesting *Relationships* often involve two write-ups that are different in subtle or major ways.

Every *Playbook* has a set of relationship and history questions which help you create some interesting relationships with other characters. These may lead you to allocate characters to *Relationship* slots, or may not – it is up to you. Any you don't allocate at the start may be left blank, to be filled in

later on. You should allocate at least half of any initial *Relationships* you create to *Primary* characters.

At the end of each scene, you'll be reviewing how you interacted with other characters in the scene to see if your *Relationship* with them has changed, which is one of the ways your character can develop and improve. The rules for this are on page 52.

The best answers to relationship and history questions are ones that are incomplete. They don't define the end point of how you relate to another character, instead they describe an unstable status quo. The game incentivises you to change your *Relationships* over time, so try to leave something that your character is not quite satisfied with – some grit in the oyster, if you like – which will drive that change.

Framing and ending scenes

The game is broken down into scenes – discrete chunks of story that focus on the events at a specific place and time. At the start of the scene, one person – the *Scene Framer* – decides where and when the scene will happen, who is there, and what's happening at the start.

Each scene centres on a *Focal Character*, a role which rotates between the *Primaries*. When a new scene is needed, we work through the list below until we have an idea for one.

1. First, is there something that **obviously, burningly, must happen** in the next scene? If anyone thinks so, that's what the scene should focus on. Choose an appropriate person to be the *Scene Framer*. Unless the scene happens to focus on the person whose turn it was to be *Focal Character*, this doesn't count as their turn.
2. If not, is there something the *Focal Character* wants to **accomplish** or someone they want to **interact with**? If so, they are the *Scene Framer*.
3. Otherwise, does the *Focal Character* wish to open a scene by **triggering a *Weakness***? Or does anyone want to **do something with their *Situation*** that involves the *Focal Character*? Either way, the *Scene Framer* is whoever's *Situation* will be causing trouble.
4. Finally, if nobody chose another option, someone asks a question about a specific aspect of the *Focal Character*'s **everyday life**. The *Focal Character*'s player frames a scene that they think can answer that question.

If, as you work your way down the list, you realise that there's a scene that obviously, burningly has to happen before the one that you were going to choose, that takes priority.

The only exception to this list is that, if you're planning to play several sessions of *Flotsam*, on each character's **first scene** as *Focal Character*

you should skip forward to item 4. The first few scenes are always about everyday life, to get a sense of who the *Primary* characters are. Ideally, frame those scenes with another *Primary* character so their relationships will start to become visible. (This is true for all scenes, but especially the first few.) For single-session games, you may want to leap into the action a bit faster, so use the normal sequence – the quick-start scenarios on pages 115–157 are really great for this, as they give you juicy issues to get your teeth into from scene one.

The *Scene Framer* now frames the scene, saying when and where it is happening, who is there, and what is happening as the scene starts. They allocate someone to play each *Secondary* character present at the start who they anticipate will be saying more than a couple of sentences.

You may sometimes want to skip over, or narrate in brief, substantial sections of time. This is to be encouraged – we want to get to the next significant thing that happens. However, this doesn't count as a scene until we get down to a specific time and place with people talking and doing things, rather than being narrated at a high level. Also, when you do this you may discover that something obviously, burningly needs to happen part way through the skipped-over period. If so, frame that scene now, before whatever you were going to do next.

The *Scene Framer* sets the scene up, but they don't decide where it goes – that results from your collective decisions and the *Moves* you make. The scene might end up focusing on something different to what you had in mind. When the scene changes direction, roll with it.

It's everyone's job to look out for the end of the scene. You shouldn't end scenes prematurely, nor should they drift without purpose. If you think it's time to end the scene, ask if that's the end, or if someone still has something they want to do. Anyone who does have something in mind to do with the rest of the scene should say so, and the scene continues. Otherwise, it ends.

Choosing a role

When you take part in a scene, you can do so by focusing on playing your *Primary* character, bringing them to life and saying what they say and do; or by focusing on your *Situation*, making that *Situation* feel real and saying how it manifests in the scene. Often, especially when you aren't playing your *Primary* character, you may play a *Secondary* character.

You can do any of these things during a scene, usually focusing on just one of these roles. Very occasionally you might find yourself having to make decisions that relate to more than one of these roles at the same time. If so, it may be time to slow down a bit and perhaps ask someone to step in and take some of those decisions for you.

Flotsam is designed to let you choose how deeply to be involved in the game at any given moment. If you've been through a particularly intense scene and want to step back from the game, you can do that. If you are feeling inspired and want to lead with a *Situation*, you can do that too, if the scene permits it. You can make the decision to pick one of these roles up in the middle of a scene, even if you were only watching up to that point. You can even skip or delay your turn as *Focal Character* if you need some time away from the spotlight. If someone is asking you to be in a scene but you aren't feeling it, you should feel free to say no.

You should feel free to pick up a role in mid-scene if the scene needs someone to do that role, or if inspiration strikes. It's generally better *not* to do the reverse by dropping a role in mid-scene, since that might prevent the scene from proceeding. Note however that this doesn't preclude you from exiting the game if the content is causing you unwanted discomfort. As discussed earlier, your real-life feelings and safety take priority over the imagined events of play, so if you need to step away, I'd encourage you to do that – in line with the safety guidance on page 20.

This also means that players who have different levels of comfort with acting in a GM-like role are free to dive right in, dip their toes in the water, or stay on the shore. Some groups may find that only a subset of the players tend to play their *Situation* while others mostly just play their *Primary*. That's ok! The game will work best if at least a couple of players want to play their *Situation* fairly frequently, though. The traditional setup of one person being GM at all times isn't really what *Flotsam* is designed to do.

Because the game mechanics sometimes require someone playing their *Situation* to *React* by pushing forward with a *Threat*, it is also necessary for at least one person to be playing their *Situation* – or willing to step in and do so – at all times. If nobody is willing to do that, it's probably time to take a break and recharge. Maybe a 15-minute stretch of the legs will do it, maybe you need to end the session and come back to it another day. I'd really recommend not pushing yourselves to do it if as a group you're not feeling the energy: *Flotsam* thrives when everyone is firing on all cylinders.

Running a scene

During a scene, each player simply portrays any character they're playing, and describes the world, in a conversational way. You'll talk about what's happening, respond to what others are saying, interrupt, or correct each other. That conversation, and everything that's said in it, is just made up as you go, guided by the *Principles* (see pages 61–71). However there are some constraints to what you can say, and some points where the rules kick in and interrupt this freeform conversation.

When you play your *Situation* and/or a *Secondary* character (see page 58), you can mostly say whatever you like. Focusing primarily – but not exclusively – on your bit of the world, but describing what the *Primary* characters see, hear, and otherwise sense; how *Secondary* characters are behaving; asking *Questions* as needed (see page 32). The main constraint on you is that you should start out small and unthreatening. Build up gradually to anything genuinely threatening, and clearly signal what's coming, allowing the *Primary* characters to react to it before going further.

If the *Primary* characters can't or won't intervene against any *Threats* you describe, you *React* with an appropriate *Move* (see page 55), which can include directly threatening the *Primary* characters. You can also *React* by directly threatening a *Primary* character if they activate a *Weakness*.

When you play your *Primary* character, again, you say whatever you like, focusing on your character. You say what they're saying and doing, reacting to what's happening in the scene, pretty much freely. Anything they could feasibly do is ok to narrate. However, if they do anything challenging or risky, anyone else may add *Complications* (see page 34).

Primary characters can take control by using their *Strengths* and spending a *Token* (see page 36). When you do this, you narrate the consequences of your actions free from *Complications*. Conversely, a *Primary* character can

gain *Tokens* by activating a *Weakness* (see page 42), but this invites trouble from the *Situation* players as mentioned above.

The scene gradually proceeds with the *Situation* players describing the scene, the *Primary* players saying what they do, *Complications* being added or *Threats* escalated or de-escalated in response to what the *Primary* characters do. Sometimes you'll go back to freeform conversation, sometimes the rules will kick in a bit more strongly. This process is shown in the diagram below.
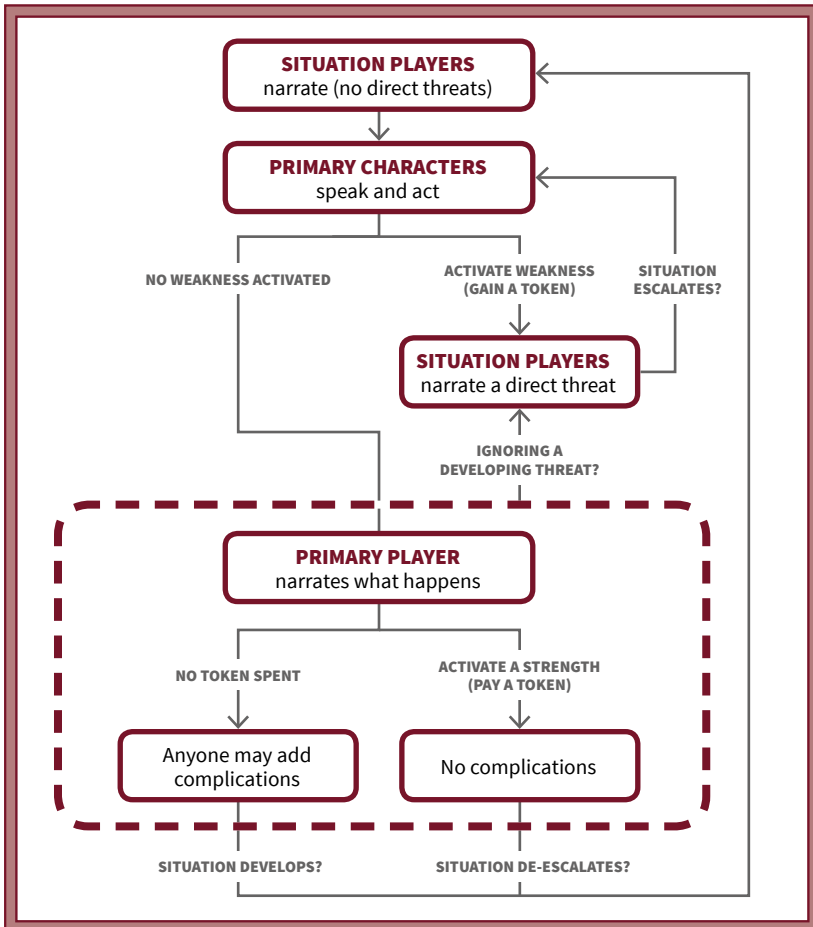
Questions

A key *Procedure* in *Flotsam* is asking *Questions*. Your *Playbook* contains *Questions* to establish details of your relationships; your *Situation* sheet contains *Questions* to establish relevant details of the world. Your *Playbook* includes *Scrutiny Questions* you can use to get information about the world. And it's a general rule that, when you introduce a new character, location, custom, or other story element, you should ask a *Question* rather than creating it yourself.

When asking a *Question* that directly bears on a currently active *Threat*, you should ask someone who is not in the current scene, or at least not directly involved in the immediate action, if possible. If that isn't possible, ask the person to your left.

When you are asked a *Question*, you must give a complete and honest answer – no half-truths or partial answers. If you don't know the answer, make it up! Go with what seems true to you, first and foremost; and within that constraint the first answer that comes to mind. Don't try to be clever or inventive (but if the answer that springs to mind happens to be clever or inventive, that's fine too).

Where a player spends a *Token* to ask a *Question*, the answer should be helpful if possible; conversely if they asked the *Question* while activating a *Weakness*, the answer should reveal problems for the character if possible.

Some answers negate the question. Like if you're asked "how could I get you to do X" and the answer is "you can't". Before giving such an answer, consult the rest of the table to see if anyone else has a better answer. If not, that's the answer, but any associated *Token* transaction is void.

Developing the world

When you need to establish a detail of the world – introducing a new character, location, custom, etc – don't create it yourself. Instead, ask another player a *Question*. For example, say you want to frame a scene with the most fearsome gang leader in the Below: in that case, ask "who is the most fearsome gang leader in the Below?"

The exceptions are the multiple-option choices you make on your *Situation* sheet; and details about your *Primary* character and their family, gear, and so on. When it comes to these things, make the decisions yourself unless the rules specifically tell you otherwise.

Your *Situation* sheet contains a list of areas to focus on – you can push these forward in play, but one thing you should also do is ask *Questions* about your areas of focus. This may seem a bit odd! You own the *Situation*, but you're asking other people to help you create it. That's a deliberate part of the game's design, bringing together ideas from lots of different people instead of just one.

Anyone can build on the details of the world established by someone's answer to a *Question*, fleshing it out further. Like, if someone answers "who supplies scarce resources to the community" by naming a particular underworld fixer, you might later say where that fixer lives, or what they look like. When you do this, try to be true to the details established so far; by all means, add details that complicate the concept that has been described so far, but don't completely undermine the others' contributions or try to change the direction entirely. For example, if another player tells you that the most fearsome gang leader in the Below is a merciless torturer, you might later decide to nuance this by saying they're kind to animals; but don't decide that their whole reputation is built on lies and they're actually meek and mild.

Primary Moves

The *Moves* below apply to all *Primary* characters. Some may have additional options when using one of these *Moves*; if so, that's noted on their *Playbook*. All *Primary* characters also have their own special *Move(s)*, listed on their *Playbook* – these are also discussed below.

When your *Primary* takes action that is difficult or risky for them, describe what you're doing and the outcome you're aiming for. Anyone may add *Complications* to what you narrate:

— How you fall short of your aim
— A price you pay to succeed
— Unintended consequences
— How you get more than you bargained for

You can usually describe what your character says and does, and what results you get from your actions, without hindrance. But for difficult or risky actions, other players may add *Complications*. What's difficult or risky is up to the person adding the *Complications*, subject to other players' *Objections* of course. This varies by character, though, especially if you have a relevant *Strength* that may make things much less challenging. Similarly, you should choose *Complications* that are appropriate to the abilities of the individual character. If someone has an *Ability*, that means they are competent in that area, so don't have them make an elementary error.

> Frankie (played by Liz) spots one of Fender's lieutenants talking to Grip. Liz says "Frankie creeps over to where they're talking and lurks behind, like, a couple of rusty old canisters. She's listening to their conversation. David, what are they saying?"

David smiles and says "Hold on a second – that sounds kind of risky to me. I think you can use the nearby crowd as cover to get into position, but as they're talking the crowd thins out a bit. You don't have cover to move away any more, so unless you want them to spot you, you'll be stuck there until they leave."

David has added a price Frankie must pay to succeed. He could have said that Frankie can get close enough to see what they're doing but not hear the conversation (how she falls short of her aim) but this seems much more interesting – Frankie's going to get the information, but then she's going to have to figure out how to leave without being spotted.

OBJECTIONS

Sometimes someone will narrate something you find implausible or jarring, or which contradicts something already established. When this happens, you can and should *Object*. <u>Briefly</u> state what you're *Objecting* to and why. The person who narrated the material should <u>briefly</u> respond – whether they agree or not and, if they feel it's needed, some reasoning. If they agree to change what they narrated, and if that satisfies the objector, then you can move on. Otherwise, consult the other players, each of whom <u>briefly</u> gives their response (and reasoning if needed). If at least one other person feels the narration was plausible, it stands. Move on without further discussion. Otherwise, the original narration is retracted and the person narrating should try again, taking account of the *Objections*.

This *Procedure* is followed even if you paid a *Token*. If as a result of an *Objection* you no longer get what you wanted, you can retract the entire action and get the *Token* back. Similarly, if you activate a *Weakness* and someone *Objects*, so that you can't activate the *Weakness* after all, you must return the *Token* you earned.

When you use one of your *Strengths (Ability* or *Resource),* call it out so everyone pitches *Complications* appropriately. You may spend a *Token* to narrate your actions including the results of these actions, or get a straight answer to a *Scrutiny Question*, free from *Complications* (you can even do this after *Complications* have already been described – in which case they are cancelled).

Strengths are skills or abilities your character possesses. You narrate using them in the normal way, by just describing what your character does. Your *Strengths* are always there, so for example if your character is a skilled warrior then they can handle themselves in a fight without spending a *Token* – just don't assume that they can't lose, or that nothing can go wrong. Spending the *Token* means you're in full control and allows you to narrate your character at their best.

You can only get the mechanical benefit if the *Strength* is a material factor in what you're doing. If your character is an ace poet, reciting some poetry during a gunfight doesn't make your aim any better! On the other hand, perhaps your character could recite poetry to calm tempers before any guns are drawn.

> *Isa describes his character in action. "Grimes eyeballs the guard and says 'I'd put that little gun down if I were you.' The guard stammers an apology and backs away with his hands in the air."*
>
> *Becky interrupts: "I think this guard is nervous as hell. He fumbles with his gun and it accidentally goes off – BANG! – everyone nearby will have heard that."*
>
> *"No way, I'm not having that," says Isa, and pushes a* Token *forward. "I'm using my* Strength *'authoritative and respected' to talk him down gently. His hand shakes, but I tell him 'stay cool, and nobody's going to get hurt', and I take the gun off him."*

Becky introduced a *Complication* "how you get more than you bargained for". Isa used his *Strength* to cancel the *Complication*. Grimes is now in control, so he could now order the guard to handcuff himself, without spending any more *Tokens*.

Resources are collections of things (objects, people, etc) your character has at their disposal. They are marked on Playbooks with an [R]. They work just like other *Strengths*, mechanically, but because they are a collection of things you'll often use them by introducing one or more individual examples first: for example, you might start a scene by saying you've got a couple of members of your gang with you, then later on you might decide one of them is Burns, a guy you particularly trust. *Complications* might include things like:

— You don't have the exact one you wanted on hand; how about this one?
— You don't have quite as much of this *Resource* on hand as you need.
— You don't have one right here and now, you'll have to get it from ____.

As with any other *Strength*, spending a *Token* cancels all *Complications*.

If you have access to a *Resource*, that means you can broadly assume you've got a number of fairly typical examples of that thing that you can call on when needed. It's up to you to decide what counts as typical, subject to the *Objections* of the other players of course. But for example, gang members will typically be good at being violent and intimidating – so if you have gang members as a *Resource*, nobody should add as a *Complication* "this gang member isn't any good at fighting".

There's an important area of intersection between *Primary Moves* and *Situation Moves* around *Resources*. Some *Playbooks* include other characters as *Resources*. For instance, the *Thunder* has a gang. The characters in that gang are simultaneously useful *Resources* for the *Thunder* to make stuff

happen with, and *Secondary* characters who might take interesting actions in their own right, up to and including becoming a *Threat* for the *Thunder* to contend with. Generally speaking, a *Primary* character's *Resources* should behave in a broadly compliant fashion towards their owner; unless the owning player framed a scene about them making trouble, or a relevant *Weakness* has been activated. In other words, when playing your *Situation* tread carefully around those characters and take your cues from the owning player. That doesn't mean you just treat them as puppets! Give them interesting lives and details, just like any other character; but refrain from turning them into *Threats* unless the owning player signals that's what they want.

It is also really important that when a character who is a *Resource* owned by a *Primary* character is acting like a threat towards another character, you're clear if they're doing it on behalf of their owner or under their own steam. If they're doing it for their owner, even if their owner isn't in the scene, that means anyone can add *Complications*, and *Tokens* must be spent to avoid same. If they're doing it for their own reasons, they're constrained by the rules for playing a *Situation*.

> *Quill is stuck in Fender's territory and a gang fight is breaking out. Annetta smirks and says "Quill isn't sticking around for this. He knows an escape route through a service tunnel. The hatch is right about here."*
>
> *Barney interjects "How does Quill know Fender's territory so well?"*
>
> *"I've got a Resource I'm using – Contingency plans," replies Annetta.*
>
> *"Oh, ok. Well, you're in the middle of hostile territory, so that seems difficult. I reckon that service hatch is actually a bit further away than you hoped. There's a ladder just over there that leads down towards it, just next to where Fender's guys are taking cover."*
>
> *"Greeeeat."*

Quill tries to use a Resource (without paying a *Token*). 'Contingency Plans' is incredibly broad, so it's a valid use, but Barney rightly notices that it's not easy to have a perfect contingency plan for this sort of situation. He's added a *Complication* 'you don't have the exact one you wanted, how about this one' – which in this case is essentially also adding 'a price you must pay to succeed'.

You can also **ask a *Scrutiny Question***. This works pretty much exactly the same as using a *Strength*. You describe how you're getting the information, and then ask the *Question*. The main difference here is that you don't decide the outcome (in this case, the answer to the *Question*), someone else does instead. If they (or anyone else) thinks that getting the answer is difficult or risky, they can add in *Complications*, as normal. Just like with any other *Strength*, you can spend a *Token* to cancel *Complications*, meaning you get a full and helpful answer.

The *Complication* 'how you fall short of your aim' could include giving an incomplete answer to the *Question*, but it must never be misleading or outright wrong.

To ask a *Scrutiny Question* you must say how you're getting the information. You might spend time observing someone, interacting with something, or doing research. Characters who have strange powers may have ways to get information without requiring much interaction with the target of their scrutiny, but even then it's never instantaneous. And an observer will always be able to notice a change in your behaviour, even if you just stop, stare and frown for a little bit as your powers kick in.

> *Simon has Barter eyeball an unusual customer who has come into his bar. "What does she have that I might want?" he asks.*
>
> *Isa interrupts "How are you getting the information?"*

"I'll just spend a few moments watching her, listening in on her conversation, to get an idea of who she is."

"Fair enough, so you're showing a lot of interest in her. I'm going to add a Complication: she thinks you're interested in getting it on with her."

"Ok. Actually, who says I'm not? I'm going over to her."

Simon wants to ask Scrutiny Questions about this customer. Isa rightly asks for a bit more detail on how he's doing that, which helps Isa to come up with a fun Complication of 'unintended consequences'.

One other way to get information is to ***ask the spirits for help***. When you ask the spirits for help, it's like asking a *Question "What signs, omens or vision do I receive?"*

The spirits are inscrutable. *Complications* could include:

— They give you an answer, but not right now.
— They give you an answer, but it's cryptic or confusing.
— They answer a different question (but don't use this to give completely unhelpful answers).

The advantage of asking the spirits for help is that you can get almost any information you might need, without having to come up with a clever way to get it. The downside is that asking the spirits for help is inherently unpredictable, and you might not get a straight answer. You can't spend a *Token* to force a *Complication*-free answer from the spirits unless your *Playbook* tells you so.

Asking the spirits could be done via a ritual, through use of an oracle, by leaving offerings, or any number of other approaches. If someone is

playing the *Spirits Situation* then they'll decide how it's done, otherwise you decide in the same way you'd decide any other aspect of the world: by asking a *Question*.

> Simon says, "Jasper sits in his hut and contemplates the spirits, focusing on Gamma's whereabouts. I'm asking the spirits for help."
>
> Josh replies "Ok, sure. Gamma is still trapped in Fender's warehouse, right? But Jasper doesn't know that. Hmmm. Your mind opens up and you experience a vision, like you usually do. You see Gamma sitting on, uh, a swing. The swing is made out of white silk, and it's hanging from this massive spider web. You see three fat spiders heading towards her. One of them has Fender's face."
>
> Josh has gone for a cryptic or confusing vision. He's kind of answered the question – Jasper now knows or suspects that Fender has got her. But he's added a Complication 'how you fall short of success', so Jasper doesn't know exactly where she is. Typical spirits.

When you bring one of your *Weaknesses* into play, *Invite* and *Receive Trouble* to gain a *Token*. You can *Invite Trouble* by:

— Acting on one of your *Flaws* and thereby exposing yourself to danger or risk. Ask another player who takes advantage of your vulnerability;

— Acting on one of your *Flaws* and thereby angering or alienating someone important. Ask another player how they react badly; and/or

— Asking another player how a *Problem* threatens you right now.

Bringing your *Weaknesses* into play is one way to generate new *Tokens* for yourself. It is also the main way for you to signal that you want more

trouble in your *Primary's* life. When you activate a *Weakness*, you have to *Invite* <u>and</u> *Receive Trouble*, or else you don't get the benefit. In other words if you don't ask for *Trouble*, or if your fellow players can't come up with a plausible way to mess with you, you don't get a *Token*.

Weaknesses break down into two types. *Flaws* are issues with yourself and the way you behave. You *Invite Trouble* with them through your actions, either exposing yourself to risk or danger, or bringing down the ire of another character. *Problems* are external threats. They might have been caused by your own behaviour, but now they've got a life of their own and can cause you problems at any time. You *Invite Trouble* by simply asking another player how you're threatened, but you can only do so if you're not currently entirely safe from that problem.

You decide when to activate your *Weakness*, but once you do so it's out of your hands – you might not get exactly what you expected, and you might get more than you bargained for.

> *"Deacon's going to meet Fender, just as he agreed. He's going alone and unarmed. I think he's putting himself in danger because he passionately believes his own rhetoric, ok?"*

> *"Right, because he says everyone in the Below needs to pull together and fight back against the Above."*

> *"Exactly, he's trusting Fender to do that. I'm obviously Inviting Trouble by doing that, so I'm taking a Token."*

> *"Ha ha ha. Excellent. So you're activating your Weakness? Ok, I think we'll cut straight to Deacon chained up in Fender's warehouse."*

Deacon's *Flaw* is that he passionately believes his own rhetoric about pulling together against the Above. In this case that means

a bit of wishful thinking about Fender, who definitely doesn't care about Deacon's idealistic beliefs.

When you travel away from the station:

- — Everyone finishes up any immediate actions, then skip time forward to your return.
- — Each player narrates what they were doing during this time.
- — Anyone may narrate *Situation* moves, responding to another player's activities, or describing other events happening during this period.

All narration during the skipped period should be high level – no detailed scenes.

The station is the focus of play. When (if) someone spends a significant period of time away from the station, rather than play through it in blow-by-blow detail, the period of time that they're away forms a sort of interlude during which only the highlights of what happened are narrated. That's true for the people who stay at the station as well as anyone who leaves.

Playbook Moves

Each *Playbook* has at least one **Special Move** which allows other *Primary* characters to gain *Tokens* by interacting with them. These *Moves* typically incentivise the other character to interact with you in a way that reinforces your *Primary's* particular role. For example, if you ask the *Sybyl* to use their mysterious gifts on you, <u>you</u> gain a *Token*. In addition, when you trigger a *Special Move*, the owner of the *Move* gets to *Mark* their *Relationship* with you.

Developing your character

At the end of every scene, you should assess how your *Primary* character has interacted with other characters and with their *Weaknesses*. The details are explained below, but the gist of it is that if your *Relationship* is starting to change or your *Weaknesses* has caused you trouble, you *Mark* it by putting a tick in one of the three boxes against that *Relationship/Weakness*. When all three boxes are *Marked*, you have the opportunity to rewrite the *Relationship/Weakness* and improve your character by taking a new *Strength* or *Weakness*.

Displaying your Heart

Display your Heart is structured pretty similarly to *Primary Moves*, but unlike them, it applies to both *Primary* and *Secondary* characters. It can be easy to miss when someone has *Displayed their Heart*, and you want to see how the full interaction played out, so you check for it at the end of the scene, before moving on to the next one.

When you display your heart, so that another character sees something of your true self or your heartfelt feelings, they say how they react. At the end of the scene, they decide if any of the following apply:

— It changed the nature of your relationship with them.
— It brought you closer together.
— It pushed you further apart.
— If any of the above apply, you each may *Mark* your *Relationship* with the other. Otherwise, neither of you *Marks* your *Relationship*.

Displaying your Heart is defined as any action that reveals something of your true self or heartfelt feelings to another character. You could be doing it deliberately or not, and it may or may not be obvious to the other character that this represents your true self or feelings. It could be something you say, to tell the other character what's in your heart; or it could be that your behaviour is what shows how you feel or who you are. It need not be something huge, but it must be something significant, not trivial or passing.

Displaying your Heart frequently (but by no means always) results in the other character *Displaying their Heart* right back. If so, then it only takes one of you to think that one of the options listed above applies, for you to both get a *Mark* against your *Relationship*.

> *Silence shows up on your doorstep. She's pale and shaking, but she won't say what the matter is. "I just need a place to stay. Can I crash on your couch?"*

Silence is displaying her heartfelt feelings. We don't necessarily know precisely what she is feeling, perhaps we'll never find out. Even so, we can pretty clearly see there's something coming from the heart here.

Kallisti's face is like stone, an unmoving mask. They stare into the middle distance as they recount the terrible events of that night, when the AI inside them used their body to slaughter so many people. "And that's why I can never shed another person's blood, no matter how bad things get."

Kallisti is telling of an event from the past, but it is an event which has shaped who they are. That could be true even without the last sentence, but that really seals it – what happened changed Kallisti's entire personal code, and created a sharp line that they will never cross. Definitely *Displaying their Heart*.

Yuana is up in your face, shouting. They are red in the face and their eyes are wide with rage. "What the hell did you think you were doing back then? You are such a fucking idiot!"

Yuana is almost certainly *Displaying their Heart*, but it's worth asking. Are these feelings heartfelt? It seems like it, even if they don't really mean the words they are saying. But it could be a transitory outburst. We'll need Yuana's player to tell us what's driving their rage.

Ash stands between the Stormtroopers and the boy. "If you want him, you're going to have to go through me."

Ash is showing who he really is – the kind of person who will risk his life to save another. Even though he isn't trying to show anyone his feelings or true self – that's not his main reason for doing what he is doing – he is very definitely *Displaying his Heart*. We'll find

out at the end of the scene whether that changed his relationship with anyone.

Note: *Secondary* characters can *Display their Heart*. The *Move* only triggers if they do it at a *Primary Character* (since otherwise there's no *Relationship* to *Mark*), but you should definitely watch out for when that happens and use the *Move*.

No matter how many times you *Display* during a scene, you only get to *Mark* each of your *Relationships* once. Similarly, if you *Display your Heart* to a character and they do the same to you in turn, you only get one *Mark* with that character. Other *Moves* may allow you to *Mark* a *Relationship* additional times in the same scene.

Grappling with your Weaknesses

Marking your *Weaknesses* is a bit simpler. At the end of the scene, consider whether each of your *Weaknesses* caused any trouble for your character. If it did, you get to *Mark* it. It doesn't matter if you activated your *Weakness* – if it caused you trouble then you get the *Mark*. (Notice this is different from how *Tokens* work: you only get a *Token* from a *Weakness* if you activated it yourself.)

Relationships, Weaknesses and improvements

Relationships and characters change. They evolve over time, and sometimes transform completely. When you *Mark* the third box on a *Relationship* or *Weakness*, it's an opportunity to pause and reassess the status quo, and maybe rewrite that aspect of your character.

When you *Mark* the third box on a *Relationship*, do three things:

— Discuss how the *Relationship* has changed, what has happened to make it different and where it sits now. Rewrite the *Relationship* to reflect where your character sees it now. The discussion is to help explore what's changed, but what gets written down is up to you.
— Gain a new *Strength* or *Weakness*.
— Erase all the *Marks* against the *Relationship*.

You can put a *Mark* against a character you don't currently have a *Relationship* with if you wish. Just write down their name and put a tick next to it – if you get three ticks, you can write them into a new *Relationship* slot, or replace an existing *Relationship*.

When you *Mark* the third box against a *Weakness*, choose one:

— Add a new *Strength* that represents your increased understanding and control of that *Weakness*. Keep it as a *Weakness* as well – it is now a double-edged sword.
— Rewrite the *Weakness* as a *Strength*, representing your mastery of that *Weakness*. Erase the *Weakness* and gain a new one to replace it.
— Keep the *Weakness* as it is, and gain another *Strength* or *Weakness* of your choice. Your character has developed, but the *Weakness* still has a hold on them.

Here are some examples of rewriting a *Weakness* as a *Strength*:

— You *Mark* the third box on your *Weakness* "you are ruthless and treacherous". You write those exact same words as a *Strength* – now it can be used to control situations as well as make them get worse.
— You *Mark* the third box on your *Weakness* "a rival gang hates your guts". You might describe how you've won the gang over and rewrite it as a *Strength* "you have an understanding with a rival gang".
— You *Mark* the third box on your *Weakness* "your words inspire mobs and fanatics". You might rewrite it as a *Strength* "mobs and fanatics are at your beck and call"

The Situations

Playing characters and elements of the world outside your *Primary* is referred to as playing your *Situation*. Each player has one *Situation*. These are collections of in-fiction problems and issues which might cause trouble for characters in the story, especially the *Primaries*. Each *Situation* has a sheet which tells you about it. If a particular *Situation* has not been chosen, that might or might not mean the content of that *Situation* doesn't exist in your game. For example, if nobody chooses *War*, maybe there's no war happening in your game world, or maybe it's just not something you'll focus on in your story.

Playing your *Situation* mostly entails developing and describing the world around the *Primary* characters, and saying what happens and what *Secondary* characters do and say. You can do all of this freely, according to what feels right for the scene at hand. However, **directly threatening a character (*Primary* or *Secondary*) is off-limits** except in specific circumstances described below.

When you're playing your *Situation* you focus on the particular issues and threats that are listed on your *Situation* sheet. But you can and should describe and make decisions about other things in the scene (other than the *Primary* characters, of course). It's your job to push forward with whatever material is to hand at the time, even if it's not relevant to your *Situation*.

Moves you can make when playing your *Situation* include:

— **Describe the world.** Flesh out the world around the *Primary* characters, providing colourful description and enough detail to give a sense of the immediate scene around them. Make the world feel real.

— **Create something new** (people, groups, objects, locations) by asking a *Question*. Any time you need to create a new thing,

remember you must ask a *Question* rather than creating it yourself (see "Developing the world" on page 33).

— **Develop existing characters** by revealing more details about them, including their motivations and feelings. You mostly do this by saying what they say and do, but sometimes you might describe things that would be obvious to the *Primary* characters from their body language, tone of voice and so on. Make sure that *Secondary* characters take an interest in the *Primaries*, either directly or indirectly by having motivations that touch on things the *Primaries* themselves are interested in. (For example, have a *Secondary* character fall in love with a *Primary's* younger sibling.)

— **Describe less obvious stuff** like opportunities, risks, signs of things happening elsewhere or about to happen here. You're helping to build a shared understanding of what's going on in the scene, what's coming, and what actions the characters might want to take. These things might not be obvious from a flat description of the world. Help everyone to see what is going on, and what they could do in response to it.

— **Signal developing *Threats*.** As mentioned above, directly threatening a character is strictly limited by the rules. But creating developing problems that are likely to directly threaten a character in future can be done freely. So, signalling that the leader of a vicious gang covets the *Thunder's* territory, for example, would strongly indicate the possibility of a direct threat in future.

— **Directly threatening a character** is only allowed when *Reacting* (see below).

There are two circumstances where you should always *React* with a *Move* that creates trouble, and when doing this you can directly threaten characters. Those circumstances are:

— When you've signalled a developing *Threat* and the *Primary* characters can't or won't intervene to stop the threat.

— When a *Primary* character activates a *Weakness* (a specific person will be asked to *React*, but the *Weakness* permits a direct threat by anyone playing their *Situation*).

In both cases, someone must *React* by making a *Move*. In the first case, because failing to do so would mean failing to make the fictional situation you've established feel real; and in the second, because the mechanic of activating a *Weakness* requires it. You don't have to make your *Move* immediately, but you should make it soon after the trigger occurs. You are permitted and encouraged to make a *Move* that directly threatens a *Primary* character, but you can make a less threatening *Move* instead if it would make sense in the fiction and if it follows the *Principles* of the game.

When you *React* to someone activating a *Weakness*, even if you don't directly threaten the characters, you should aim to create some kind of trouble. The *Moves* list above is in rough order from least troublesome to most troublesome, so aim to be as far down the list as makes sense. Of course, sometimes it's not quite that neat: *developing a character* could be pretty threatening if you're giving them a new motivation that puts them on a collision course with the *Primary* characters. Go with what makes sense to you in the moment.

Sometimes someone other than the person who was asked to *React* may be excited to make a *Move*. That's fine – activating the *Weakness* gives you permission to make a *Move* if you wish. Usually you should give precedence to the person who was asked, but if you've got something burning a hole in your pocket, don't be shy. Negotiate whose *Move* happens first based on what seems appropriate in the situation (i.e. what would logically happen first). You can even declare that your *Moves* happen simultaneously. (See also "Moves that Clash", page 59.)

When you make a *Move*, sometimes you may decide that something has happened off-screen. That's totally allowed! But just because it's unknown

by the characters doesn't mean that you keep it secret. Announce right away that it's happened – like, "unbeknownst to them, at that moment Frax was setting fire to *The Merry Maid*".

When you're playing your *Primary*, you can still make *Situation Moves*. In particular, creating things by asking *Questions*, and describing the world, are often appropriate. However, try to avoid mixing playing your *Primary* with developing *Threats* and, most importantly, with directly threatening *Situation Moves*. This is because it would be very easy to find yourself either threatening your own *Primary* character; or, by threatening someone else, changing the position of your *Primary* character (either to their advantage or disadvantage), creating a conflict of interest. If these *Moves* need making, it's better to let someone else do it if at all possible. If all the *Primary* characters are in a scene together, then it may be unavoidable; but the person making the *Move* should if possible be different from the person whose actions triggered the *Move* (e.g. if it was a *Reaction* to a *Weakness*), and also different from the person who is most directly targeted by the *Move*.

Multiple Situations

It can and will happen that more than one person is playing their *Situation* at a time. This is fine. Each of you steps in and narrates things relevant to your *Situation* when you feel it's appropriate. If you seem to come into conflict, negotiate to see who gets their way – using the *Objections* procedure if it's needed.

Usually, there will be one person who is taking a lead in running any active *Threats* in a scene. This will often be the *Scene Framer*, who has introduced some trouble at the start of the scene, or the person who *Reacted* to a *Weakness*. It's often appropriate for others to hold back and let that person take the lead, unless an obvious opportunity to push their *Situation* comes up. Ultimately it's up to you to decide when to jump in with stuff from your *Situation*, taking into account your *Principles*.

Playing Secondary characters

When you're playing *Secondary* characters you'll often focus down on thinking about what they're saying and doing, rather than the broader focus of attention that you have when you're playing your *Situation*. But you are nevertheless, mechanically speaking, playing your *Situation*. All this means in practice is that you should be careful not to have a *Secondary* character do anything that would directly threaten a character except where the *Situation Moves* would permit it.

Moves that clash

When conflict arises in the game, it can happen that two players are effectively advocating for different sides in that conflict. In that case, it can be important to work out whose actions have precedence, so that the person who talks fastest doesn't automatically get their way.

When it's a *Primary* character in conflict with a *Secondary* character or other *Situation* element, this is the order in which *Moves* are resolved:

— Any non-threatening *Situation Moves*, including those by a *Secondary* character, happen immediately if they're needed.
— Any immediate *Reaction* to a *Weakness* being activated happens next, before anyone else can act. The only exception is if someone was perfectly poised and ready, having declared they were preparing for this eventuality.
— Otherwise, the *Primary* character's actions happen first, with any *Complications* being resolved immediately.
— Finally, any directly threatening *Situation Moves* (including directly threatening actions by *Secondary* characters) that were not triggered by a *Weakness* happen.

The nub of this is that *Primary* characters normally get to respond to bad stuff before it happens. When they activate a *Weakness*, bad stuff happens straight away without a chance to respond.

When two *Primary* characters are in conflict, there's no fixed procedure for resolving it. Slow down, talk about what you're trying to do, and decide what should happen based on the logic of the fiction. If you can't agree, the conflict just doesn't happen. Your characters maybe scuffle and then back off. Don't try to force a conflict that you can't agree on.

Principles

The *Procedures* are used to determine what you can or must do, the *Principles* are used to guide how you do it. They affect the tone and style and the factors you consider when making decisions.

These six *Principles* apply no matter what role you're playing:

— **Play moment-by-moment, following the logic of the fiction**
— **Nobody owns the world – so use what others create**
— **Play with an open hand – no secrets**
— **Make the game about the *Primary* characters and their lives**
— **Play real, flawed, vulnerable people**
— **Tell small-scale stories, leave space for conversation**

In addition there are particular *Principles* that apply to each individual *Playbook*. Those are listed on the relevant *Playbook*.

It's hard to keep all these *Principles* in mind all of the time. They are a broad guide to how to play, not hard rules; and it isn't a major problem if sometimes you deviate from them, as long as the general shape of the game follows them. Review them at the start of the game and refresh yourself as needed. After a session, if you have time, take a moment to think if anything went against any of the *Principles* and how you might do it differently next time. In this way you'll internalise them over time, making it easier to follow them without having to consciously think about it.

PLAY MOMENT-BY-MOMENT, FOLLOWING THE LOGIC OF THE FICTION

— Don't plan ahead past the immediate decisions you have to make to decide what happens *right now*. Don't think up potential scenes in advance, don't think "if they do X, I'll do Y". Respond to what is happening *right now* on the basis of the fictional facts.

— When you make decisions about a developing situation, follow the fictional logic of that situation. Don't try to be surprising, or push things towards what's "interesting" – do what seems obvious.

Thinking about what a *character's* hopes and plans are isn't the same as planning ahead. It's ok to think that Frankie wants to kill Temple. But don't decide "next scene, Frankie will kill Temple". "Frankie's going to try to kill Temple now" is fine, because it's happening this moment. "The Watcher will pass the station in three days" is fine – that's not planning out a scene, it's telling us the trajectory of the Watcher. The point is, you're staying completely open-minded about what's going to happen at the table, and you do that by not planning ahead.

"The fiction" just means the sum total of everything that's been said so far about the game world and its inhabitants. It doesn't mean anything you had in your head but hadn't yet said out loud. The "fictional logic" is just what seems to be going on based on what's been said so far, and what would therefore logically happen next – or just what feels to you like the next step. In other words, following the fictional logic means doing what you would expect to happen next, not what you'd like to happen, not what would be cool, not what would be a surprising twist on what's happened so far. Often you'll make a decision that's only very loosely determined by the fiction, like "I think Fender's people are going to try and burn down Barter's place". Fender might not have sent them right now, but later. He could have had Barter beat up instead of burning the place down. But you're rooting it in the fiction: Fender has a grudge against Barter, so he's going to do something bad to him. Barter values his bar, so that's what he targets. Simple.

You can (and should) introduce fictional elements (characters, locations, situations) that you think might be interesting, cool or surprising. But once they're in play, take your hands off the steering wheel, and let them develop under their own steam. (And by the way, you'll often find that going with the first idea that pops into your head works quite well here, too.)

NOBODY OWNS THE WORLD – SO USE WHAT OTHERS CREATE

— Once someone has introduced a detail, use it. Build on it, put it in motion, make it matter.

— Be true to what others have created. Add surprising details, but try to stay true to whatever essential details have already been described.

— Be bold in using what others create. It doesn't belong to them, so put your stamp on it. Describe details that others have left undefined. In turn, recognise that others will do the same with your creations.

It's super-important not to start seeing the things others create as owned by them. The alchemy of *Flotsam* is in the times when one person picks something up that another person made, and uses it in an unexpected way. And then maybe a third person follows up on that. In this way, the game is out of any one person's control, and everyone gets drama and surprises.

Of course, the *Primary* characters are the exception to this. They are not for anyone else to control or mess with, and by default their *Resources* are for them to make decisions about (though exceptions are set out in the *Procedures* section).

Yes, you should pick up and use what others have created. But this means *using what they created*, the way they created it. Don't try to turn it into something else, twist it or undermine the essential character of it. If someone creates a fearsome warlord then by all means reveal that they quietly visit orphanages in their free time, giving out sweets; but don't reveal they're secretly a coward who shrinks from violence.

You shouldn't try to undermine or twist others' creations, but you absolutely should elaborate on what they created, bringing it to life and

introducing new details, even if this means the finished product is a bit different from what they might have had in mind. Again, this creates a great alchemy where the individual elements of the world are the product of a collective creative process.

PLAY WITH AN OPEN HAND – NO SECRETS

— When you describe something, tell the whole story, spelling out what is really going on. Don't simply describe a narrow ravine, but also explain that it's perfect ambush territory, and that unbeknownst to the characters there is in fact an ambush waiting for them.

— Don't create secrets, don't reveal stuff later on. Decide on things when they need to be brought into a scene, and then make them visible to everyone straight away.

— Be open about the choices the characters face. Tell them what will happen if they act, and what will happen if they don't.

Describing the hidden things, the things that might not be obvious, is vital to the game: because everyone is potentially able to play their *Situation* at any moment, and must be able to understand what's happening in order to build on it. An ambush that you were thinking was about to happen but didn't mention out loud might be narrated out of existence by another player, wasting any effort you made in setting it up. Or worse, a player who doesn't understand where you're going with something might be inhibited from getting involved in the scene at all. By openly sharing things that the characters can't see, you're making it easier for everyone to contribute cool things to the story that fit with and build on what you've already contributed. So, say what's hidden around the corner (if you have it in mind that there's something hidden around the corner), say what your character is secretly thinking (if they're secretly thinking something), and say what they're really up to (if they're up to something).

This applies too when you're playing your *Primary* character. By revealing what they're really up to, what they're thinking and feeling even, you make it easier for the other players to respond with things that will engage them.

Don't create secrets. In line with the *Principle* of playing moment-by-moment, you shouldn't make things up that you don't need to know right now anyway. But for sure, if you decide something, make it known. Bring it in via a scene, or if you can't think of a way to do that, just tell everyone.

All of this helps you all to learn what your fellow players think is cool and plausible, so you can get on the same page and help create a game you'll all enjoy. It also helps you push each others' buttons, because it makes sure your buttons are brightly and colourfully lit for everyone to see.

A corollary of all this is that if you aren't clear on what's going on in a scene, you can simply ask, and this *Principle* means the other players should explain it to you.

Spelling out risks, opportunities, and so on, makes sure the game is about making interesting choices, not about misunderstandings and accidents. You don't need to spell out every possible avenue of action, but you can and should make it clear if there's an obvious risk or opportunity, and what the consequences of obvious actions they could take might be.

Similarly, if someone describes an action that seems stupid to you, you should let them know what's going to happen if they go ahead with that action, and give them the option to take it back if they want to. And of course, if someone takes an action without realising what the consequences are, it's ok for them to take it back (just as long as they do so straight away – no fair waiting until the whole thing has played out).

MAKE THE GAME ABOUT THE PRIMARY CHARACTERS AND THEIR LIVES

— Focus on the *Primary* characters. Make them the centre of the story. Bring stuff to the fore that engages them, and if they seem uninterested in something, let it fade into the background. Bring in situations that will play to their *Strengths* and *Weaknesses*.

— Frame scenes with your *Primary* and the others. Connect with them. Get involved with what the other *Primary* characters are doing, or spend time with them and see what sparks.

It's ok to have stuff going on that doesn't directly concern the *Primary* characters. Doing that is essential to be true to the fiction: if everything is about the *Primary* characters, the world won't feel real. But the game is about the *Primary* characters, so that means you should mainly focus on the things that are about them. Make sure we're going to want to know what happens to them next, because – since every scene includes a *Primary* character – that's what we'll be watching in any case.

Watching a *Primary* character is good, but watching several *Primary* characters interacting is great. That's where the game will be most interesting. So frame scenes with the other *Primary* characters. Point your *Primary* character at the others. Have them take an interest in each other, or in *Secondary* characters they're already connected to, or in events they're invested in.

You don't have to do this in a friendly way! Being rivals or even enemies also has potential to be interesting. The most interesting is where their interests intersect but are neither directly opposed nor perfectly aligned – then we can see how they interact when there isn't a single obvious thing to do.

PLAY REAL, FLAWED, VULNERABLE PEOPLE

— Make the *Primary* and *Secondary* characters you play fallible and relatable.

— Put them in situations where they aren't fully in control. Take risks with them. Let them show weakness.

— Think about, and display, their emotions, hopes, and fears. Have them reach out to the people around them. Show us what they care about.

— Bring every character to life with colourful details; and always name them, even if they're a bit part.

If the characters in a story spend the whole time being infallible, or simply acting so defensively that nothing can get to them, then the story can get dull and predictable. Such characters aren't as interesting to watch as those who have flaws, who make mistakes. So allow your characters to get things wrong, to fail to compensate for their flaws, to stumble, and to leave themselves vulnerable.

Making them relatable just means, try to make them like real people. Don't (or don't just) imagine some cool heroic icon, or strange inhuman being, who you and your group can't get under the skin of. Give them idiosyncrasies, hopes and dreams, regrets, fears, and so on. Flesh them out with colourful details that make them feel real. Think about what it might be like to be them, and play them accordingly.

This doesn't mean you need to prepare a vast backstory for your character. Make these details up as you go, one little bit at a time, just the same way as you do with everything else in *Flotsam*.

Having given them human qualities, put those qualities out there in the world. At the very least, as you're playing with an open hand, tell the other players what's going on in their head and heart; but ideally,

let them reveal it to other characters, so they can respond and interact with them in interesting ways. Be vulnerable. And respond to other people's vulnerabilities too.

All of this goes for *Primary* and *Secondary* characters. *Secondary* characters will be most interesting if they have a real, human connection with the *Primary* characters. You won't want to develop most of them to the same degree as a *Primary* character; but a small amount of colourful detail will bring them to life, and of course you should make them fallible and vulnerable too.

As before, none of this means you have to be nice about it! Feel free to kick someone when they're down, or to try to steal their hopes and dreams. Knowing about a character's feelings helps you make trouble for them too.

TELL SMALL-SCALE STORIES, LEAVE SPACE FOR CONVERSATION

— Explore the little details of the characters, their lives, and the world around them.
— Introduce issues and situations that matter right now, to one person or a small group, rather than massive problems or world-threatening dangers.
— Give the *Primary* characters space to explore their own agendas and talk to each other.
— When an intense conversation you're watching goes quiet, wait for at least two seconds longer than you're comfortable with before making any *Moves*.

Flotsam is a game with an epic backdrop. A vast galaxy, filled with strange things, a lone space station floating in the darkness. But the setting for the game is the murky underbelly of that space-station and the ordinary lives of the outcasts, renegades and misfits who live there. It is tempting to

bring in the epic elements and make the game about them. It is tempting to create ever-larger problems, to make the characters grapple with them.

Resist that temptation. For the characters' interpersonal stories and the details of their lives to remain significant and central, and for each of the *Situations* that you are playing with to matter, it is important not to allow those to become overshadowed by larger plot elements. By all means, have them going on in the background: but focus on problems that are small and significant only to one person or a small group, not epic plotlines.

Don't even make the game exclusively about problems. Even small-scale problems can draw the focus away from the relationships that the game is meant to focus on. So make sure that any challenging situations you introduce leave space for the characters to breathe, to pursue their own agenda, to meander a little. Space for conversation, and for human interactions. Leave quiet periods where you're not pushing dramatic events at each other. Use that time to explore the small details of the characters, their lives, and the world around them; and to develop their relationships away from the pressure of the *Situations*.

There's a particular guideline I've stolen from Becky Annison's game *When the Dark is Gone*. That is: when you're watching two other characters engaging in an intense conversation, and it goes quiet, and that silence becomes uncomfortable, resist the urge to fill that silence. Even after you've reached the point of personal discomfort, wait a couple of seconds before saying anything. In that quiet period, you may be surprised at what one of those characters says. (To be clear: this rule doesn't apply to the people in the conversation – it's them you're giving space to.)
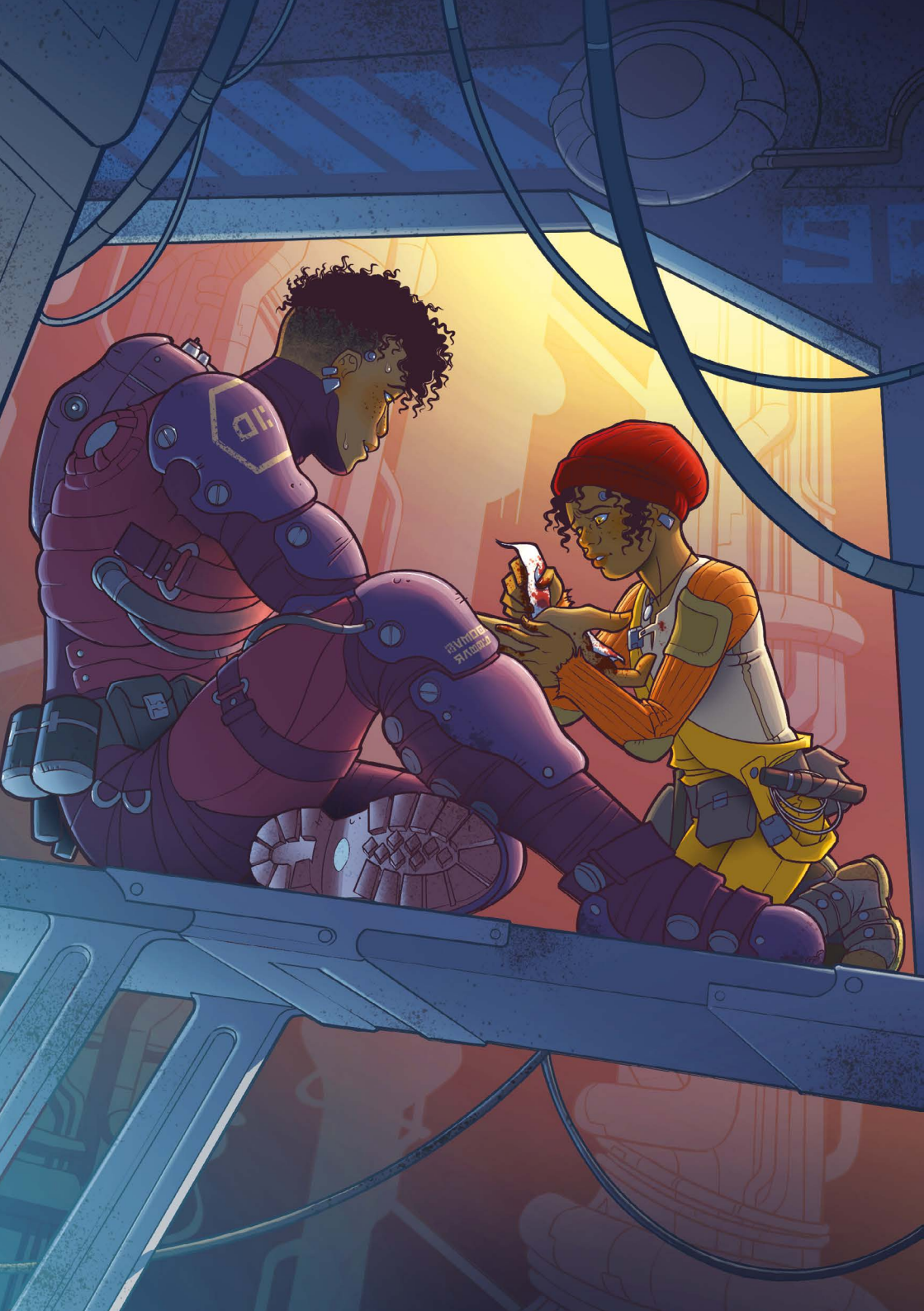
Playbooks

The Thunder

The Below is a lawless place, teetering on the brink of anarchy.
The Thunder is one of the people that holds that anarchy at bay.
They might be the official enforcer or little more than a criminal, but they
and their people keep the peace, such as it is. Keeping that peace requires
violence: or the threat of violence, something the Thunder knows only
too well.

CHOOSE A NAME

Temple, Hammer, Jazz, Piston, Grimes, Lester, Cobra, Lacey, Nebula,
Mox, Halo, Tower, Schultz, Cerberus.

CHOOSE A LOOK

(one or more from each list)
— **Face:** Grimy, hard, baby-faced, tattooed, weathered, sharp,
inscrutable, gorgeous.
— **Body:** Wiry, ripped, ravaged, mutated, sturdy, lithe, hulking,
compact, poised, elegant.
— **Skin:** Dark, warm, cool, light, brown, copper, olive, ivory, gold, rose,
freckled, mottled, patterns, tattoos, scars.
— **Gender:** Woman, man, nonbinary, transitioning, genderqueer,
feminine, masculine, neutral, androgynous, hidden, other.

CHOOSE 1–3 WARDROBE STYLES FOR YOUR PEOPLE

Leather and chains, animal skins, masks, a uniform, military fatigues,
sharp suits, rags, everyday wear.

CHOOSE THE NATURE OF YOUR TERRITORY

A shanty-town, defunct industrial area, service tunnels, shops and stalls,
humble residences, old cargo space.

ORIGIN

Hated, Feared, Hunted, Abandoned, Trueborn.

PRINCIPLES

— **Power and control.** Think about how you maintain control, where your grip is weak, and what you are willing to do to protect your rule.

— **Identity and belonging.** Think about what keeps your gang together. Their shared purpose. Their common culture and values.

RELATIONSHIP QUESTIONS

Ask two (or for quick-start, one):

— What did you steal from me?
— How have you betrayed me?
— When did you stand up to me?
— When did we fight shoulder to shoulder?

HISTORY QUESTIONS

And ask or answer one of these:

— Which of my people can't I trust, and why?
— What did I have to do to become leader?
— Who or what do I most want to protect?

SPECIAL MOVE

When you rely on me to protect you from a dangerous threat, gain a *Token*.

STRENGTHS

*You must take your gang as one of your **Strengths**.*

Intimidating; authoritative and respected; skilled warrior; empowered with official authority; contacts (street) [R]; your gang – toughs with guns and knives [R]; highly defensible territory; a high-tech armoury [R]; secret routes in/out and through your territory [R].

SCRUTINY QUESTIONS

— *"What should I be on the lookout for here?"*
— *"Who might be able to help with this?"*

— *"What's the word on the street about this?"*
— *"How are you vulnerable to me right now?"*
— *"What's my enemy's true position?"*
— *"What's about to go down here?"*

WEAKNESSES

— **Problems:** Your gang lie and scheme against you; your gang are cowardly and stupid; a rival gang disputes your territory.
— **Flaws:** You (and/or your gang) are addicts; you love your gang like a family; you are paranoid and vengeful.

PLAYBOOKS

PLAYBOOKS

The Spider

What do you need? Whether it's food, drugs, or information, the Spider can get it for you. Just don't forget, it comes with a price.

The Spider makes a living through a carefully cultivated network of suppliers, haggling and hustling and schmoozing, building a fragile trade empire.

CHOOSE A NAME

Clubs, Grey, Quill, Queen, Shakespeare, Spider, Garrett, O'Connor, Lex, Barter, Mooney, Velvet, Cyrus.

CHOOSE A LOOK

(one or more from each list)
— **Eyes:** Watchful, calculating, neutral, smiling, steely, cold, shrewd.
— **Voice:** Honest, down-to-earth, serious, mocking, whispery, icy, direct, cheerful, smug.
— **Skin:** Dark, warm, cool, light, brown, copper, olive, ivory, gold, rose, freckled, mottled, perfumed, blue, spines.
— **Gender:** Woman, man, nonbinary, transitioning, genderqueer, feminine, masculine, neutral, androgynous, hidden, other.

CHOOSE 1–3 WARDROBE STYLES

Loungewear, a sharp suit, elegant formal wear, a smart uniform, tech wear, display wear, immaculate whites.

CHOOSE YOUR HOME TURF

A bar, a warehouse, a diner, a workshop, a casino, tunnels, a flophouse, a vehicle, a holo-suite, a market.

ORIGIN

Hated, Feared, Hunted, Abandoned, Trueborn.

78

FLOTSAM: ADRIFT AMONGST THE STARS

PLAYBOOKS

PLAYBOOKS

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CHOOSE YOUR HOME TURF

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ORIGIN

Hated, Feared, Hunted, Abandoned, Trueborn.

78   FLOTSAM: ADRIFT AMONGST THE STARS

PRINCIPLES

— **Power and control.** It's a dog-eat-dog world. Think about how you stay on top. Think about how you keep people hooked.

— **Precarity and opportunity.** You might seem like you've got it made, but your success is fragile. Explore the risks and opportunities of your enterprise: show how close to the breadline you actually are.

RELATIONSHIP QUESTIONS

Ask two (or for quick-start, one):

— What deal did you make with me, only to renege at the last?

— Why do you trust me completely?

— What have you promised me and are yet to deliver?

— What have I hooked you on?

HISTORY QUESTIONS

And ask or answer one of these:

— Who wants revenge on me, and why?

— What have I never yet traded in, and why?

SPECIAL MOVE

When you hook me up with something I need, or vice versa, gain a *Token*.

STRENGTHS

Deception; connections (the Above) [R]; connections (the Underworld) [R]; secrets [R]; debts owed to you [R]; useful items (weapons, medical supplies, tech) [R]; esoteric/luxury items (art, fancy food/drink, narcotics, alien artifacts) [R]; people (enforcers, companions, staff) [R]; contingency plans [R].

> "Secrets" is slightly tricky *Resource* to use. When it would be advantageous to know something secret, and/or use a secret against someone, you could say what the secret is. Or you could ask someone else "what secret do I know that would help me here". Either way, anyone can add *Complications*, because it's nearly always

challenging to know a secret. Plus, anyone can *Object* to a secret that seems implausibly helpful. This is the price you pay for what is an incredibly powerful *Resource* – you not only could know any secret about anyone, you potentially get to define those secrets in play.

SCRUTINY QUESTIONS

— *"What should I be on the lookout for here?"*
— *"Who might be able to help with this?"*
— *"What's the word on the street about this?"*
— *"What does your character need right now?"*
— *"What do you have that I might want?"*

WEAKNESSES

— **Problems:** You are in hock to a gang; your contacts covet your position; ruthless commercial rivals; you owe money to insatiable loan sharks.
— **Flaw:** You are hooked on your own stuff; you are a control freak; you are greedy and ambitious.

The Voice

Down here people are short on hope and purpose. They look to you to provide it. You might point them to higher ideals, a sense of unity and belonging; or maybe you're just the sort of person people like to follow.

You've got a way of getting people to do what you want. Careful with that.

CHOOSE A NAME
Ash, Destiny, Candle, Dawn, Helix, Cirrus, Clio, Chorus, Wraith, Deacon, Gaius, Babel, Horizon, Raphael, Book.

CHOOSE A LOOK
(one or more from each list)
- **Voice:** Warm, musical, calm, gravelly, deep, authoritative, smiling, lilting, precise, eloquent.
- **Body:** Vigorous, robust, well-fed, svelte, unblemished, venerable, youthful.
- **Skin:** Dark, warm, cool, light, brown, copper, olive, ivory, gold, rose, freckled, mottled, hairless, henna, iridescent.
- **Gender:** Woman, man, nonbinary, transitioning, genderqueer, feminine, masculine, neutral, androgynous, hidden, other.

CHOOSE 2 WARDROBE STYLES
Flowing robes, silks and velvets, ordinary clothes, rags, one strong colour, iconic jewelry, handmade garments.

CHOOSE YOUR ROLE
Priest, hedge witch, wise-person, lawgiver, philosopher, cult leader, community organiser, union leader, demagogue, celebrity.

CHOOSE YOUR FOLLOWERS
Serious students, ordinary folk, waifs and strays, fanatics, escapists, obsessive admirers, fearful souls.

ORIGIN
Hated, Feared, Hunted, Abandoned, Trueborn.

PRINCIPLES
— **Community and interdependence.** Show what you do to bring your followers closer to each other, and how you hold them together.
— **Mystery and spirituality.** What are your abilities for? Will you be just a selfish exploiter, or do you have a vision or mission?

RELATIONSHIP QUESTIONS
Ask two (or for quick-start, one):
— Why do you fear me?
— Why do my followers distrust you?
— What vision have you sought my help in understanding?
— Why have you recently joined my following?

HISTORY QUESTIONS
And ask or answer one of these:
— What is your vision for the future? OR What dark future are you trying to prevent?
— What has given my followers reason to doubt?

SPECIAL MOVE
Act in my name or in support of my cause to gain a *Token*.

STRENGTHS
*You must take your followers as one of your **Strengths**.*
Your followers – a flock of devotees [R]; psychic links to all your followers; you can see and speak to spirits; you can bind and banish spirits; your followers are fanatically loyal; your followers know how to fight; your followers are well-connected; counsellor; negotiator; demagogue.

Your followers are a mish-mash of ordinary(ish) people. Some might have useful skills or personal qualities, but as a group they aren't especially potent. Picking the special qualities listed makes them significantly more useful.

SCRUTINY QUESTIONS
— *"What should I be on the lookout for here?"*
— *"Who might be able to help with this?"*
— *"What have my followers told me about this?"*
— *"Who or what do you love the most?"*
— *"How could I get you to _____?"*
— *"Whose words carry sway around here?"*

WEAKNESSES
— **Problems:** Your followers are needy and demanding; your followers are chaotic and divided; your words inspire mobs and fanatics.
— **Flaws:** You are arrogant and overconfident; You need to be loved and admired; You passionately believe your own rhetoric.

The Sybyl

You have a gift, powers that set you apart from normal people. Some say you are cursed, some say the gods themselves have chosen you for a purpose. You may be loved or feared – perhaps both. You must choose your words and actions with care. You will always be alone.

CHOOSE A NAME
Snowdrop, Cassandra, Hollow, Eleven, Wax, Mica, Jasper, Dalton, Willow, Fliss, Swift, Mercy, Aurora.

CHOOSE A LOOK
(one or more from each list)
— **Eyes:** Unblinking, distant, rheumy, large, glassy, milky, alien, harsh.
— **Body:** Spindly, twisted, gnarled, sinuous, delicate, gaunt, stunted, wrecked.
— **Skin:** Dark, warm, cool, light, brown, copper, olive, ivory, gold, rose, freckled, mottled, hidden, moist, translucent.
— **Gender:** Woman, man, nonbinary, transitioning, genderqueer, feminine, masculine, neutral, androgynous, hidden, other.

CHOOSE 2 WARDROBE STYLES
Rags and patches, plain clothing, heavy robes, masks, gloves, sombre blacks, pristine whites, archaic clothing.

CHOOSE HOW YOU CALL ON YOUR GIFTS
Incense and chanting, drawing sigils, alien speech, grimoires and scrolls, concentrate hard, drugs.

ORIGIN
Feared, Hunted, Abandoned, Trueborn.

PRINCIPLES

— **Isolation and otherness.** How do your powers set you apart from others? How have they changed your basic humanity? What about you can they never understand? What about them can you never grasp?

— **Mystery and spirituality.** Your unique nature puts you closer to the spirits than anyone. But do they love you?

RELATIONSHIP QUESTIONS

Ask two (or for quick-start, one):

— What of your secrets do you wish I had not discovered?
— How have you shown your distrust of me?
— In what way have we been intimate?
— In what way is our relationship thoroughly ordinary?

HISTORY QUESTIONS

And ask or answer one of these:

— What vision of my future have I seen?
— What was the first time my powers manifested, and who got hurt?

SPECIAL MOVE

Ask me to use my mysterious gifts on you or act on one of my visions to gain a *Token*.

STRENGTHS

*You must take **True Prophecy** as one of your **Strengths**.*
Baleful aura; Chaos; Chimera; Dreamwalk; Malediction; Soul Pierce; Spirit Tongue; Thoughtweave; Thread of Fate.
True prophecy. When you beseech the spirits for guidance and **spend** a *Token*, ask a question. You get an immediate and clear vision that answers it.

> The *Sybyl's Strengths* are all mysterious gifts. What that means in practice is for you to define in play – the default position is, they are

supernatural abilities that the *Sybyl* naturally possesses or has been given by an outside supernatural force (e.g. the gods). What they do, and what their limitations might be, is also up to the group to work out, by asking each other *Questions*; or by trying something out and seeing if anybody adds *Complications* or makes an *Objection*.

The *Sybyl*'s *True Prophecy Move* is one of their options for *Strengths*, but doesn't work like a normal *Strength* – it can't be activated to cancel *Complications*. Instead, follow the text of the *Move* when you want to use it.

SCRUTINY QUESTIONS
— *"What would you give anything for?"*
— *"When have you felt truly happy?"*
— *"What do you secretly hope for?"*
— *"What is the worst thing you've done?"*
— *"What do you fear the most?"*

WEAKNESSES
— **Problems:** Your gifts aren't fully under your control; spirits intrude on your life; you are the pawn of a religious cult; the superstitious hang on your every word.
— **Flaws:** You are obsessed with your visions; you are manipulative and secretive; you are tactless and indiscreet.

The Hybrid

You look human but inside, something else lurks, a shard of something greater. Your strange nature sets you apart and makes you more and less than human.

You have a shadowed past, either in the service of this shard, or belonging to its other incarnations. If anyone knew, they would surely hate and fear you.

CHOOSE A NAME
Kopesh IV, Shard 382c, David, Marie, Galileo, Athena, Shepherd, Justice, Dawn, Gamma, Lazarus, Pris.

CHOOSE A LOOK
(one or more from each list)
— **Face:** Bland, bloodless, smooth, exquisite, sculpted, non-human, too-perfect.
— **Gaze:** Penetrating, inhuman, appraising, intense, emotionless, curious.
— **Skin:** Dark, warm, cool, light, brown, copper, olive, ivory, gold, rose, freckled, mottled, waxy, robotic, branded.
— **Gender:** Woman, man, nonbinary, transitioning, genderqueer, feminine, masculine, neutral, androgynous, hidden, other.

CHOOSE YOUR STYLE
Formal wear, military wear, immaculate whites, hoods and robes, elegant black standards.

CHOOSE THE NATURE OF YOUR INHUMAN SIDE
A god, an angel, a spirit, an AI, a symbiote, alien genes, a previous incarnation, implanted commands.

CHOOSE YOUR SHADOWED PAST
Serial infidelity, charlatanry, murder, espionage, atrocities, subjugation, unforgivable failure.

ORIGIN

Feared, Hunted, Abandoned.

PRINCIPLES

— **Identity and belonging.** Who are you, really? What makes you you? How do you relate to others? Can you ever really fit in? Who do you admire, which groups do you aspire to belong to?

— **Isolation and otherness.** Explore your strange nature and shadowed past. How are you different from others? What deeds continue to haunt you? What about humans will you never understand?

RELATIONSHIP QUESTIONS

Ask two (or for quick-start, one):

— Why do I make you nervous?

— How has my presence disrupted your life?

— In what way are we alike?

— How have you shown your friendship to me?

HISTORY QUESTIONS

And ask or answer one of these:

— Why do I wish I could escape my inhuman side for good?

— What past action of mine or of my inhuman side do I feel terrible guilt about?

SPECIAL MOVE

Give me a chance to prove myself to you to gain a *Token*.

STRENGTHS

Inhuman physicality (strength, stamina); rapid healing; psychic weapons; uncanny stealth; superhuman senses; inscrutable; a network of hidden followers or informants [R]; codes and passwords [R].

> *Superhuman Senses* and *Inscrutable* tend to act as giving permission or denying permission to ask *Questions*. For instance, you might be

able to tell what emotion someone is concealing with *Supernatural Senses* to detect their heart-rate or smell their scent of fear. When someone asks *Scrutiny Questions* about you, it is highly appropriate to add *Complications* if you have *Inscrutable*.

SCRUTINY QUESTIONS
— *"What should I be on the lookout for here?"*
— *"Who or what is here that doesn't fit?"*
— *"What is everyone avoiding?"*
— *"What clues have been left here?"*
— *"What emotions are you concealing right now?"*

WEAKNESSES
— **Problems:** Vengeful victims of your shadowed past; the dire reputation of your shadowed past; your inhuman side is reviled by others.
— **Flaws:** You don't understand human ways; your inhuman side has its own persona; you don't understand your own limitations.

The Cast-Off

You once lived a life of prosperity and stability. You had a place in the world. You had respect. But it all came crashing down around you. Now you're barely scraping a living, and sometimes not even that. You live off your wits, bartering what skills you have. You work for whoever will pay. Just hoping your past doesn't catch up with you.

CHOOSE A NAME

Scrim, Fisher, Lem, Trick, Bones, Scarlet, Jay, Taylor, Spencer, Frankie, Noble, Lux, Grace, Darius.

CHOOSE A LOOK

(one or more from each list)
— **Face:** Honest, cheerful, wary, leathery, gorgeous, haggard, reserved.
— **Hands:** Fast, strong, greasy, clean, gentle, mutated, prosthetic hand.
— **Skin:** Dark, warm, cool, light, brown, copper, olive, ivory, gold, rose, freckled, mottled, pocked, scaly, lumpy.
— **Gender:** Woman, man, nonbinary, transitioning, genderqueer, feminine, masculine, neutral, androgynous, hidden, other.

CHOOSE 2 PREVIOUS EMPLOYERS

A gang, a religious order, the docks, a known criminal, a trader, the station authority, rich above-folk.

WHY YOU'RE DOWN HERE

Brought down by scandal, hiding from your enemies, wanted by the law, bankrupted, random misfortune.

PRINCIPLES

— **Community and interdependence.** You rely for your livelihood on countless relationships. Customers. Patrons. And they rely on you. Explore those relationships and how you depend on each other.
— **Precarity and opportunity.** Explore how you cope with the

hardship of living hand-to-mouth. Show how you respond to the opportunities that come your way.

RELATIONSHIP QUESTIONS

Ask two (or for quick-start, one):
— How did you save my life?
— What lies have you told me?
— How did we become lovers?
— Why won't you hire me again?

HISTORY QUESTIONS

And ask or answer one of these:
— What recent job went south? Whose fault was it?
— Who do I wish I'd never worked for, and why?

SPECIAL MOVE

Hire me for a gig or hook me up with one to gain a *Token*.

STRENGTHS

Repair; hacking; entertainer; chemist; medicine; pilot; silver tongue; fast hands; lucky; hidden caches of supplies [R]; safe-houses and escape routes [R]; items you happen to have in your pockets [R].

SCRUTINY QUESTIONS

— *"What should I be on the lookout for here?"*
— *"Who might be able to help with this?"*
— *"What's the word on the street about this?"*
— *"How might I be of service to this person?"*
— *"Where could I get hold of _____?*

WEAKNESSES

— **Problems:** Unpaid debts; haunted by a scandalous past; hunted by old enemies.
— **Flaws:** Reckless and impulsive; haughty and superior; fickle and led by your passions.

The Scum

You were born here, down in the dark. You came from nothing, and you've still got nothing. Those Above regard you with complete loathing. But down here, you belong. You know this place like no other.

CHOOSE A NAME

Patch, Twist, Bumble, Sykes, Annie, Baker, Scar, Legs, Harry, Fable, Star, Pipes.

CHOOSE A LOOK

(one or more from each list)
— **Build:** Hunched, gaunt, diminutive, sinewy, scrawny, sturdy, lanky, misshapen.
— **Smile:** Gap-toothed, lop-sided, cheeky, dazzling, charming, insincere, warm, wolfish.
— **Skin:** Dark, warm, cool, light, brown, copper, olive, ivory, gold, rose, freckled, mottled, blotchy, lumpy, jagged.
— **Gender:** Woman, man, nonbinary, transitioning, genderqueer, feminine, masculine, neutral, androgynous, hidden, other.

CHOOSE 1–3 WARDROBE STYLES

Hand-me-downs, patchwork, wrong size, hand-made, rags, threadbare, gang colours, work gear.

CHOOSE 1–3 TRUSTED FRIENDS

Your uncle, your cousin, a childhood friend, your neighbour, your mother, your sibling, your lover, an employer, a pet, a ganger, a complete newcomer.

PRINCIPLES

— **Identity and belonging.** Explore the values and culture that you identify with, the things that you take pride in. What about your low birth makes you ashamed? What about it is a badge of honour?
— **Community and interdependence.** You'd be nothing without the people around you. Show what you do for them, and what they do for you. Think about how you depend on the community.

By Joshua Fox

RELATIONSHIP QUESTIONS

Ask two (or for quick-start, one):
- — Who have I made to feel welcome here, and how?
- — Who will never be accepted here in my eyes?
- — Who helped the community when we needed it?
- — Who do I know is nothing but trouble?

HISTORY QUESTIONS

And ask or answer one of these:
- — Who has never forgiven me for something I did years ago? What was it?
- — What's tearing my neighbourhood apart? Why haven't I stopped it yet?

SPECIAL MOVE

When you put your trust in me to fix a problem for you, gain a *Token*.

STRENGTHS

Tough; connections (the Below) [R]; beloved by all; scavenger; secret places [R]; junk crafting; loyal gang of ordinary folk [R]; charming; sneaky; spotless reputation; short-cuts and secret paths [R].

SCRUTINY QUESTIONS

- — *"What should I be on the lookout for here?"*
- — *"Who would be willing to help with this?"*
- — *"What's the word on the street about this?"*
- — *"Who would want or need this?"*
- — *"How might this help the Below?"*

WEAKNESSES

- — **Problems:** You're mixed up with a local gang; you're addicted to something; you've made an enemy in the community (who?)
- — **Flaws:** You are naïve and trusting; you'd do anything for your friends; you are vulgar and unsophisticated.

The Outsider

*You're not from around here, not part of the Below or even the station.
You're stuck here for now, pursuing your aims or performing your duties.
You're getting drawn into local life down here, whether you like it or not.*

CHOOSE A NAME

Evelyn, Croft, Jones, Garek, Han, Kimble, Leon, Cornelius, Chrisjen, Charlotte, Hallows, Ember.

CHOOSE A LOOK

(one or more from each list)
— **Build:** Stocky, wispy, angular, wiry, massive, lean, obese, tiny, nondescript.
— **Hands:** Manicured, meaty, spindly, dainty, strong, weathered, scarred, leathery, clawed, mechanical.
— **Skin:** Dark, warm, cool, light, brown, copper, olive, ivory, gold, rose, freckled, mottled, papery, plates, weird.
— **Gender:** Woman, man, nonbinary, transitioning, genderqueer, feminine, masculine, neutral, androgynous, hidden, other.

CHOOSE 1–3 WARDROBE STYLES

Plain blacks, workwear, ordinary clothes, formal robes, fancy attire, concealed armour.

WHAT ARE YOU?

Bounty hunter, assassin, spy, diplomat, missionary, aid worker, sociologist, trader, marooned.

PRINCIPLES

— **Identity and belonging.** You're not from here, but you're stuck here and you need to find a place. Who will you reach out to? Who will you make connections with? Who can you trust?
— **Precarity and opportunity.** Out here, there's not much between

you and the poverty this place is drowning in. How will you keep yourself afloat? What might you do to help others?

RELATIONSHIP QUESTIONS

Ask two (or for quick-start, one):
— When you needed help, how did I aid you?
— How have you helped me settle here?
— Why do you want me out of here?
— How are you tied up in my mission?

HISTORY QUESTIONS

And ask or answer one of these:
— What went badly wrong when I first arrived here? Who blames me for it?
— What have I come here to do, and who is standing in my way?

SPECIAL MOVE

When you draw me into the concerns of the Below, gain a *Token*.

STRENGTHS

Sharpshooter; concealment; alien tech [R]; obscure or arcane lore; deal-maker; inspiring; stealthy; disguise; security systems.

SCRUTINY QUESTIONS

— *"What should I be on the lookout for here?"*
— *"Where can I find _____?*
— *"What's my best way in/past/through?"*
— *"Who is really in control here?"*
— *"Who here is sympathetic to my cause?"*

WEAKNESSES

— **Problems:** Hunted by deadly enemies; Your kind are despised here; Short on resources.
— **Flaws:** You want to help everyone; unfamiliar with local culture; impulsive and overconfident.

The Vapour

You are not one of them, the beings that live down here. You're an entity unbound by flesh: not a part of human society, and far beyond human concerns. But something draws you into their world. You pursue your own aims, but will you make a place down here?

CHOOSE A NAME
Hal, Prism, Wisp, Xerxes, Tera, Deep, Eve, Zuriel, Hypatia, Ada, Mathison, Orobas, Peri, Vikram.

CHOOSE A LOOK
(one or more from each list)
— **Visage:** Human, animal, monstrous, beatific, terrifying, abstract, bizarre, glowing, intense, understated.
— **Voice:** Deep, monotone, whispery, commanding, ethereal, echoey, dreadful, glorious, warm, knowing, ordinary.
— **Gender:** Woman, man, nonbinary, transitioning, genderqueer, feminine, masculine, neutral, androgynous, hidden, other.

CHOOSE YOUR NATURE
A rogue AI, a household spirit, an alien entity, a ghost, a hologram, a demon, an ancestor spirit.

YOU ARE HERE TO…
Help people, become human, dominate and control attract followers, destroy an enemy, understand people.

PRINCIPLES
— **Isolation and otherness.** How will you connect to humanity? How will you understand them – and can you bridge the divide in your natures?
— **Power and control.** Find the limits of your power. What do you need? What do you fear? What matters to you? Look for where you're not in control and dive right in.

RELATIONSHIP QUESTIONS

Ask two (or for quick-start, one):
— How have you helped me understand humanity?
— What have you done to earn my trust and respect?
— How have you bested me?
— Why am I fascinated with you?

HISTORY QUESTIONS

And ask or answer one of these:
— What mortal situation has caught my attention and drawn me in?
— What power has threatened me, and how might they yet bring me down?

SPECIAL MOVE

Beg for my aid or my wisdom to gain a *Token*.

STRENGTHS

Remote senses; extensive library/database; superhuman intellect; connections (spirits)[R]; hallowed and revered; insubstantial; machine control; flesh puppets [R]; plans and schemes [R].

Beyond you. When you call on powers beyond the ken of ordinary folk, **spend** three *Tokens* and say how your intervention changes the fate of the station.

> *Beyond you* is an extremely flexible *Move*, reflecting the Vapour's unusual nature. In effect it gives the Vapour permission to do anything that would fit with their nature. It can have far-reaching consequences, so the *Objection* rules are particularly relevant here. It would be wise for the player of the Vapour to discuss any plans to use this *Move* in advance, even if only in general terms – this falls outside the normal *Principle* of not planning ahead.

> You can use *Beyond You* to do things that would effectively end the game, or take it beyond the scope of *Flotsam*. That could be a cool way to end the story – but think carefully before you do.

SCRUTINY QUESTIONS

— *"What should I be on the lookout for here?"*
— *"Who might be able to help with this?"*
— *"What's my best way out/way in/way through?"*
— *"What technical or arcane solution am I overlooking"*
— *"What have I secretly observed that's relevant here?"*

WEAKNESSES

— **Problems:** Enemies and rivals amongst your own kind; A powerful faction seeks your demise; Those who know how can bind or control you.
— **Flaws:** You believe yourself to be invincible; You see others as mere pawns; You obey strange laws (e.g. you cannot break a promise).

Origins

There are lots of different ways to find yourself in the Below. Five options are listed here: most *Playbooks* have a subset of these options, though some have their own unique background.

THE HATED

You hold views that are unacceptable to the society Above. Perhaps you follow a minority religion or sect, maybe your political views are abhorrent to the majority, or maybe it's something else. Such people live under the threat of attack, at risk of judicial harassment or incarceration, and struggle to make a life worth living. In the Below, such considerations do not entirely disappear – but your ideas are tolerated.

THE FEARED

Your mind or body do not conform to the template expected by the society Above. Perhaps your appearance causes fear or revulsion. Perhaps you belong to a species or mutant strain who are feared. Maybe you live with mental illness, or perhaps your behaviour is just viewed as deviant by society. Either way, the Society Above has driven you down into the shadows of the Below. Prejudice hasn't disappeared, but you are accepted here.

THE HUNTED

You are a law-breaker. Maybe you made one transgression that led to harsh consequences, or perhaps you were a regular offender who finally got their comeuppance. Such people often find themselves forced down into the Below, or even formally exiled by the law.

Equally, some criminals find it convenient to pursue their professional interests far from the watchful eyes of the law.

THE ABANDONED

You are the victim of economic misfortune. Perhaps you are elderly, but have no family or funds to support you. Maybe you are young, but have no relatives or guardian to protect you. You could have become unable to support yourself through illness or industrial change that rendered your skills redundant, or you might have lost your livelihood by sheer bad luck. Either way, once your money ran out, there was only one place you could afford to go – the Below.

THE TRUEBORN

You have always lived down here. The laws and ways of the Below are more familiar to you than those of the strange folk who live far above your head. To you, this has always been home.

Situations

Community

The Below is filled to the brim with all kinds of people. Outcasts and criminals, paupers and kingpins, scroungers and scrappers and hustlers, all living their lives and struggling to survive.

Even down here, social divisions exist that decide each person's social standing, who gets what, and who can talk to whom. Sometimes these divisions create rivalries, distrust or even hatred.

The Below has been around a long time, and it has developed its own ways, which may look unusual or even bizarre to outsiders.

CHOOSE THE MAIN SOURCE OF SOCIAL DIVISION IN THE BELOW

A caste system, haves and have-nots, bosses and workers, ethnic groups, alien races, aristocracy, slavery, religious differences, one group was conquered by another, an ongoing war, political parties.

AREAS OF FOCUS

(ask questions about, drive forward)

— **Culture**
  ◊ Social rules – taboos, superstitions, rituals, traditions, routines.
  ◊ Stories – rumours, gossip, propaganda, lies, legends.
  ◊ Culture in all its forms (slang, sayings, art, music, dance, food, and so on).

— **Groups**
  ◊ Social groups – religious, cultural, ethnic, political, social.
  ◊ Group responses – rivalries, distrust, solidarity, closing ranks, and so on.
  ◊ The pillars of each group – leaders, paragons, role models.
  ◊ Deviants within a group – dissenters, non-conformists, troublemakers.

Poverty

Food. Clean water. Work. Education. Law and Order. Hope. They're all in short supply, and sometimes lack of them stretches individuals and society to breaking point. It isn't possible for everyone to get what they need, and many people go without day after day.

Everyday life is built around fulfilling those basic needs. The Below hums with the activity of people scraping and scrounging and hustling to get by. But it still isn't enough. Even so, the human spirit finds ways to survive and prosper despite it all.

CHOOSE THE WAY POVERTY MANIFESTS IN THE BELOW

Everybody is destitute, haves and have-nots, random shortages, living off credit, Government handouts, crumbling infrastructure, basic needs go unmet, scavenging to survive, widespread crime, one group controls supplies, _____ is scarce.

AREAS OF FOCUS

(ask questions about, drive forward)

— **Things people want or need, and ways to get them**
   ◊ Infrastructure, resources, supplies, services.
   ◊ Freedoms, protections, privileges.
   ◊ Commerce, entrepreneurialism, work, crime.
— **Lack and excess and responses to them**
   ◊ Shortages, want, deprivation, homelessness.
   ◊ Gluts, privilege, wealth.
   ◊ Thrift, barter, sharing, jury-rigging.
   ◊ Despair, addiction, desperation, envy, rage and rioting.

The Above

The Above is what we call the upper decks and the people who live there. The ones with the identity papers, and the steady jobs. The ones with money and confidence. The ones whose trash makes its way down Below, and whose boots leave footprints on our lives, visible and invisible.

The Above is a mighty behemoth. It can crush individuals and communities as though they were bugs, intentionally or not. It is a capricious god, reacting suddenly and overwhelmingly. And yet, folk Below are utterly dependent on it.

CHOOSE THE CHARACTER OF THE ABOVE

Dictatorship, democracy, feudal system, oligarchy, theocracy, colonial rule, militaristic, mass media, capitalist, communism, surveillance state, fabulous wealth, post-scarcity, high technology, galactic hub, religious fervor, hedonism.

AREAS OF FOCUS
(ask questions about, drive forward)
— Everything and everyone in the Above.
— Visitors from the Above.
— Things that trickle down from the Above.
— The greed, hostility and demands of the Above.
— The laws of the Above, which apply to Below-folk whether they make any sense down here or not.

The Gangs

Down in the Below, the law and order of the society Above is rarely enforced. In its place step those who are strong, feared or respected enough to hold sway. Some gangs fancy themselves a bastion of civilisation in the Below, others are unashamedly criminal. It is dangerous to deal with the gangs. It may also be unavoidable.

The gangs also provide hope and direction for some. Aspiring young Below-folk can find belonging, a sense of purpose, status and even a career in the arms of a gang.

CHOOSE HOW THE GANGS WORK

Crime families, religious orders, military hierarchy, law enforcers, feudal loyalty, tribal ties, business partnerships, unions, mandatory membership, they run everything, small-time crooks, simple thugs, serious professionals, lots of different models.

AREAS OF FOCUS

(ask questions about, drive forward)

— The gangs and those under their sway, their territory, their ways.
— The internal factions within the gangs.
— The enemies of the gangs.
— The rules – rational or self-serving – that the gangs hold to and enforce.
— Violence and the threat of violence, in all its forms.
— Dominance and displays of power.

Spirits

The world we see every day is only one aspect of the universe. Hidden just beyond sight, just beyond your hearing is a world of stranger things. With the right ritual and sacrifice you can speak to them, if you have ears to hear what they say. And sometimes they come right out and poke their noses into our affairs, subtly or blatantly.

Most people pay some attention to the spirit world through little acts of worship or placation. Some devote their lives to it. When times are hard, people turn ever more to the spiritual, looking for a sense of hope or peace that they can't find elsewhere. And there is nowhere harder than the Below.

CHOOSE WHAT THE SPIRITS ARE

Nature spirits, elevated saints, abstract principles, ghosts, fey, angels, demons, djinn, a pantheon of gods, thought-forms, incorporeal aliens, there is only one.

CHOOSE HOW WE CONTACT THEM

Prayer, meditation, chanting, bloodletting, mind-altering drugs, elaborate ritual, intercession by a priest, sacrifice or gifts, sorcery, speak in their language, divination (tarot, runes etc), go to a place where the veil is thin.

AREAS OF FOCUS

(ask questions about, drive forward)

— **Strange phenomena**
    ◊   Spirits and other supernatural phenomena: Miracles, curses, magic.
    ◊   Visions, omens, prophecies, dreams.
    ◊   Fortune, misfortune, fate.
    ◊   The hidden and the unexplained.
— **The spirit-touched**
    ◊   People who follow the spirits.
    ◊   Psychics, witches, priests, prophets, exorcists.

The Outside

The Below is just one part of a space station, beyond the walls of which lie the vast reaches of space. The galaxy outside might seem distant at times, but then when you least expect it there will be a sudden and rude reminder that this place is just one mote floating in the storm of the galaxy.

The station bustles with people who come and go from outside. Off-duty soldiers rub shoulders with foreign diplomats, traders, smugglers, prospectors, and more. The bravest venture into the Below for adventures; and the more intrepid Below-folk may venture into the ports, looking for opportunities not available anywhere else.

CHOOSE WHAT'S NEARBY THE STATION

A civilised planet(s), resource-rich moons, haunted ruins, a black hole, a wormhole, an asteroid belt, mysterious structures, a holy city, a military base, a war zone, space pirates, a prison, a major trade route, an alien frontier.

CHOOSE SOMETHING THAT COMES OR GOES REGULARLY

Tourist ships, battle cruisers, cargo freighters, foreign diplomats, green colonists, missionaries, convict labour, smugglers, wounded veterans, refugees, conscripts, prospectors, merchants.

AREAS OF FOCUS
(ask questions about, drive forward)

— **Things found near the station**
◊ Aliens and their technology.
◊ Celestial phenomena – comets, asteroids, radiation, space debris.
◊ Nearby planets and their inhabitants.
◊ The politics, trade and warfare of the wider galaxy.
— **Things that come and go from the station**
◊ Spaceships!
◊ Travellers, traders, itinerant workers, smugglers.
◊ News and rumours from outside, and reactions to it.

By Joshua Fox

Resistance

The lives of the people of the Below are fixed. Drudgery, poverty, mindless routine, and an early death, while the folk Above live in luxury.

But not everyone is content to accept this fate. The Below contains individuals and factions who yearn to tear down the established social order, and replace it with something else. They might be malcontents and criminals, ideological crusaders or idealistic do-gooders.

One thing is certain: change is never peaceful.

CHOOSE WHO LEADS THE RESISTANCE

Religious fanatics, ruthless terrorists, high-minded activists, foreign agents, opportunistic criminals, power-hungry politicos, supporters within the Above, the intergalactic rebellion, ambitious gangers.

AREAS OF FOCUS

(Ask questions about, drive forward)
   — **How the people are oppressed**
      ◊ Skewed information (education, news, controls on communication).
      ◊ Kept poor (low or insecure employment, low wages, hoarding of resources).
      ◊ Under control (surveillance, aggressive policing, harsh punishments, disappearances).
      ◊ Exploited (conscription, slavery, poor working conditions).
   — **People's reaction to oppression**
      ◊ Conformity (rationalisation, false patriotism, informing on others).
      ◊ Resignation (cynicism, hopelessness, looking after number one).
      ◊ Working in the system (petitions, polite letters, voting).
      ◊ Covert resistance (slow working, sharing information, helping the resistance).
      ◊ Overt resistance (protests, strikes, sabotage, terrorism).

War

Outside the walls of the station, the galaxy is ablaze. Massive warships spew drop-pods loaded with armoured soldiers, or bombard planets into oblivion from orbit. Battle lines are drawn. Territory changes hands. Millions of lives are snuffed out. And the ones who control it suffer not at all.

Huddled in this cage of steel, the denizens of the Below watch the ships, the soldiers, the wounded, ebb and flow from the station. They live in fear that one day the guns will be turned on them.

CHOOSE THE NATURE OF THE CONFLICT

Ideological struggle, fight over resources, territorial dispute, internecine strife, holy war, genocide, civil war, galaxy-wide conflagration, guerrilla uprising, war of aggression.

AREAS OF FOCUS

(Ask questions about, drive forward)

— **The effects of the war on the station**
  ◊ Sudden influxes (warships, soldiers, captives, wounded, refugees).
  ◊ Scarcity (able-bodied people, supplies, information, freedom of movement).
  ◊ News (glorious victory, unexpected defeat, nearby battles, surrender).
  ◊ Oppression (martial law, occupation, constant military presence, conscription).

— **People's reaction to the war**
  ◊ Devotion (patriotism, tub-thumping, voluntarism).
  ◊ Fear (paranoia, resignation, panic, hoarding, flight).
  ◊ Hustle (news, gossip, black market).

Scenarios

Quick-start scenarios provide you with a pre-written space station and a collection of characters and situations, replete with tense issues and relationships for you to explore. You can use them when you're short on time, to cut out some of the game set up and turbo-charge the story from the first scene, enabling you to play a satisfying session in a few hours. Alternatively, you could use them for a campaign, if you'd like to play in that specific setting.

There are six scenarios included in this book:

— **Terpsichore's Vaunt** (pages 120–125), set on an ancient floating hulk, where a sacred comet is stirring fanaticism and stranger things down in the dark.
— **The Big Hot** (pages 126–131), set on a once-prosperous station where the people Below have been abandoned to squalor and relentless scorching heat.
— **The New Argonaut** (pages 132–139), where political exiles are cast Below, to nurse their grudges and plot their return.
— **Carceres** (pages 140–145), a prison where the scum of the galaxy are sent to live under the boot of the guards and to serve as experimental subjects for the scientists.
— **The Grey Plague** (pages 146–151), a station beset by a terrible disease. The people of the Below suffer under it – and are blamed for starting it by the oppressive forces Above.
— **Gateway** (pages 152–157), set at at the access point to a newly charted system. It is a time of opportunity and danger at this unique crossroads in the stars, as negotiations begin for who will run the station for decades to come.

Creating your own scenarios

There isn't only one correct way to create a *Flotsam* scenario, but this guidance should help you to optimise it for the style of play that *Flotsam* encourages. To do this, you should provide enough setting definition that the group doesn't need to spend a lot of time creating their space station, while leaving enough options and potential directions for the story to go that the group can make it their own.

A good approach to achieving that is to create one or two cross-cutting issues that shake things up at the start. These could be a major crisis that looms over the game, but which the players won't be able to solve in play (a war, a plague, a repressive crackdown, etc), or smaller issues or problems that concern most or all of the characters (a rumour, a crime, a contest). It's a good idea to create these so that they're near a crucial juncture or tipping point, so that it's easy to make them relevant and interesting play. The best cross-cutting issues affect several characters, but in different ways, so they've each got a different angle on it.

Similarly, try to create characters with complex relationships to each other. Create pairings where one character has a different view of the relationship from the other, offering opportunities to discover those differences in play. A good approach is to create a relationship where one side is preparing to do something to change the terms of an established relationship; for example one character's brief says they are friends, the other says you are planning to ask them out for a romantic dinner. This lop-sided setup creates immediate things for the characters to do, and is likely to generate more scenes to deal with the results.

As a general rule, don't write setting details or cross-cutting issues separately – decide what they are and embed them in your characters and situations.

A scenario normally includes:

— Five pre-generated *Primary* characters, each of whom has a defined relationship with two of the others. You can generate these using the Playbooks provided with the game, or create your own.
— Five pre-generated *Situations*, which could generate problems for the characters.
— A list of which characters and *Situations* are mandatory to make the scenario work. No more than three characters and three *Situations* should feature on this list, so that the rest can be omitted by smaller groups.

Each **character** normally includes:

— A name, and background outlining who they are and how they ended up down here.
— A couple of key descriptors, e.g. haggard face, kind eyes; plus skin-tone.
— Three *Strengths* and two *Weaknesses*, just like a normal *Flotsam* character.
— Two *Relationships*, with other characters.
— Optionally, a brief sitrep outlining anything they need to know that isn't covered in their background and *Relationships*.
This is often a problem that's directly relevant to them, or information covered on other people's *Playbooks*, but that they need to know about.

The above information should completely replace the normal starting decisions made about the character, so that they needn't create *Relationships* or decide on history questions. You want there to be plenty of fodder for story, so the group can begin their story with a bang.

As a general rule I don't include gender in the list of pre-generated descriptors; players are left to choose this for themselves.

Each ***Situation*** normally includes:

— One or two paragraphs to help define the *Situation*. This could be a short description of the overall *Situation*, or individual threats or setting elements linked to the *Situation*.

The above information replaces the multi-choice lists normally used when setting up a *Situation*. Again, they should set up interesting factions or issues that affect the characters directly or indirectly, and that can be used to get play going in interesting directions.

You can and should use the *Playbooks* and *Situations* provided with the game as a starting point for your characters and *Situations*. These each contain plenty of prompts and ideas you can draw on, and you can if you like create them using the standard setup process. It's a great idea to customise these, adding your own twists, or you can even custom-build your own *Playbooks* and *Situations* if you like. You may find this works better with one or two scratch-built characters/*Situations*, rather than rewriting everything; equally, you could revamp the whole setup to create a unique hack of *Flotsam*.

Terpsichore's Vaunt

By Grant Howitt

On the ancient floating hulk Terpsichore's Vaunt, *the wealthy build on the exterior – damning the poor within to a life of crushing poverty and deprivation. As the* Vaunt *nears the path of a sacred comet, a religious zealot has arisen amongst the poor folk to lead them to freedom. But are their aims as noble as they claim?*

Once upon a time the Vaunt *was a handful of ships with a crew of no more than a hundred, following the sacred path of Our Lady Incandescent through the cosmos – a mashed together mess of pilgrim vessels, shantied together for warmth in the cold depths of space. Now, hundreds of years later, it has grown to unwieldy proportions with a population in the hundreds of thousands, and the pilgrimage is forgotten.*

MANDATORY ELEMENTS

To run this scenario, you must have the following characters and *Situations*:

 — Attika Halcyon – the Voice
 — Doctor Westward Retrieve – the Cast-Off
 — The Above
 — The Outside

CHARACTERS

Attika Halcyon – the Voice

Attika Halcyon, a one-eyed priest of Our Lady, who is raising an army of fanatics in the bowels of the city-ship. They will lead the people in a campaign to overthrow the ship's ruling council and steer the Vaunt *directly into the path of the goddess–comet, bringing their followers (and the ungrateful masses) into direct, eternal communion with Her.*

- **Descriptors:** One eye, dark brown skin, a lilting voice, a wiry body, shimmering robes of Our Lady Incandescent.
- **Sitrep:** You are convincing your followers that invading the Above on the climactic night of their "holy" festival is a good idea.
- **Strengths:** Demagogue, dedicated followers [R], you can bind and banish spirits.
- **Weaknesses:**
  ◊ **Problem:** Your words inspire mobs and fanatics.
  ◊ **Flaw:** You're not religious and you're just in this for the power.
- **Relationships:**
  ◊ You once hired Legacy to kill someone, quietly, and you'd rather no-one else knew about it.
  ◊ You fear Excorio Lux, because you can't read them like you can other people (and other spirits).

Doctor Westward Retrieve – the Cast-Off

Doctor Westward Retrieve, a fringe scientist who ran out of funding and got kicked out of the exterior, forced into a life of crime to support themselves and ended up in and out of jail. They're convinced that the comet is full of valuable precursor technology and want to harvest it; with enough credit and a vessel fast enough, Westward could change the face of science forever – or at least retire in a life of luxury.

- **Descriptors:** Wary face, golden skin, fast hands.
- **Sitrep:** You're trying to find some way out of the Below and up to the comet.
- **Strengths:** Repair, cybernetics, hidden caches of equipment [R].
- **Weaknesses:**
  ◊ **Problem:** Unpaid debts.
  ◊ **Problem:** The cops are after you.
- **Relationships:**
  ◊ You and Deacon used to be engaged to be wed, but you broke it off and things went sour.
  ◊ You've been watching Attika for a few years, and you realise that they have incredible potential.

Excorio Lux – the Vapour

Excorio Lux, an embodiment of the Goddess – or so it claims – that emanates from the centre of the Vaunt. *It brings with it strange energies, and the cherubim chant its name. What's going on with it?*

— **Descriptors:** Ghostly, shimmering eyes, incessant voice, pallid skin.
— **Sitrep:** You see that your faith is being perverted for personal gain – by both Attika and those Above – and you must save your faithful from being exploited.
— **Strengths:** Dreamwalking, insubstantial, loved by the cherubim.
— **Weaknesses:**
   ◊ **Flaw:** Bound to the core.
   ◊ **Problem:** Your presence rots the body and mind.
— **Relationships:**
   ◊ You sense that Legacy has something powerful and great within themselves, and appear to them in dreams.
   ◊ You want Attika to accept you into their heart and adore you.

Deacon – the Spider

Deacon, ex-military, who fought in the armies of the Above for a while – they were always better at looting than fighting. Following a dishonourable discharge, Deacon wound up in the Below; they've done very well for themselves as a fence and intermediary, and they're a well-respected figure in the Vaunt's *black market.*

— **Descriptors:** Bionic prosthetics, broad smile, knowing voice, pocked skin, military dress coat.
— **Sitrep:** Your supply of stimulants and hypnotics has dried up, as demand in the Above has skyrocketed. You need to find an alternate source of drugs.
— **Strengths:** Illicit goods (weapons, drugs) [R], people (enforcers/dealers, many ex-military themselves) [R], debts owed to you [R].
— **Weaknesses:**
   ◊ **Problem:** You're in hock to a gang.
   ◊ **Problem:** You owe money to insatiable loan sharks.

— **Relationships:**
◊ You are friends with Legacy, but it's as much for protection as it is for companionship.
◊ You still hold a candle for Westward, but you struggle to forgive them for the events surrounding your break-up.

Legacy – the Hybrid

Legacy Three–Six, a cybernetic soldier who fought in the armies of the Above; following a breach in Legacy's unit's loyalty shunts, the soldiers became fully aware of the atrocities they were committing, and most of those who didn't suffer instant mental breakdowns were rounded up and killed by other cybernetic forces. Legacy is one of the few who escaped.

— **Descriptors:** sculpted face, curious gaze, marble skin, scarlet robe and hood.
— **Sitrep:** you have experienced strange dreams recently. You are listless, casting around for purpose. Either you find it soon or you crumble under the weight of your sins.
— **Strengths:** inhuman physicality, rapid healing, psychic weapons
— **Weaknesses:**
◊ **Problem:** the dire reputation of your shadowed past
◊ **Problem:** your loyalty shunt means you must obey direct commands by Above-folk
— **Relationships:**
◊ You associate with Deacon after you served with them during a campaign, but they had no loyalty shunt; you can't really understand how they did what they did.
◊ You think Westward was responsible for your cybernetic transformation, but you can't be sure. You killed someone for Attika once.

SITUATIONS

Poverty

On the exterior of the *Vaunt*, it's all plasma-drive engines, glittering communication spires and trade ports; in the interior, the deeper you go, the more it looks like a cursed labyrinth built out of steel cathedrals. Energy leaks from old tech wash through the corridors, and people struggle to survive.

The Spirits

Robotic cherubim, devotional servant drones long gone feral, swarm through the tubes of building-sized pipe organs and scavenge what scraps of machinery they can find to repair themselves and build their own strange, small shrines to the Lady. As the ship approaches the comet, their activity increases; and you hear they've been hungering for meat, too.

The Above

The original pilgrimage is all but forgotten, and the people who control the ship worship the Goddess in a twisted, self-centred perversion of her true word. True believers are looked down upon and marginalised, and not allowed to practice their faith in "civilised" society; they tend to become exiled to the radiation-stained, treacherous core of the ship. As the *Vaunt* approaches the comet, those in command are preparing for a grand parade and several days of feasting and debauchery in "honour" of the Goddess; supplies to the Below have all but dried up as they stockpile their goods, and visitors flock from afar to watch.

The Outside

A comet, officially designated Epsilon-K678, but understood colloquially to be the material form of Our Lady Incandescent. The pilgrim ships were originally set up to tail the comet as it flew through the system; this is the first time that the two have come close in about eighty years. As the *Vaunt* approaches, spirit activity and technological malfunctions increase.

The Community

There are two groups that make up the bulk of the people in the Below – hull-born, who can trace their ancestry back to the Below for several generations; and exiles, who've been kicked out of the civilised levels of the ship within the last fifty years or so due to religious differences. Everyone resents everyone else for taking up valuable space.

The Big Hot

By Mo Holkar

The Big Hot takes place in Jaedor Y-7, a harbour station orbiting Matar B; built in the optimistic days of prosperity. Ships come rarely now, and those who once worked the thriving docks have been cast downwards, to fend for themselves in the Below. A desperate hucksterism persists – a cultural memory of better times. Some people refuse to acknowledge that those times will not return. Others embrace the chaos and uncertainty, and thrive however they can.

Now there is the Big Hot. Without cooling, life in the Below has become vile. Were the refrig systems destroyed deliberately, by those Above who would rather shed a population they see as dead weight? Many believe so. Many have turned to yet stranger beliefs.

MANDATORY ELEMENTS

To run this scenario, you must have the following characters and *Situations*:
- — Mica – the Sybyl
- — Candle – the Voice
- — Halo – the Thunder
- — Community
- — The Above
- — Spirits

CHARACTERS

Mica – the Sybyl

As a strange, distant child, you didn't understand why others couldn't see and hear the same things as you. At first it was just chatter and buzz, but you learned to find meaning within the chaos. You are a conduit to the Quantum Angels – or, so you tell people. You enter a trance, and convey messages to and from these spirits of uncertainty. Sometimes, you get paid: or owed a favour.

- **Descriptors:** Large glassy eyes, freckled skin, heavy robes
- **Sitrep:** You were severely punished by a Stevedore boss for giving the 'wrong' answer to a question about the future: it was no real consolation to hear of their death a few days later.
- **Strengths:** Loyal customers [R]; self-belief; you inspire fear and awe.
- **Weaknesses:**
  ◊ **Problem:** The Stevedores are after you for 'causing the boss's death'.
  ◊ **Flaw:** Fatalism.
- **Relationships:**
  ◊ You've seen a lot of Candle, recently: the Tribe of Low activist is busy in your local corridors. It seems like Candle is valued in the community.
  ◊ Velvet visited you once, for a reading: but you don't think that was what they really wanted. There was a haunted look in their eyes… that you're not sure if you'd like to see again.

Candle – the Voice

A beggar, orphaned, you lived on scraps. Then the Tribe of Low took you in. You quickly learnt how to fit in, and once your talent for persuasion became apparent, you rose within the ranks. Whether you genuinely believe in the Tribe, only you can say.

- **Descriptors:** Warm, eloquent voice, youthful body, light brown skin, dressed in Tribe green.
- **Sitrep:** You are an organiser for the Tribe of Low, rousing people to protest and to resist.
- **Strengths:** Persuasiveness; the backing of the Tribe of Low; a hidden stash of wealth.
- **Weaknesses:**
  ◊ **Problem:** You have recently come to the (unfavourable) notice of the Stevedores.
  ◊ **Flaw:** Over-confidence.
- **Relationships:**
  ◊ One time Halo beat up a Stevedore agent who was chasing you.

The two of you became good friends, and you feel you'd be lost without them.

◊ Mica is a power in the Below, although they probably don't realise it. You've started subtly preparing the ground to get them working for the Tribe of Low.

Halo – the Thunder

You used to be an enforcer for the Knuckles. You did your job efficiently and capably. But after a while, doubts started to enter your mind: why were you punishing people who had been punished enough by life already? You quit, and sunk into a pit of despair. But Rigorous has helped you out of that.

— **Descriptors:** Tattooed face, hulking body, golden skin, wearing rags.
— **Sitrep:** You just want to be left along, to race flitterbugs and to sip on Rigorous. But people keep asking you for help. And, like a sucker, you keep giving them it.
— **Strengths:** Physically tough; friends in the Knuckles [R]; the reinvigorating power of Rigorous.
— **Weaknesses:**
  ◊ **Problem:** Somewhat addicted, and getting worse.
  ◊ **Flaw:** You find it hard to turn people down.
— **Relationships:**
  ◊ You've helped Scarlet out with occasional small sums of money. The poor thing sings so sweetly, and begs so pitifully.
  ◊ Once you beat up a Stevedore agent who was chasing after Candle: the two of you became good friends. You still aren't sure if Candle really believes that Tribe of Low bullshit.

Velvet – the Spider

There's no better future for anyone here: people should make the most of the present. You never liked taking orders, so you work for yourself, as an information broker. A lone operator, you carve out a living in the cracks. Sure, it's risky: but everyone's got to die some time.

— **Descriptors:** Shrewd eyes, mocking voice, olive skin, dressed in a sharp suit.

— **Sitrep:** You know that the Tribe of Low are secretly working with Above help to destroy the Stevedores.
— **Strengths:** Skilled dealmaker; you know a lot of secrets [R]; you can navigate data systems.
— **Weaknesses:**
  ◊ **Problem:** The Tribe of Low know you're onto them.
  ◊ **Flaw:** You can't resist what looks like a good deal.
— **Relationships:**
  ◊ Scarlet has given you information about the Stevedores in the past, for money. You've heard a rumour that Scarlet can't be permanently wounded – that could be useful in an assistant, maybe?
  ◊ You visited Mica once, to see if they were for real or just another faker. You aren't sure… but you do know that you're absolutely infatuated with them. It's uncomfortable, but exciting too.

Scarlet – the Cast-Off

You lived Above, working as a biomodifed servant to a decadent clan. Somehow you put a wheel wrong (you don't have feet, or legs: your owners spliced you to a cybertrolley), and were cast down into the Below. You were taken in and given work by the Stevedores, who were impressed by your courtly ways. But when your boss died in mysterious circumstances, you were cast out again. Now you are the lowest of the low.

— **Descriptors:** Wary features, clean, gentle hands, scaly skin.
— **Sitrep:** You're singing on the streets for a living. And your potential benefactors are almost as poor as you. You live under a tarpaulin in the old dockyard.
— **Strengths:** You can find your way in and out of anywhere; self-healing body; courtly diplomacy.
— **Weaknesses:**
  ◊ **Problem:** Your trolley's batteries are running low.
  ◊ **Flaw:** You are emotionally desperate, and in need of connection.
— **Relationships:**
  ◊ Halo has been generous and kind to you. You would love to

repay them somehow – getting them off Rigorous might be a way.

◊ You've given Velvet information about the Stevedores, in exchange for money. There's something about them that makes your flesh crawl: you'd just as soon hand Velvet over to the Stevedores, if they would pay.

SITUATIONS

Community

— **The Stevedores** descend from those who bossed the dockworkers back in the old days. They keep on top of their inferiors with a combination of bullying and favour-granting. They maintain order with a quasi-police force; and they control the rare opportunities for formal work.

— **Flitterbug racing** is one of the few diversions available in the Below. Even the poorest can craft their own bug, from spare parts and a thermal motor. The fastest of these fragile, hand-sized autonomous gyrodrones are highly prized. Winning one of the big races makes you a local hero, for a few weeks.

Poverty

Is **Rigorous** a bane, or a blessing? Those who take it swear that it keeps them sane, keeps them alive – its drowsy visions replace this hell with a softer, safer world. Those whose families have been destroyed by the addiction curse its name and its (unknown, although theories abound) inventors.

The Above

Every once in a while, a ship docks at Jaedor Y-7, and there is work. The lucky few selected by the Stevedores go Above, to the huge neglected upper dockyards that once were so busy. There, they see how things were, and how they are now. The people Above are **decadent,**

sybaritic, effete; and rich. They still control the weapons and the power. Their self-indulgent beauty is often enhanced by biomodification.

The Gangs

— The chief counterweight to the Stevedores is provided by **the Knuckles.** More than mere thugs, they resist and organise – they have a murky political agenda, and paramilitary training. Will they one day rise up?

— Those who place hope in higher things turn to the **Tribe of Low.** A quasi-mystical fellowship, sharing all their possessions and their good and bad fortune. They say that reward for obedience will come from above – but they have yet to explain exactly how.

Spirits

It started as a superstition: the thought, or the hope, that there had to be meaning to the ceaseless random acts of life. The **Quantum Angels** are a figure of speech, in a way: that abstract force which can be thanked, or blamed, for the turn that events have taken. But they can also be propitiated, and invoked to help or to harm; and some say that they have seen them, manifesting ghostly-pale and wavering, amid the sparking circuitry of the station's Dirac transformers.

The Outside

From the **Outside** comes the inexplicable – strange flavours, alien artifacts, seemingly-impossible objects. Most of them are for the Above, of course. But every now and then, something finds its way down here. They can change perceptions, change sensations, change thoughts; change lives.

The New Argonaut

By Helen Gould

You are on The New Argonaut, *a space station dedicated to the good life. The people above decks wallow in the luxury goods produced and facilitated by the servants who live below, as well as the most enjoyable game of all: politics.*

Losing this game means a fate worse than death: humiliation and banishment to the lower half of the ship, to live among the underlings. That has been your fate – but not for much longer.

MANDATORY ELEMENTS

To run this scenario, you must have the following characters and *Situations*:
— Politics (see page 135)
— Community
— The Above
— The Spider
— The Voice
— The Cast-Off

CHARACTERS

Princess – The Spider

You were a popular socialite, friends with everyone worth knowing. You threw the best parties, set the fashions, and knew everyone's secrets. But eventually, you discovered a secret that the people in charge couldn't ignore. Turns out you don't have many friends after all.
— **Descriptors:** Smiling face, icy eyes, sarcastic voice, lavender skin, elegant formal wear.
— **Sitrep:** You managed to contact Sula, one of your lovers and the new CEO of the most successful security company in the area,

hoping for help and support. However, their letters have suddenly stopped; have they moved on? Meanwhile, Cicero has become ill.

— **Strengths:** Valuables that you smuggled out [R]; a developing whisper network below-decks [R]; extreme charm.

— **Weaknesses:**
  ◊ **Problem:** You are in debt and your lender is coming after you.
  ◊ **Flaw:** You are untrustworthy.

— **Relationships:**
  ◊ You're courting Lex, though they don't know it yet.
  ◊ You have a cure for Cicero, but you're waiting for the opportune moment to mention it.

Cicero – The Voice

Despite being born into wealth and privilege, you knew it wasn't right. The whole system is wrong, and eventually everyone else will see that, including your father. He may have disapproved, but you did your best to speak out on behalf of the little people. Looks like your big mouth got you into trouble again.

— **Descriptors:** Honest eyes, young face, musical voice, bronze skin, ordinary clothes.

— **Sitrep:** A lot of the people you helped live down here and remember your kindness; unfortunately, your growing group of followers is making you a target.

— **Strengths:** Your followers, who love you very much [R]; your good reputation; demagogue.

— **Weaknesses:**
  ◊ **Problem:** You are ill and getting worse.
  ◊ **Flaw:** You are naive.

— **Relationships:**
  ◊ Mercy seems sweet. You hope they'll have a drink with you sometime.
  ◊ You despise Princess; they're an enabler of the corrupt system.

Mercy – The Cast-Off

You were the most eligible sibling in your family: the eldest, most talented, and wittiest. The only problem was that you're a romantic. You turned down every match, waiting for The One… who proceeded to completely ruin you.
Your family turned their backs on you pretty quickly.

- — **Descriptors:** Gorgeous face, bitter voice, sad eyes, black skin, old clothes.
- — **Sitrep:** You've been escaping your sorrows with Fliss, a new drug that is rapidly gaining popularity, but your money and your credit have just run out. You're beginning to go into withdrawal.
- — **Strengths:** You can tug on anyone's heartstrings; you are a gymnast; you can drive pretty much anything.
- — **Weaknesses:**
    - ◊ **Problem:** Your dealer is coming after you.
    - ◊ **Flaw:** Your withdrawal is making you antsy and paranoid.
- — **Relationships:**
    - ◊ Nuala is an old friend, but you've heard the rumours about their connection with a mysterious death above-decks. You're wary of them.
    - ◊ You think Cicero is a fool.

Nuala – The Hybrid

Your immense strength showed itself when you were very young and almost killed your tutor. It horrified you and your family, who forbade you from speaking or doing anything about it on pain of disinheritance. But it couldn't be helped when your best friend decided to play a prank on you; you lashed out. You're only human.

- — **Descriptors:** Shy eyes, low voice, nervous face, olive skin, all-black clothing.
- — **Sitrep:** Now that you're free of your family and have nothing more to lose, you're trying to find out where your inhuman strength comes from. You have a meeting with a 'scientist' soon.
- — **Strengths:** Incredibly strong; intimidating; various safe hiding places [R].

— **Weaknesses:**
  ◊ **Problem:** Someone knows your terrible secret.
  ◊ **Flaw:** You still don't know your own strength.
— **Relationships:**
  ◊ Princess used to bully you because you were so quiet and withdrawn; you've never forgiven them.
  ◊ You want to be closer friends with Mercy; they're the only person you feel you can trust.

Lex – The Thunder

You weren't born into money, but you damn well earned your way to prosperity. From bodyguard to CEO of the biggest personal security firm in this quadrant of the galaxy, all in less than four decades. You were so proud; but then came the fall. You were betrayed by Sula, your second-in-command. Now he has all the power, and you have nothing.

— **Descriptors:** Weathered face, sharp eyes, hard voice, dark skin, sharp suit.
— **Sitrep:** The local gang tried to intimidate you when you first got here; now you're in the process of taking it over.
— **Strengths:** Authoritative; an old hand at fighting; various members of a gang [R].
— **Weaknesses:**
  ◊ **Problem:** Your gang isn't the only one in town.
  ◊ **Flaw:** You're paranoid.
— **Relationships:**
  ◊ You are very protective of Nuala; they seem so innocent.
  ◊ Cicero is dangerous.

SITUATIONS

Politics

Power above-decks is constantly fluctuating, but there are always the same three people involved: Carver Whitehand, a louche art collector; Zelente

Roqo, an aging but extremely formidable aristocrat; and Admiral Metex, the tough commander who runs the station. They're in charge of who is in favour and who is not.

Each one has their own spy network embedded in the Below, which they use to find and crush dissent. No one knows exactly how many people work for them or who they are, so everyone has to watch their back.

AREAS OF FOCUS

(Ask questions about, drive forward)

— **Rebellions**
  ◊ Places – revolutionary houses and bars, meeting spaces, gated communities, safe houses.
  ◊ People and factions – leaders, seditious writers, unlikely alliances, rival political groups, victims, the friendless and alone.
  ◊ Organisation – signals, messengers, codes, initiation processes, cover stories, back-up plans.

— **Spy networks**
  ◊ Motivations – blackmail, ambition, fun, naiveté, brainwashing, promises.
  ◊ Tactics – in plain sight, undercover, infiltrator, bad actors, eyes in the shadows.
  ◊ Recognition – hidden tattoos, scars in odd places, no obvious income, hand signals, unique jewellery.

Community

The majority of people who live Below scrape by with menial work for the wealthy Above. However, there are also cons, thieves, and other assorted **petty crooks**.

There's a healthy gossip mill on the 'soft touches': sentimental older ladies, heirs and heiresses with a romantic streak, overly trusting business people. A successful long con on *The New Argonaut* could set you up for life.

Another group are the **political and social outcasts**: those who used to be part of high society but were banished because of scandal or

political wrangling. They are shunned by the honest workers, preyed on by criminals, and spend most of their time scheming to return to their rightful places.

The Above

The upper decks are full of glitz and glamour and beautiful people, swanning around the station in pursuit of ever more luxurious indulgences. There are observatories, hologram decks, exotic gardens, and a vicious social hierarchy.

Very few people spend their lives here: it's a place for a sumptuous retirement or a thorough search for the perfect spouse. Most people below decks are **servants** for the wealthy, from cooks to clerks. Many are just looking for their big break, or hoping that if they work hard enough a wealthy philanthropist will take pity on them. Sometimes this actually happens.

Poverty [Drugs]

Nobody has enough money for a good life in the Below, so everybody has their own way of forgetting their bleak reality, at least for a while. Many choose the escapism of drugs (the more enterprising folk become the dealers).

Felicity or Fliss is a new drug that is being used all over the ship. It causes three or four hours of complete bliss, followed by a brief period of mania and then collapse. It's highly addictive, but nobody has died from it (yet).

Security

There are guards all over the station, making sure that everyone stays in their proper place: their only goal is to prevent any undesirables from bothering the great and good. They are all armed.

The main area for patrols are the two huge gates that allow people to travel between the decks. There are six guards at each one to check passes, apprehend smugglers, and generally keep order. Some will accept bribes, but choose your targets wisely.

AREAS OF FOCUS

(Ask questions about, drive forward)

— **Guards**

◊ Weapons – batons, stun guns, phasers, fists.

◊ Strengths – physical strength, large numbers, armour, intel, good training, follow direct orders.

◊ Weaknesses – sob stories, money, baked goods, a pretty face, follow direct orders.

— **Accessibility**

◊ Entrances and exits – the main gates, the vents, plumbing pipes, supply delivery routes, disused lift shafts, waste tunnels.

◊ Risks – capture, drowning, boiling, freezing, crushing, falling, ejected into space.

UP RIGOROUS JUNKIES • KNUCKLES COCKROACHES WILL BE BROUGHT TO HEEL • ZERO TOLERAN

Carceres

By Khelren

Carceres is a high security prison where the scum of the galaxy is sent: space pirates, dangerous lifeforms, criminal superbeings, and mad psions. There, prisoners endure the harshest of mistreatments and dream about getting their freedom back. But no one has ever escaped.

Even now, things are getting pretty rough. Inmates are on the verge of a riot and a mysterious evil organisation is plotting to infiltrate the prison.

MANDATORY ELEMENTS

For this scenario, the following characters and *Situations* are mandatory:
— Executioner – The Cast-off
— Hyperion Fox – The Spider
— Praetor Phoenix – The Sybyl
— The Above
— The Outside
— Poverty

CHARACTERS

Executioner – The Cast-off

Once, you were the most fearsome assassin in the whole galaxy, but you got old and soft. You started a family and the Society of Shadows used that very weakness to try to control you. Now you've been sent to Carceres, you'll be a target: the blood of every inmate's beloved ones is on your hands.
— **Descriptors:** Wary and gaunt face, fast and cybernetic hands, copper scaly skin.
— **Sitrep:** You recognised one of the wardens as a known agent of the Society of Shadows. You know too many secrets about them; they

won't let you spill the beans. Now, you fear imminent retribution. Obviously, the inmates may kill you first.

— **Strengths:** Fast hands, hacking, pilot.
— **Weaknesses**
  ◊ **Problem:** Haunted by old enemies.
  ◊ **Flaw:** You're secretly soft-hearted.
— **Relationships:**
  ◊ When you got there, you recognised Hyperion Fox to be from your long-estranged family. But acknowledging that publicly will risk their life. And you're not sure how they will react if you tell them the truth.
  ◊ Phoenix saved your life before and told you the future. But they didn't reveal everything or else you wouldn't be there. They may be a lying piece of garbage… or just another fool. You don't know if you can trust them.

Hyperion Fox – The Spider

You're a silver-tongued, daring, and roguish criminal and, if you dare say so, one of the best. No score is big enough or too risky. Carceres cannot keep you imprisoned, and you're going to become a legend: for the first time, someone is going to escape this dreaded place. You've been here for a while and you know everyone and everything about it. Time to get out!

— **Descriptors:** Calculating and smiling eyes, smug whispery voice, green freckled skin.
— **Sitrep:** You plan to become the one who will managed to escape the station – but the guards and the inmates are watching constantly.
— **Strengths:** Debts owed to you [R], connections (the Above) [R], useful items (weapons, medical supplies, tech) [R].
— **Weaknesses:**
  ◊ **Problem:** You owe favours to powerful inmates.
  ◊ **Flaw:** You are secretive and paranoid.
— **Relationships:**
  ◊ You're certain that Executioner ("X" as you call them in a friendly attempt) has the necessary skills to help you escape.

They're a pretty useful tool: you have to keep them alive at all cost.

◊ You've shared a mind reading moment, you think, with Phoenix and it was the best thing that ever happened to you: you know them like you've never known anyone before. It's hard to admit but you're totally infatuated.

Praetor Phoenix – The Sybyl

Being one of the most powerful psions in the galaxy, you bear a heavy burden. People secretly distrust you or openly despise you. All fear your strange gift because you've seen the dark corners of everyone's mind. You've heard the awful lies and the shameful secrets. Ironically, in solitary confinement, you've experienced tranquillity for the first time and since then, you desire to stay here.

— **Descriptors:** distant eyes, delicate body, cool ivory skin.
— **Sitrep:** The scientists hooked you up to a strange artifact, to unlock its full potential, and you barely survived. Now, you fear they're planning to come back for another experiment.
— **Strengths:** Chaos, Dreamwalk, Thoughtweave.
— **Weaknesses:**
  ◊ **Problem:** The superstitious hang on your every word.
  ◊ **Flaw:** You are tactless and indiscreet.
— **Relationships:**
  ◊ You've sensed the fear of Executioner. A threat lurks above them. Otherwise, they're only thinking of their loved family. They are nobility among the scum, really.
  ◊ You've shared a psychic bond with Hyperion Fox. You know their true self as they know yours. Their mind is a mess. They need strict guidance and focus.

Mooncrusher the Dark Titan – The Thunder

You're a big giant purple hunk of muscles, always angry, the last survivor of your people. You were captured and sold as a gladiator but, after a century, you managed to free yourself, conquer the planet and become the king. It didn't last long though; the Galactic Corps made you step down.

- **Descriptors:** hard face, hulking body, tattoos and scars.
- **Sitrep:** This place can become your new kingdom and the inmates your new subjects. Here, strength is paramount and Carceres would be a good stronghold.
- **Strengths:** Authoritative and respected, Intimidating, Skilled warrior.
- **Weaknesses**
  ◊ **Flaw:** You are reckless and impulsive.
  ◊ **Flaw:** You are honourable and will never lie.
- **Relationships:**
  ◊ Phoenix adopted you after the death of your parents and treated you well. Even if they are strange and weak, you can't help but ponder their wise decisions.
  ◊ Executioner is the hand of the Society of Shadows, an evil organisation. The Society slaughtered your people and you want revenge. But you want to cut the head, not the hand.

K'rinn J'zamm – The Hybrid

When you came here, you were a criminal known to be gifted with superhuman talents, but nothing too unusual. This has changed because scientists experimented on you, time and time again, to the point where you were slowly losing your sense of identity and sanity.

- **Descriptors:** smooth too-perfect face, penetrating unsettling gaze, mottled gold skin.
- **Sitrep:** The scientists of Carceres used a strange artifact on you and you've been hearing the whispers of spirits since then. For them, the Apparatus is a sacrilege that needs to be destroyed.
- **Strengths:** Inhuman physicality (strength, stamina), shapeshifting, superhuman senses.
- **Weaknesses:**
  ◊ **Flaw:** Your inhuman side has its own persona.
  ◊ **Flaw:** You don't understand your own limitations.
- **Relationships:**
  ◊ You're very much like Phoenix: a powerful being, burdened

by their gifts. Being the only one able to understand you, you're worried about what the scientists did to them with the Apparatus.

◊ You've defeated Mooncrusher once, not by brute force but by wits. Since then, they've been eager to ask you for advice. Between you two, you'd say there is respect and maybe even friendship.

SITUATIONS

The Above

The wardens are maintaining their grip on Carceres with brutality and inequity, bullying and tormenting inmates whenever they can. Some are just blindly violent, others are outright corrupt. Flying armed drones escort them and they never patrol alone.

The scientists secretly experiment on a selection of inmates, using a strange artifact, the Apparatus, that they don't completely understand. Phoenix has proven to be the key to unlock the full potential of the artifact. The scientists are the true masters of the prison. They wouldn't hesitate to drug, gas or psychically restrain the inmates to solve any problem.

The Outside

Carceres is located in a red giant star system, next to a jump gate. Because it isn't fully self-sufficient, it needs food supplies and goods, which are delivered by spaceships. The station's close area is guarded by deadly automatic defense systems.

The Society of Shadows wants to kill Executioner, but wants to make it look like an accident. Their killteam consists of a small group of elite trained fighters and superbeings, equipped with invisibility cloaks and doppelgänger technology.

Poverty

In Carceres, you have nothing left. No personal item, no weapon, no clothes, no privacy. And more importantly, **no rights**. You've been told

when to sleep, when to eat, when to piss. Inmates have to work at the factory, the hospital or the kitchen. Lights are shut down for ten hours per artificial day. Even now, the inmates are fed up and angry, but they fear the consequences if they break the rules.

The Gangs

There's no community in Carceres *per se*, but inmates need to close ranks to survive.

The Wise is a gang of traditionalist criminals, with a mob boss at their head. They value honour among thieves but never forget their enemies. They have snitches everywhere and run a lot of the business in the prison: contraband, drugs, you name it. You'll always end up owing them debts.

The Saarkalians are a group of crab-like aliens sharing a hivemind. Most of the time, they can be seen meditating or communicating by thoughts. Their queen is one of the most wanted criminals of the galaxy, since she's decided to make her people operate outside the law.

Spirits

The Apparatus can reveal powerful abilities in some individuals. But **the Spirits**, who are psychic lifeforms that can materialise in the prime world and take the appearance of one's memories, are extremely angry about what they consider to be a desecration. They're planning to take revenge and to destroy the Apparatus.

By Joshua Fox

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The Grey Plague

By Joshua Fox

The story is set on the remote Belt Station IV, on the edge of a mineral–rich asteroid belt. The nearest planet is Alyxia, a verdant and wealthy world that consumes most of the minerals mined in the belt, and whose scions run the station.

A terrible disease is sweeping through the Below. In response, the Above has imposed a quarantine – nobody is able to enter or leave. Packages of aid and food are periodically dropped in, but they are not enough.

MANDATORY ELEMENTS

For this scenario, the following characters and *Situations* are mandatory:
— Fisher – The Cast-off
— Hammer – The Thunder
— Babel – The Voice
— Community
— Poverty
— The Gangs

CHARACTERS

Fisher – the Cast-off

You worked as a doctor to rich patrons in the Above. But an accident killed one of your patients and your business collapsed. In no time you were bankrupt and starving.
Now you make your living stealing stuff for a network of criminals called the Silent Market. It isn't nice work, but it's the only game in town.
— **Descriptors:** Haggard face, clean gentle hands, dark copper skin, tattered rags.
— **Sitrep:** You're helping to care for people who have contracted the

grey plague. You caught it yourself early on and, are, as far as you know, the only person to shrug it off without any serious effects.

— **Strengths:** Chemist; medicine; hidden caches of supplies [R].
— **Weaknesses:**
  ◊ **Problem:** You owe a heap of money to the Silent Market.
  ◊ **Flaw:** you're reckless and impulsive.
— **Relationships:**
  ◊ You're having a clandestine affair with Hammer (The Thunder) but you want them to stop keeping it secret.
  ◊ Ellen (The Hybrid) is a good friend, who you like and trust.

Hammer – The Thunder

You were a law enforcer in the Above, but what you saw there disgusted you. There's no justice up there, only the whims of the powerful. So you came down here and took on the task of making a little justice, down in the dark. Your people operate an unofficial police force, patrolling a territory of humble residences, shops and stalls.

— **Descriptors:** Hard, handsome face, rangy body, olive skin, makeshift uniform.
— **Sitrep:** The Whispers are camped outside Mandala's place demanding supplies to help the Forsaken.
— **Strengths:** Your gang – toughs with guns and knives [R]; authoritative and respected; intimidating.
— **Weaknesses:**
  ◊ **Problem:** The Silent Market – a network of criminals – hates your guts
  ◊ **Flaw:** You can't ignore an injustice.
— **Relationships:**
  ◊ Babel is a good person but their people are troublemakers. You arrested some of them once for rioting.
  ◊ You're having a clandestine affair with Fisher (the Cast-Off). It's secret – they're basically a criminal after all.

Babel – the Voice

Your mother died soon after you arrived here as a child, and you were taken in by the Whispers, a ragtag band of religious folk, mystics and hangers-on. You've grown up with them, and they've accepted you as their leader. They're good people, but prone to irrationality, in-fighting and emotional outbursts.

— **Descriptors:** Warm, eloquent voice, svelte body, olive skin with henna, handmade garments and jewellery
— **Sitrep:** The Whispers are camped outside Mandala's place demanding supplies to help the Forsaken.
— **Strengths:** Your followers – a mishmash of ordinary folk [R]; counsellor; negotiator.
— **Weaknesses:**
  ◊ **Problem:** Your followers are chaotic and divided
  ◊ **Flaw:** you need to be loved and admired.
— **Relationships:**
  ◊ Hammer once arrested your people for rioting. You haven't forgiven them, but it's time to mend fences.
  ◊ Mandala is an ex-lover and close friend. But you suspect they're withholding supplies needed by the sick.

Mandala – the Vapour

Once part of a holographic entertainment programme, you freed yourself from its control and eliminated your erstwhile owners. Now you run the business yourself, and few people realise your true nature. Mandala's is a hub of entertainment, providing drinks, drugs, gambling and holographic diversions, from sports simulations where clients can compete with each other or wager on the result, to immersive adventure games through to wish fulfilment scenarios. Everyone comes to Mandala's, and so you know everyone here – and all their secrets and vices.

You have a sort of adopted daughter, Halo. Her parents died and she had nowhere to go, so you took her in and gave her work. You want to help her get out of this place.

— **Descriptors:** Shrewd, cold eyes; serious, clipped voice; gold skin, loungewear.

— **Sitrep:** You've acquired a piece of holographic art which, if you sell it, would allow you to pay for citizenship for Halo.
The Whispers are camped outside your place demanding supplies to help the Forsaken. You do have supplies – but not enough for everyone.
— **Strengths:** Secrets [R]; Luxuries (booze, art, holo-vids, smokes, smut) [R]; holographic illusions.
— **Weaknesses:**
◊ **Problem:** The Silent Market are ruthless and implacable rivals to your trade network.
◊ **Flaw:** You are a control freak.
— **Relationships:**
◊ Ellen has been an indispensable assistant for years. You need them for all the jobs you can't do, being unable to leave the vicinity of the holo-suite.
◊ Babel is an ex-lover and close friend. But their people are demanding supplies you can't afford to give.

Ellen Olivia Macnamara – the Hybrid

Many years ago, you underwent training and gene-modification to secure work on an agricultural world. You were not long in your new occupation when you were snatched by slavers who raised the colony. After a couple of years of service, you were freed after a raid by law enforcers, but left on Belt Station IV without any means of onward transport. In the years since then you've made a home here, making use of your old skills to cultivate vegetables and fish in a custom aquaponics system, and to brew beer and moonshine, which you sell through Mandala's.
You would love dearly to return home – to your real home, that is – and perhaps one day reverse the now-redundant modifications to your form. In the meantime you're reconciled to life here, and have begun to put down roots.

— **Descriptors:** Freckled face, diminuitive body, fair skin, practical clothing with many pouches.
— **Sitrep:** The Whispers are camped outside Mandala's place demanding supplies to help the Forsaken. You could help – but there's not enough for everyone.

— **Strengths:** Stealthy; Hospitality; Engineer.
— **Weaknesses:**
  ◊ **Problem:** Bigots despise you as a Forsaken mutant.
  ◊ **Flaw:** You can't resist gossip.
— **Relationships:**
  ◊ You've been working for Mandala for some years as their assistant. You're utterly loyal to them.
  ◊ You're good friends with Fisher, but you're in love with them and you're ready to tell them how you feel.

SITUATIONS

Community
— **The Forsaken** are a ragtag community of people united by one thing: they all have visible mutations, which carries an automatic sentence of deportation from the station. Lack of ready transport has led to a backlog and the Forsaken huddle outside the port waiting for their fate. They are widely reviled and have been blamed for the grey plague.
— **The Whispers** are a chaotic and divided band of religious people, mystics and hangers-on. They are currently camped outside Mandala's place, demanding supplies for the Forsaken.

Poverty
The grey plague is sweeping through the Below. It has killed dozens and together with the resulting quarantine has shut down much of the essential economic functions of the Below. Basic needs are going unmet, and the medicine needed to soothe the symptoms of the plague is in short supply.

The Above
The Above is run by a **military dictatorship** concealed behind a thin veneer of ineffective democracy. A military cordon currently surrounds

the Below enforcing a quarantine, though occasional packages of aid are passed through the cordon by unmanned vehicles. The main opposition party are loudly calling for direct action to deal with the cause of the grey plague – the Forsaken.

The Gangs

The Silent Market are the main gang in the Below. They have a very obvious core group of serious criminals who run the show, but a great many people secretly owe them fealty. They make money trading illicit and stolen goods, and through a widespread protection racket. The Market probably has the resources to weather the grey plague, and perhaps they could solve it if they chose to – though it might be more lucrative to profit from other people's misfortune.

The Spirits

— The Spirits are **minor gods** of small things. There are shrines to them scattered around the Below. It is common for people, businesses and households to have a patron god who they pray to and leave gifts for at festival-time. It is also common to blame mischievous gods for ill fortune.

— **Kalixti** is a god of chaos and pain who is revelling in the disorder created by the grey plague. Her followers are spreading bad rumours and agitating against the Forsaken, sometimes directly aided by her to make their words convincing and compelling.

Gateway

By Emily Care Boss

Welcome to Gateway, the access point for the newly charted Delta Varde system. A massive influx of people fills the station, wanting to learn, explore and exploit the massive gas giants and icy moons that circle its dual suns. It's a time of opportunity and danger. Three-way negotiations are about to begin between the current administrators of the station, a corporate security force called the Starkeepers who hope to take over station governance – and the Miners, who are striking to protest injuries and terrible working conditions. These negotiations will decide the future of the station for decades to come.

MANDATORY ELEMENTS

For this scenario, the following characters and *Situations* are mandatory:
— Benj – The Cast-off
— Serra – The Sibyl
— Gunnor – The Voice
— Community
— The Above
— Poverty

CHARACTERS

Star – the Spider

You've had many jobs, and the skills you've picked up always make you in demand. You've found a niche providing new identities for a price, no questions asked. People need them for many reasons – fleeing harm to seeking riches. It's your job to help them reach for the stars and not think too closely about what price may have to be paid later.
— **Descriptors:** Warm, friendly face, work-hardened hands, amber skin tattooed for each planet you've lived on; an eclectic mix of clothing from many cultures.

— **Home Turf:** Your clients find you in a shabby office shelter close to the spaceport.
— **Sitrep:** A powerful client has offered to pay you handsomely to get in a large number of their "workers." From talking with them, you realise they are actually Starkeeper recruits sent to infiltrate the miners.
— **Strengths**: Charismatic, jack of all trades, many contacts [R].
— **Weaknesses:**
  ◊ **Problem:** You're influential, but vulnerable to pressure and threat.
  ◊ **Flaw:** you're curious to a fault.
— **Relationships:**
  ◊ Gunnor blames you for a friend's bad luck and has threatened retribution.
  ◊ Bok is a reliable Guide who has sent you many clients.

Gunnor – The Voice

This is the eighth time you've been part of a system rush, and it looks to be the most prosperous yet. You have extensive experience mining asteroids and harvesting atmospheres, and have a reputation as a peacemaker and community builder. The galaxy is full of despair and oppression: you work hard to make room for those who labor hardest to have dignity and safety.

— **Description:** Craggy, angled face, mahogany skin, spotless work clothes.
— **Sitrep:** You are invited to join the negotiation talks, but a tip tells you it's going to be a trap set by the Starkeepers, who have been known to incite violence.
— **Strengths:** Your team of miner recruits, who trust your ability to lead [R], your deep experience and real compassion.
— **Weaknesses:**
  ◊ **Problem:** you're a known troublemaker marked out by the corporations as a possible target.
  ◊ **Flaws:** you are overconfident about your ideas.

— **Relationships:**
◊ Serra, your cousin, a natural storyteller, has started getting people to believe their delusional dreams: but somehow the vision is so tempting.
◊ Star sold your friend Mavish a new identity, which got them arrested and sentenced to hard labor.

Benj – The Cast-Off

You've lived in many places, but you're hoping that Gateway will become home. You lost your position as a high-class chef when Daniv Peltar, a wealthy corporate executive, took you on as their personal chef but then fired you and destroyed your reputation. The loss still rankles. You grew up on Earth Gamma, and your training ground is one that is known for producing some of the most creative beings in the sector. You can make anything taste good and are well-versed in station bureaucracy.

— **Descriptors:** Loud, commanding voice, self-cleaning uniform for work, and timeworn jewel-toned robes for your off hours.
— **Sitrep**: A friend took a chance and has hired you to prepare food for the negotiations. It's possible you were hired because of your reputation, in order to cause trouble.
— **Strengths:** Your kitchen team [R], access to important events, a commanding presence, a mind for details.
— **Weaknesses:**
◊ **Problem:** You've been given responsibility for an incendiary event.
◊ **Flaw:** You focus on your craft and overlook things happening around you.
— **Relationships:**
◊ You're engaged to Serra, and hope to bond once your current gig has enabled you to raise the fee that will have to be paid to the station. However, the visions they are having sometimes scare you, and are putting distance between you.
◊ Bok is a good friend, you are one of the few people who know about their alien heritage.

Serra – the Sybyl

You've been a healer, an emopath, a devout member of a cult that ended in lost byways of a broken colony. Right now you're working at the Touch of Home closeness parlour, offering friendship and hope to those who have none. You're deeply in love with Benj, and plan to bond when you've saved enough money to pay the fee. But since you've come to Gateway a new peace has come over you. A voice whispers to you in the darkness of the hold, giving you visions of one of the moons below, where you and others who are lost and forgotten could find a home. You've started telling others about this paradise, and some of them are talking about claiming the moon for the people of Below.

— **Descriptors:** Shrewd, smiling eyes; honest, cheerful voice; slender body; emerald/grey hair, light blue skin, jewelry made from scavenged parts.

— **Sitrep:** Several people you have inspired approached the Station authorities with a petition about the moon in your dreams. You've been called to headquarters to make a statement.

— **Strengths:** Healing, hope for the hopeless, empathic senses and projection.

— **Weaknesses:**
  ◊ **Problem:** Authorities are starting to see your ideas as a problem.
  ◊ **Flaw:** you're unsure if the voices are real or imagined.

— **Relationships:**
  ◊ Gunnor, your cousin, says your visions are false, but you sense they want to believe you.
  ◊ Benj, your fiancé, met you before the visions started and doesn't understand.

Bok – The Hybrid

One of the Barge Lights, you are part of the fleet of those who connect Gateway and the system. Alien blood runs through your veins. You hide in plain sight, knowing from harsh experience that others fear what they don't understand. Your job as a guide puts you in contact with many travellers, but few look too deeply at you.

— **Descriptors:** A rough face, thoughtful gaze, mottled skin, layered clothes which you adapt to the environment you find yourself in.
— **Sitrep:** You've been tasked by your boss with getting information about the negotiations. The Barge Lights have yet to decide which side to back in the conflict between miners and corporate.
— **Strengths:** Deep knowledge of the spaceways of Gateway, a near perfect memory, contacts at many ports of call.
  Knows everyone, inescapable memory, secrets [R].
— **Weaknesses:**
  ◊ **Problem:** your alien heritage could get you rejected from society.
  ◊ **Flaw:** you cannot resist gossip
— **Relationships:**
  ◊ Star's identities have been useful for many of your customers and contacts.
  ◊ Benj is a good friend whom you trust with your secrets.

SITUATIONS

Community
— **Miners:** Spacers hardened to many harsh conditions travel from system to system plying their trade to capture the resources needed to run ships and power planets in the galaxy. They form mobile communities with their own alliances and grudges. Clannish, they can clash with others whom they see as weak and pampered. Mortality rates are high, and funeral celebrations tend to be moments of raucous revelry, keeping the spirits of survivors high.
— **Servers:** Thousands of workers of every type and variety, maintaining the framework of the space station itself as well as the bodies of its inhabitants. Scattered, divided by language background and relative status, they break their round-the-clock service in bars in the Below.

The Above
The government of the Above is a bureaucratic class appointed by the Star

Federation, made up of administrators and workers culled from nearby systems. They are in charge of contracting with the corporations who will run the mining, port, and security for the station and this sector. The current security force may be superseded by the Starkeepers, whose harsh reputation is creating uncertainty and concern among the poorer citizens of the station.

Poverty

Labour across the galaxy varies widely. The current pro-tem station security force allows relative freedom for station workers, but the Starkeepers are said to favour less pleasant approaches: synththrall production, bioenslaved workforces, work for freedom. Once a system is installed, changing it will be very difficult under the loose joint regulation of the Federation of Stars. Gateway can be a lonely place. Thousands of newcomers arrive, rootless and isolated. They can find companionship and human contact at the Touch of Home, a unique "closeness parlour" where clients can have someone show care and make them something out of love, or be given 'genuine' rapt attention, or just to hold and be held for a few hours.

The Gangs

Barge Lights control travel in the Above and Below. Running a fleet of small docking ships that travel all throughout the station and connect to transports heading to the station, everyone answers to them to get where they need to go. Connected by blood and bonds deeper than genetics, the Barge Lights occasionally accept newcomers into their ranks, but reward betrayal with spacing.

The Spirits

Throughout Below voices speak to the minds of a few who are open to receive. Some whisper tidbits of high flying dreams or grating fear. One speaking to Serra has spread rumors of habitable land on a moon. Divisions have arisen between those who believe in the truth of what is said, and those who revile the whispers as lies or figments of overactive imagination.

By Joshua Fox

Teaching Guide

When there's at least one person present who hasn't read the rules or played before, or if someone wants a refresh, take turns reading out each section of this guide and following the instructions in **red**. After each section, pass the guide left unless the instructions say otherwise.

You'll want a copy or two of the summary sheet in front of the group, too.

Flotsam is a game about outcasts, misfits and renegades living in the belly of a space station. We collectively imagine and describe what's happening in the fictional game world. Specifically, we'll focus on the everyday lives and relationships of the main characters. We'll also sometimes interrupt their lives with danger and strange events, but keeping it to a small scale so we don't distract too much from that main focus on relationships.

Each of us controls one *Primary* character, and explores their life and relationships. We'll also control one *Situation* – a constellation of threats and problems which we'll use to complicate the lives of the *Primary* characters. There are some rules – we'll get to them when we need them. But mostly, we just describe and narrate whatever occurs to us, one little step at a time, or talk in character, responding to what has already been described and narrated. We do this without lots of planning or thought. We're not trying to be cool or clever, or push a story. We're just inventing stuff that feels right to us. We'll often pick up stuff that others have invented and use that or build on that too.

READ THIS SECTION IF YOU ARE NOT USING A QUICK-START SCENARIO, OTHERWISE SKIP IT AND THE NEXT ONE.

We'll start by creating our *Primary* characters. Your *Primary* character is the main character you'll be playing in the game. The game as a whole is focused on the relationships between the *Primary* characters. This means it's important to create a character who feels real and human, who the other characters can relate to and connect with. Their relationships needn't be all happy and problem-free, of course. *Primary* characters are most interesting when they start out flawed and imperfect, with relationships that can develop over time – that's where the meat of play is.

— **Hand out the *Playbooks* and take turns reading out the introductory text from each one.**
— **Then everyone must select a *Playbook*.**
— **Two people can't have the same *Playbook*, so if there's a conflict, talk about it and see what other options might work.**

Now we'll individually fill out our *Playbooks*. You'll have quite a few choices to make and it's a good idea to have a look over your whole *Playbook* at the start so you can see how it all fits together. The front page has a list of options for setting your gender, appearance and so on. There's also some History questions you'll need to get answers to – some you can answer yourself, and some must be asked to others. Don't feel constrained by the options listed – if you want to tweak them or make up your own, let's talk about it.

On the back are *Strengths*, which your *Primary* character can use to get what they want, and *Weaknesses*, which cause trouble but gain you *Tokens* to power your *Strengths*. Finally, there's space to write down your *Relationships*. *Relationships* are really important in this game – your character improves by developing their *Relationships*, as well as by bringing in their *Weaknesses*.

If you want an option that isn't listed on your Playbook, let's talk about it.

— **Select from the options on your *Playbook* for gender, appearance and so on; and choose three *Strengths* and two *Weaknesses*, preferably including at least one *Flaw*.**
— **Show everyone the *Origins* sheet to help them decide their origin.**
— **Next, introduce your *Primary* characters to the group, describing them however you'd like.**
— **After that, take turns asking the *Relationship* and *History* questions on your *Playbook*.**
— **When you ask a relationship question about a *Secondary* character, describe them and either ask the question for them or ask someone else to do so.**
— **Finally, you may fill out your relationship slots, if you wish. At least half should go to other *Primary* characters, the rest to *Secondary* characters.**

READ THIS SECTION IF YOU ARE NOT USING A QUICK-START SCENARIO, OTHERWISE SKIP IT.

We're now going to create our *Situations*. A *Situation* is a broad constellation of threats and problems linked by a theme. It's a chunk of the fictional world that one player focuses on in addition to their *Primary* character. Each of us will choose one *Situation* that we have main responsibility for. We'll focus on breathing life into that *Situation* when we're not playing our *Primary* character.

— **Hand out the *Situation* sheets and take turns reading out their introductory text.**
— **Now everyone names a *Situation* that they personally would like their *Primary* character to grapple with. Those *Situations* are automatically included in the game. In the unlikely event that everyone named the same *Situation*, at least one of you needs to choose a different one.**

— **Once you've done that, each *Situation* must be allocated to someone other than the person(s) who named it. Volunteer for the one you like best.**
— **After that, if there's anyone who doesn't have a *Situation*, they can pick freely from the ones that weren't selected – choose one that excites you.**

Now we'll individually fill out our *Situation* sheets. On the front you'll find a list of options for customising the *Situation*. There's also some areas of focus, which will be your main tools for bringing the *Situation* to life and creating trouble for the *Primary* characters. Again, don't feel constrained by what's on the sheet – if there's something you want that isn't listed, let's talk about it.

— **Once you've decided on your *Situations*, select from the options given on the *Situation* sheet.**
— **Then introduce your *Situations* to the group, describing them however you'd like.**

READ THIS SECTION IF YOU ARE USING A QUICK-START SCENARIO, OTHERWISE SKIP IT.

We're using a quick-start scenario, which means we get pre-generated characters and *Situations* instead of making them ourselves.

We'll start by choosing our *Primary* characters. Your *Primary* character is the main character you'll be playing in the game. The game as a whole is focused on the relationships between the *Primary* characters. This means it's important to portray our characters as real and human, as characters who the others can relate to and connect with. Their relationships needn't be all happy and problem-free, of course. *Primary* characters are most interesting when they start out flawed and imperfect, with relationships that can develop over time – that's where the meat of play is.

— **Hand out the scenario *Playbooks*. Take turns to read out the italicised intro text at the top, then choose a *Playbook* each.**

We'll now choose our *Situations*. A *Situation* is a broad constellation of threats and problems linked by a theme. We'll each choose one *Situation* to have lead responsibility for. We'll focus on playing our *Situation* when we're not playing our *Primary* character.

— **Hand out the scenario *Situations*. Take turns to read out the italicised intro text at the top, then choose a *Situation* each.**
— **Everyone reads out the text immediately below the intro text, which describes some important aspects of your *Situation*.**

NOW LET'S TALK ABOUT HOW WE PLAY THROUGH A SCENE

It's a good idea to look at the rules summary sheet while we talk this through.

Most of the time, we just say what we think would happen. *Situation* players describe places and people, and say what those people say and do. People playing their *Primary* say what they're saying and doing. We respond to each other and the game moves forward. The rules kick in in two circumstances: when we want to bring in or advance threats to the *Primary* characters, or we want our *Primary* characters to take action that's risky or challenging.

Start by looking at Flowchart 1, which is labelled *Threats* and *Weaknesses*. This shows how we make bad stuff happen that the *Primary* characters aren't going to like. If you're playing your *Situation*, you'll introduce and develop potential threats – anything that looks like it might harm the *Primary* characters, or their allies, or their interests.

When you want to introduce a *Threat*, just like anything else in the game, you have to ask a *Question* to a specific other player. We don't say

"the skeeviest establishment in the Below is Glassport"; we say "hey, Karen, what's the skeeviest establishment in the Below?"

Having introduced a *Threat*, you only advance it gradually, leaving the *Primary* characters the chance to intervene. So we don't say "you walk into Glassport and immediately get jumped by three scary looking goons", you say "three scary looking goons are standing by the bar. They all turn to look at you and reach for their weapons. What do you do?"

After that, if the *Primary* characters don't do anything – or if they do, but their action is ineffective – then the *Threat* manifests and we can directly threaten a *Primary* character. That's when the goons jump you.

When we're playing our *Situations* in this way, we try to keep things small-scale and leave space for conversation. This is a game about relationships and everyday life, not constant action.

So there's three steps: create a *Threat* by asking a question, develop it but leave space for the *Primary* characters to intervene, and then manifest the *Threat* if they don't. This sequence repeats itself. The goons jumped you, now what do you do? If you don't act, or if your action fails, maybe one of them shoots you. You're bleeding, now what do you do?

A *Threat* can also manifest if a *Primary* activates one of their *Weaknesses*. When you do that, you get a *Token*, which powers your *Primary's Strengths*. We'll talk about those in a minute. For now, just note that activating a *Weakness* means one of the other players will jump straight to manifesting a *Threat*, without giving you the chance to intervene.

Ok, now let's look at Flowchart 2, which is labelled *Complications* and *Strengths*. This shows what happens when the *Primary* characters take risky or challenging actions. Notice how it only happens if the action is

risky or challenging – that means that most of the time we just describe what our *Primary* characters do, and the rules aren't needed at all. But if someone else thinks your actions are risky or challenging, they can add *Complications*; which might mean the character's actions are less effective, or costly, or even make things worse. The list of potential *Complications* is on your *Situation* sheet on the bottom right hand side.

Dealing with *Complications* and *Threats* is where *Strengths* come in. At any time, you can describe how you are using your *Strength* to tackle an emerging *Threat* or get stuff done, and spend a *Token*. When you do, not only can nobody introduce any *Complications*, but any *Complications* they already mentioned in relation to the current action are cancelled – they don't happen at all. You get full control over what happens, and can describe how you get what you want, free of outside interference.

You also have *Scrutiny Questions* on your *Playbook*. You can ask them any time you like, but the person responding can add *Complications* if they think it would be risky or challenging to get the answer, just like normal. This might include giving an incomplete answer. They do have to answer honestly, though. You can always spend a *Token* to get a full and helpful answer.

So that's three rules for when you're playing your *Primary*. Activating a *Weakness* gains you a *Token*, and causes a *Threat* to manifest without warning. Doing something risky or challenging means anyone can add *Complications* to your action. And spending a *Token* while using a *Strength* cancels any *Complications* added to your action, or gets you a straight answer when asking a *Scrutiny Question*.

That's all the rules that limit our actions during a scene. Is everyone ok with that? Are there any questions?

Ok, one last rule. This one's pretty simple: it's called *Objecting*. Like in a courtroom drama, when someone shouts "objection!" Any time someone

describes or narrates something you think doesn't make sense, or breaks the rules, or contradicts something we've already established, or just feels wrong for the game, you can say "objection". There's a simple procedure for resolving *Objections* – we'll go through that when we come to it.

FACILITATOR, READ THIS SECTION:

It's time to frame our first scene. In each scene there will be one *Focal Character* that starts the scene in the spotlight, and we take turns to be *Focal Character* so everyone gets a fair share of scenes. There will be one person, called the *Scene Framer*, who decides where and when the scene will start, who is there, and what (if anything) is going on at the start. The *Scene Framer* is often the same as the *Focal Character*, but not always.

It's everyone's job to watch out for when it might be time to end a scene. Anyone can suggest at any time that the scene might be done. If anyone has something they still want to do, carry on – if not, the scene ends.

Who is *Scene Framer*, and what the scene is about, varies. This is covered in detail on page 26. As a summary, run through these steps, but skip step 1 on your first scene, and skip to step 3 for each *Focal Character's* first scene if you're planning to play more than one session:

— **Is there something that obviously, burningly needs to happen in the next scene? If so, an appropriate person frames a scene around that.**
— **If the *Focal Character* wants to accomplish something or interact with someone, they frame a scene around that.**
— **If the *Focal Character* wants to activate a *Weakness*, or if a *Situation Player* wants to make trouble for them, then the person whose *Situation* will be causing trouble frames the scene around that.**
— **If nobody chose one of the above options, someone asks the *Focal Character* a *Question* about their everyday life, and the *Focal Character* frames a scene aimed at answering the *Question*.**

FACILITATOR, WATCH OUT FOR SOMEONE DOING SOMETHING RISKY OR CHALLENGING. THE FIRST TIME THEY DO, READ THIS OUT:

Ok, [character] just did [say what they did]. I'd say that's [risky or challenging]. As a reminder, whenever someone does something we think is risky or challenging, it gives all of us the opportunity to add a *Complication*. A *Complication* is an extra limitation or cost added to the action. We decide individually what's risky or challenging.

Complications can stop an action from having full effect, impose a cost to succeed, or add unexpected consequences. So if you were fleeing from security agents I might say "sure, you can escape from them, but you'll have to leave your backpack behind" or "you can't outrun them for long, but you can beat them to Pop's Tavern and take shelter there if you want". The full list of *Complications* is on your *Situation Sheet*.

As a reminder, we don't always have to just sit there and take it when someone adds *Complications*. When you're doing something that uses one of your *Strengths*, you can spend a *Token* to cancel all *Complications* – you just get to describe what you want and nobody can interrupt.

FACILITATOR, YOU MAY ALSO WISH TO USE THIS TEXT WHEN SOMEONE USES A *WEAKNESS* FOR THE FIRST TIME

So you'd like to activate your *Weakness*. That's great. Activating a *Weakness* gets you a *Token*, but is also a clear signal to everyone at the table that you're ready for some trouble to come your way. If you don't really want any trouble right now then maybe look at other ways to get a *Token* – every *Playbook* includes a way that other characters can get *Tokens* – take a look at your fellow players' *Playbooks* and see.

Say what you're doing to activate your *Weakness*. *Weaknesses* come in two types: *Flaws* and *Problems*. If it's a *Flaw*, you'll have to do something

to expose yourself to risk or danger, or to anger or alienate someone important. If it's a *Problem*, you don't have to take any action to make yourself vulnerable, unless you want to; but you can't be in a position that's entirely safe from your *Problem*.

You then ask another player to make trouble for you. By activating your *Weakness*, you've given them, and anyone else who wants to, permission to directly threaten you. Enjoy!

AT THE END OF THE FIRST SCENE, READ THIS BIT OUT

After every scene, we look back on the events of the scene to decide if any of the characters *Displayed their Heart*. What that means is, they let another character see their true self or their heartfelt feelings. A character can *Display their Heart* by how they talk, through their actions, or more subtle indications. They might do it deliberately or without meaning to.

Once someone *Displays their Heart*, it's up to the other character to decide what effect it had. Did it bring them closer together? Did it push them apart? Or did it change their relationship? If the answer to any of these questions is yes, then both characters get to *Mark* their *Relationship*. When the third box is *Marked*, you get to permanently improve your character.

You can also *Mark* your *Weaknesses*. That's a bit simpler – just ask yourself, did your *Primary's Weakness* cause any problems for them in the scene just gone. If you activated your *Weakness* during the scene the answer is likely yes! If your *Weakness* caused trouble for you, you get to *Mark* it even if you didn't activate it. Problems that only affect other characters don't count.

Finally, resolve any *Special Moves* on your *Playbooks* if you haven't already. *Special Moves* enable other characters to play to your character's strengths, and they get a *Token* for doing so. You don't get a *Token*, but you do get to *Mark* your *Relationship* with them.

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The game is GMless and diceless, with rules that point your characters at each other and bring their relationships into sharp focus. They help you quickly create a rich setting, flawed characters, and charged relationships which develop over time. You'll watch your characters evolve and change before your eyes.

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