

SCENARIO INTRODUCTION

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.

FLOTSAM QUICKSTART

This document contains pre-generated *Primary* characters and *Situations* which you can use to play a game of Flotsam in a single session (3–4 hours), or to kickstart a campaign.

THIS PACK INCLUDES:

- Pre-generated *Primary* characters and *Situations* for this scenario
- The Teaching Guide and rules summary (optional tools for first time play)
- Threats sheet and Characters sheet / names list (optional)

MANDATORY ELEMENTS

For this scenario, the following characters and *Situations* are mandatory:

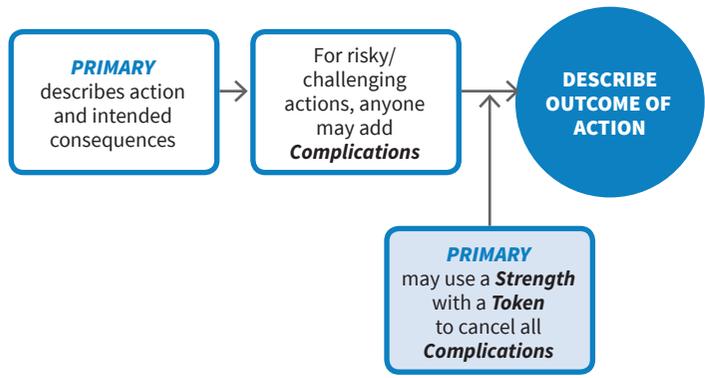
- Attika Halcyon – the Voice
- Doctor Westward Retrieve – the Cast-Off
- The Above
- The Outside

RULES SUMMARY

1. THREATS AND WEAKNESSES



2. COMPLICATIONS AND STRENGTHS



SCENE STRUCTURE



3. FRAMING SCENES

First:
— Is there anything that obviously, burningly must happen next?

Second:
For the current *Focal Character*, check in order:
— Does the *Focal Character* wish to accomplish something or interact with someone?
— Does the *Focal Character* want to activate a *Weakness*, or does a *Situation player* wish to do something with the *Focal Character*?
— Ask a question about the *Focal Character's* everyday life.

4. END OF SCENE

When you *Display Your Heart*, so that another character sees something of your true self or your heartfelt feelings, at the end of the scene, they say if any of the following apply:
— It changed 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.

When your *Weakness* causes trouble for you, at the end of the scene you may *Mark* your *Weakness*.

Check for any *Playbook Moves* you might have missed.

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.

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?

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).

Use a *Strength/Resource* and
SPEND A TOKEN
 to ignore *Complications*
 and narrate what happens

- 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

NEED TO GAIN A TOKEN

Act in my name or in support of my cause to

ASK A QUESTION from this list at any time.

SPEND A TOKEN to get a full and helpful answer ...

“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?”

... or **ASK THE SPIRITS**

Let them see your true self or true feelings to get a chance to *Mark* one box. Also *Mark* if they use your *Special Move*.

NAME

RELATIONSHIP

_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

Activate a *Weakness* and invite trouble to *Mark* that *Weakness* and **GAIN A TOKEN**

PROBLEMS

- Your followers are needy and demanding
- Your followers are chaotic and demanding
- 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

When you have *Marked* all three boxes on a *Relationship* or *Weakness*, you rewrite it and gain a new *Strength*, *Resource* or *Weakness*

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.

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.

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.

Use a *Strength/Resource* and
SPEND A TOKEN
 to ignore *Complications*
 and narrate what happens

- 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]

GAIN A TOKEN

Hire me for a gig or hook me up with one to

ASK A QUESTION from this list at any time.

SPEND A TOKEN to get a full and helpful answer ...

“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 _____?”

... or **ASK THE SPIRITS**

.....
 Let them see your true self or true feelings to get a chance to *Mark* one box. Also *Mark* if they use your *Special Move*.

NAME

RELATIONSHIP

_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

Activate a *Weakness* and invite trouble to *Mark* that *Weakness* and **GAIN A TOKEN**

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

When you have *Marked* all three boxes on a *Relationship* or *Weakness*, you rewrite it and gain a new *Strength*, *Resource* or *Weakness*

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.

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.

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.

Use a *Strength/Resource* and **SPEND A TOKEN** to ignore *Complications* and narrate what happens

- 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.

NEGOTIATING
Beg for my aid or my wisdom to

ASK A QUESTION from this list at any time.
SPEND A TOKEN to get a full and helpful answer ...

- “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?”

... or **ASK THE SPIRITS**

.....
Let them see your true self or true feelings to get a chance to *Mark* one box. Also *Mark* if they use your *Special Move*.

NAME	RELATIONSHIP	
_____	_____	□□□
_____	_____	□□□
_____	_____	□□□
_____	_____	□□□

Activate a *Weakness* and invite trouble to *Mark* that *Weakness* and **GAIN A TOKEN**

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) □□□

When you have *Marked* all three boxes on a *Relationship* or *Weakness*, you rewrite it and gain a new *Strength*, *Resource* or *Weakness*

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.

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.

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.

Use a *Strength/Resource* and **SPEND A TOKEN** to ignore *Complications* and narrate what happens

- 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]

GAIN A TOKEN

When you hook me up with something I need, or vice versa,

ASK A QUESTION from this list at any time.

SPEND A TOKEN to get a full and helpful answer ...

- “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?”

... or **ASK THE SPIRITS**

.....
Let them see your true self or true feelings to get a chance to *Mark* one box. Also *Mark* if they use your *Special Move*.

NAME	RELATIONSHIP	
_____	_____	□□□
_____	_____	□□□
_____	_____	□□□
_____	_____	□□□

Activate a *Weakness* and invite trouble to *Mark* that *Weakness* and **GAIN A TOKEN**

PROBLEMS

- You are in hock to a gang □□□
- Your contacts covet your position □□□
- Ruthless commercial rivals □□□
- You owe money to insatiable loan sharks □□□

FLAWS

- You are hooked on your own stuff □□□
- You are a control freak □□□
- You are greedy and ambitious □□□

When you have *Marked* all three boxes on a *Relationship* or *Weakness*, you rewrite it and gain a new *Strength*, *Resource* or *Weakness*

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.

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?

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.

Use a *Strength/Resource* and
SPEND A TOKEN
 to ignore *Complications*
 and narrate what happens

- 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]

GAIN A TOKEN

Give me a chance to prove myself to you to

ASK A QUESTION from this list at any time.

SPEND A TOKEN to get a full and helpful answer ...

“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?”

... or **ASK THE SPIRITS**

.....
 Let them see your true self or true feelings to get a chance to *Mark* one
 box. Also *Mark* if they use your *Special Move*.

NAME

RELATIONSHIP

_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
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Activate a *Weakness* and invite
 trouble to *Mark* that *Weakness*
 and **GAIN A TOKEN**

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

When you have *Marked* all three boxes
 on a *Relationship* or *Weakness*,
 you rewrite it and gain a new *Strength*,
Resource or *Weakness*

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.

.....

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.

.....

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.

SITUATION MOVES

Your *Moves* are:

- Describe the world.
- Create something new by asking a *Question*.
- Develop existing characters.
- Describe risks, opportunities, warning signs.
- Signal developing *Threats*.
- Directly threaten a character (but only after signalling the *Threat* **or** someone activating a *Weakness*).

When a *Primary* character does something risky or challenging, you can add *Complications*:

- How they fall short of their aim.
- A price they must pay to succeed.
- Unintended consequences.
- How they get more than they bargained for.

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

CHARACTERS AND OTHER THREATS

OTHER NOTES

Make the game about the Primary characters and their lives • Play real, flawed, vulnerable people • Tell small-scale stories, leave space for conversation

THE 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.

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.

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.

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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.

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.

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.

SITUATION MOVES

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CHARACTERS AND OTHER THREATS

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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.

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.

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.

SITUATION MOVES

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THE 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.

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.

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.

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- Describe the world.
- Create something new by asking a *Question*.
- Develop existing characters.
- Describe risks, opportunities, warning signs.
- Signal developing *Threats*.
- Directly threaten a character (but only after signalling the *Threat* **or** someone activating a *Weakness*).

When a *Primary* character does something risky or challenging, you can add *Complications*:

- How they fall short of their aim.
- A price they must pay to succeed.
- Unintended consequences.
- How they get more than they bargained for.

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

CHARACTERS AND OTHER THREATS

OTHER NOTES

Make the game about the Primary characters and their lives • Play real, flawed, vulnerable people • Tell small-scale stories, leave space for conversation

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 **blue**. 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 USING A QUICK-START SCENARIO

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. 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.