

SCENARIO INTRODUCTION

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 refrigeration 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.

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)

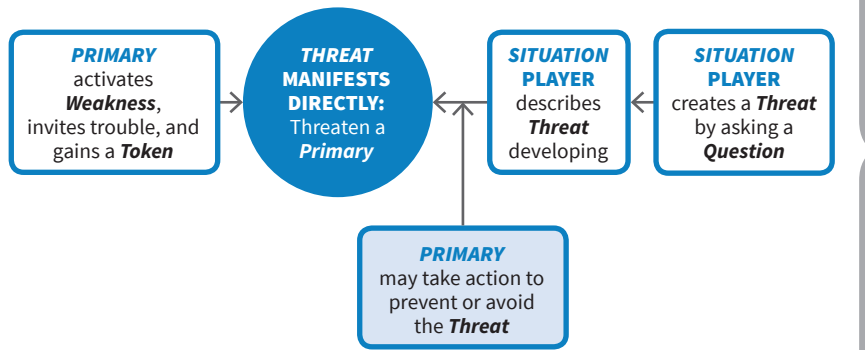
MANDATORY ELEMENTS

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

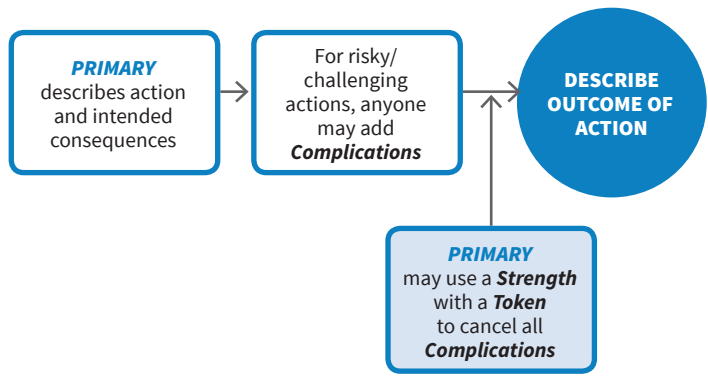
- Mica – the Sybyl
- Candle – the Voice
- Halo – the Thunder
- Community
- The Above
- Spirits

RULES SUMMARY

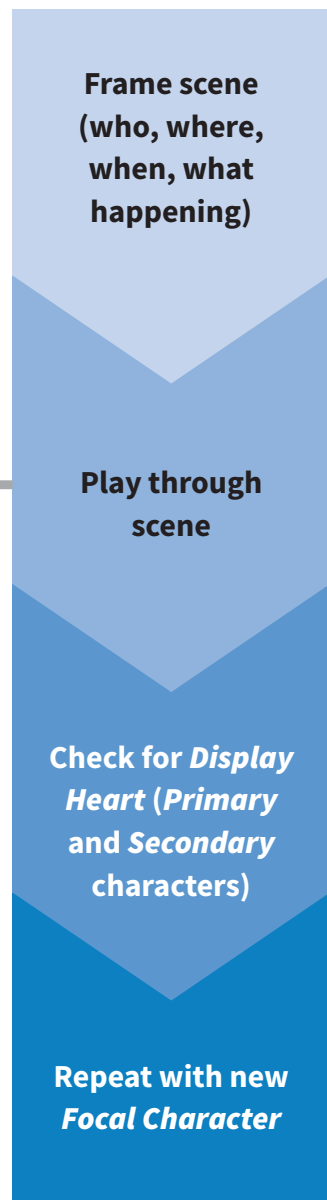
1. THREATS AND WEAKNESSES



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.

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.

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?

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.

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

- 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.

Ask me to use my mysterious gifts on you, or act on one of my visions, to **GAIN A TOKEN**

ASK A QUESTION from this list at any time.

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

- “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?”

... 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

- 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

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

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.

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

- 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.

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

NEW! 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"/>
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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*

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 alone, to race flitterbugs and to sip on Rigorous. But people keep asking you for help. And, like a sucker, you keep giving them it.

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.

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.

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

- 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]

GAIN A TOKEN

When you rely on me to protect you from a dangerous threat,

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 are you vulnerable to me right now?”

“What’s my enemy’s true position?”

“What’s about to go down 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"/>
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Activate a *Weakness* and invite trouble to *Mark* that *Weakness* and **GAIN A TOKEN**

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

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

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.

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

- 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.

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*

SCARLET

THE CAST-OFF

You lived Above, working as a biomodified servant to a decadent clan. Somehow you put a wheel wrong (you don't have feet, or legs: your owners spliced you to a cyberrolley), 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.

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

- 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.

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	
_____	_____	□□□
_____	_____	□□□
_____	_____	□□□
_____	_____	□□□

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 □□□

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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.

- **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 gyrodrone are highly prized. Winning one of the big races makes you a local hero, for a few weeks.

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.

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

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.

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.

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.

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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.

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.

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.

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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.

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- 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.
-

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.

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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.

.....

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.

.....

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.

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 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.

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.

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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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.