

## SCENARIO INTRODUCTION

# 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.*

---

### 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)

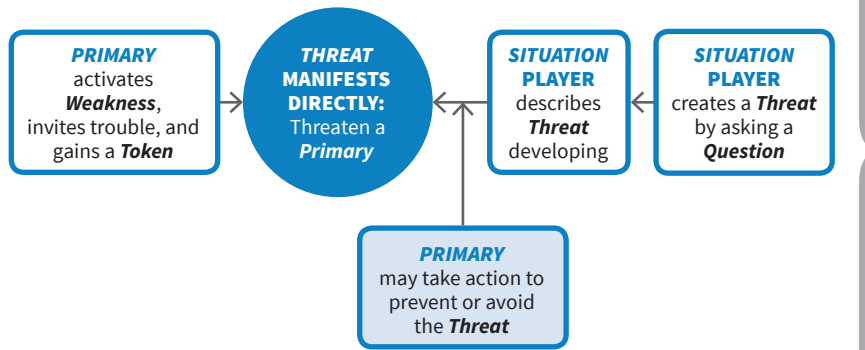
### MANDATORY ELEMENTS

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

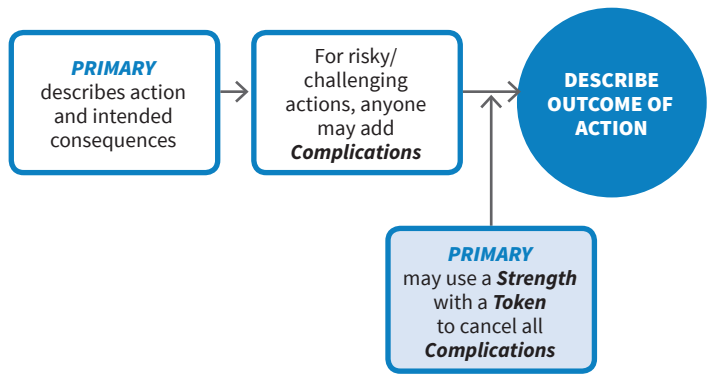
- Politics
- Community
- The Above
- The Spider
- The Voice
- The Cast-Off

# RULES SUMMARY

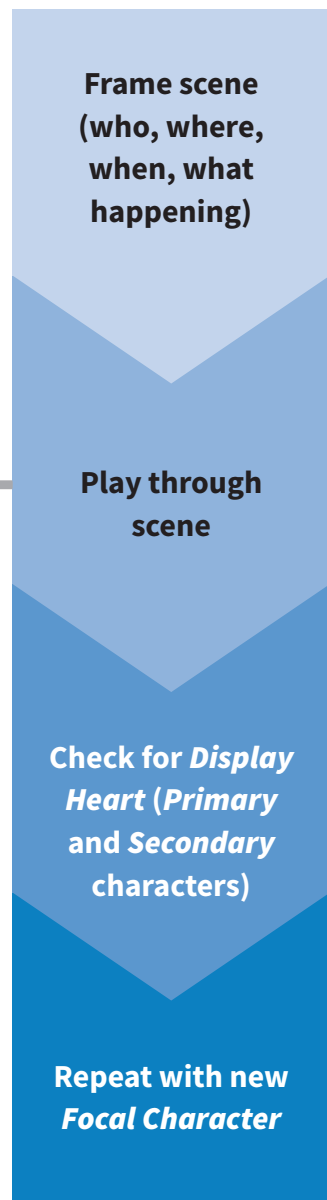
## 1. THREATS AND WEAKNESSES



## 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.

# 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.

### 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

- 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.

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*

# 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.

### 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

- 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.

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"/>
_____	_____	<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*

# 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.

### 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 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.

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*



# 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.

### 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

- 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.

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

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*

# 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.

### 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

- 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.

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"/>
_____	_____	<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 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*

# 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
- **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.

## 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 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 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.

## 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



# 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 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.

## **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**

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 [DRUGS]

.....

*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.*

.....

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).

.....

## **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

# 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.

## 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

# 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.