



# DEEP DARK BLUE

Adventure in the  
Benthic Frontier

LORE GRAHAM  
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A WORLD OF  
ADVENTURE FOR

**FATE**  
CORE SYSTEM



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**FATE**<sup>™</sup>  
CORE SYSTEM

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**Deep Dark Blue**

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are fictional. Any resemblance to real people, underwater creatures, submarine  
crews, current or future ecological crises, or profit-hungry corporations is  
purely coincidental, but kinda hilarious. And just a wee bit depressing.

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In the near future, when most of the Earth's land has been stripped of its resources, you and your fellow crewmembers are among those brave enough to explore the depths of the oceans in search of precious metals. This new frontier carries as many opportunities as it does dangers, including the crushing pressure of the deep waters, colossal squids, the ruthless tactics of Quest Inc., and even the limitations of your own submersible. How far down will you go?



## INTRODUCTION

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Much of the Earth's land has been mined to exhaustion. To meet the continued demand for minerals and metals, enterprising individuals and corporations alike have turned to the oceans, enabled by new technologies that allow for easier navigation of the deep ocean. The seafloor, or benthic zone, of the Pacific Ocean is the world's new frontier. It falls outside of any practical legal jurisdiction, giving remarkable latitude to the corporations that operate there, and offering a haven for individuals looking for a place to live and work far from the law.

While only a few corporations have invested in constructing large-scale mining operations, hundreds of independent submarines—referred to interchangeably as “ships”—operate in the frontier. Most take short-term contracts with corporations to check in on mining operations, ferry supplies from place to place, or engage in shadier activities such as bounty hunting and sabotaging or stealing from rival operations. Otherwise, many submarines engage in profit-turning activities like salvaging wrecked vessels or obtaining rare and valuable specimens of deep-sea life.

As players, you will take the roles of a submarine crew, seeking fortune and adventure in the Benthic Frontier. Your vessel serves as both your home and your vehicle, and it is as important as any player character.

## THE WORLD AND THE DEEP SEA

---

The world is running low on minerals necessary to meet the ever-increasing desire for technology, from computers and smartphones to solar panels and spaceships. The ocean is rich in these minerals, and recent technological advances have made deep-sea mining of zinc, cobalt, manganese, gold, and platinum more feasible. There are a few fledging operations to mine diamonds as well, seeking to break into that market's oligopoly.

Mining operations usually focus on hydrothermal vents. These sea vents spew clouds of dark material containing high concentrations of sulfides and metals. When such a cloud meets cold ocean water, many of its constituents precipitate and form black, chimney-like structures around the vents. In time, this builds ore deposits of metal sulfides, rich with valuable minerals.

Mining is largely automated, though most sites have small bases for one to four technicians to handle what needs to be done manually. Sites without a constant staff presence are remotely monitored and periodically checked on by hired crews.

Resources are transported to the ocean surface in specially designed pods, which can rapidly rise to the surface through a triggered reaction producing pressurized air. The pods are then picked up by ships, which locate the pods' tracking signals in the expected area, and brought back to land. For maximum speed and cost-efficiency, these pods were designed to function without any crew. No living creature on board could survive the trip to the surface.

### The Benthic Frontier

The area commonly called the Benthic Frontier is in the ocean's benthic layer, or abyssal zone, and usually refers to areas in the Pacific Ocean, where most deep-sea mining operations take place. However, expeditions in the Atlantic or Indian Ocean are also possible. Though typically 4,000 to 6,000 meters deep, trenches in the Benthic Zone may go much deeper, with the Mariana Trench reaching almost 11,000 meters deep; these trenches comprise the hadal zone. Most expeditions in *Deep Dark Blue* steer clear of the trenches, which are even more treacherous than other parts of the ocean floor.

The deep sea is extremely dark, cold, and pressurized; survival requires specialized submarines and bases. Diving suits that can withstand the pressure have been developed, but they're bulky and expensive enough that they're not commonly used.

The Benthic Frontier is in international waters. Despite any official claim to the ocean floor, the handful of major corporations with frontier operations have staked areas of territory. Within these areas, independent mining or salvage operations are frowned upon, and may be met by intimidation or even aggression from that corporation's representatives.



Usually hailing from Pacific Rim countries, the inhabitants of the Benthic Frontier are a diverse bunch. Due to its tough, cramped conditions, families are virtually unseen in the Frontier, though childless couples, or parents who work while their children are raised on land, are fairly common. Some do a few stints of six weeks to six months, taking jobs on submarines to earn some relatively quick income. For others, their careers in the Benthic Frontier are their lives, and they may go years without seeing the sun.

An oligopoly of corporations runs the successful mining operations in the Benthic Frontier. Atlantean Enterprises was the first, and remains a well-established, reasonably profitable corporation. Duonautics was the brainchild of a billionaire mogul and is part of his massive corporate conglomerate. Quest Inc. is the newest player in the field, but is quickly making headway with their aggressive expansion efforts and unscrupulous business practices.

Atlantean Enterprises was founded by an oil tycoon who saw an opportunity to switch to a new, underused source of natural resources with little competition at the time. They've been operating in the Benthic Frontier for the last two decades, focusing on mining sulfide ore deposits at hydrothermal events. There's no doubt that they're profit-driven, but they tend to do things by the book and have a solid reputation among freelancers as a reliable source of contracts.

Atlantean strongly resents Quest's presence in the deep ocean, and AE's higher-ups in particular think that Quest is riding on the coattails of industry success, looking for easy profit after other corporations did the expensive, groundbreaking work to develop the technology that made deep-ocean mining feasible. AE has been suspicious of Quest's business practices for a while now, and they're looking for opportunities to gather hard evidence of Quest's dirty tactics. Such evidence would allow AE to publically harm Quest's reputation.

The primary driving force in the Benthic Frontier is profit, but deep-sea exploration still has scientific merit. While deep-sea research is not as prevalent as it used to be, there are still a few research bases, and many scientists sign on with submarines to conduct research and acquire specimens. New species are discovered regularly, and there's still much to learn about most deep-sea species. As mining continues to expand, though, so too does the concern for underwater ecosystems, especially around the biologically diverse hydrothermal communities. Geologists, biologists, zoologists, chemists, and others may sign on with a freelancing crew or hire their own for an expedition.

Occasionally, the Frontier sees tourists as well. A few are genuinely interested in the wonders of the deep-ocean experience, but most are millionaires with a desire to hunt down large and rare beasts.

## Inside Submarines

Perhaps the biggest difference between life on land and life in a submarine is the air. Even with impressive advances in filtering, the air in submarines feels perpetually stale. To conserve oxygen and reduce the risk of fire, submarines circulate air with slightly less oxygen than in the earth's atmosphere. Less oxygen means injuries take longer to heal, however, and even with less oxygen, fire is still a serious threat. As such, anything that could cause a spark is strictly forbidden.

Submarines are cramped spaces, and older models in particular tend to have machinery wedged in wherever it will fit. Being able to quickly maneuver through tight or dangerous spaces is a useful skill. Equipment doesn't just hurt if you bang your head on it; it may have sharp edges, burning-hot surfaces, or other hazards, especially in the cobbled-together and ruthlessly modified subs common in the Frontier. Efficiency is a top priority, while safety... isn't.

Noise echoes within a submarine, so sources of loud noise—everything from guns to heavy boots—are typically forbidden. Beyond being distracting, noise can give away a submarine's location in combat. When attempting to go unnoticed by passive sonar, captains will send the order to go into "silent running" mode, prompting the crew to remain as still and quiet as possible. Indeed, nuclear submarines are so popular partly because, with active reactor-cooling disabled, they can run very quietly.



## THE CREW

---

Together, the player characters form the crew of a submarine. Safely and efficiently completing jobs in the deep blue requires a cohesive crew, to best use everyone's talents. In *Deep Dark Blue*, creating a character begins with defining their desired role on the crew, and then expanding the character through their background, personality, and goals.

Players, consider together what you'd like the crew as a whole to look like. Your characters might be freelancers, agents of a specific corporation, or even not-for-profit researchers or environmental activists. Doing this will help you decide on a **crew concept**.

A good crew concept captures the overall dynamic, tone, or feel of a crew—for example, *Ragtag Team of Scoundrels*, *Our Mission Statement Is More Money*, *Well-Oiled Machine*, *For the Greater Good*, or *Divided but Never Conquered*.

### Character Aspects

Each character starts with five aspects: a **role**, a **trouble**, a **history**, a **personal mission**, and one other aspect of your choosing.

#### Role

This aspect serves a dual purpose: it represents your character's role within the crew, but it also says *how* your character fills or ended up in that role. Write your role in a way that invites complications and adds flavor—if your character is a scientist, are you an *Abysobiologist Tagalong* or a *Mercenary Geologist*?

The one required role in any crew is the captain. For the captain, the role aspect is always *Captain of the [Ship Name]*. More so than any other crew member, the captain is tied to their ship and to their crew. It's more than just a vessel; it's a reflection of the captain, and vice-versa.

While the ship will have only one captain, there's no such restriction on most other roles. Some crews could benefit from more than one scientist or engineer, for example. Other crew functions to consider include pilot, navigator, engineer, quartermaster, weapons specialist, first mate, and medic. When considering your role, players, think about what expertise your character would bring to the crew to help them better carry out their missions.

#### Trouble

No one is completely without trouble, especially down in the Benthic Frontier. Your character may have a dark past that drives them away from the surface, unsettled debts (financial or blood), an uncomfortable secret, or some terribly inconvenient character trait. Potential troubles include *Technically a Fugitive*, *Gambling Addict*, or *Grudge Against the Boss*.

## History

For most people on Earth, living and working in the deep isn't something they would seriously consider. Especially for old-timers, there's usually something in their past—good, bad, or otherwise—that pushed them into the blue. When writing your character's history aspect, think about why they got into this business and where they came from. What is their background and how does it influence why they're here now? Possible history aspects include *Nothing Else to Lose*, *Rags to Riches to Rags to This*, and *Thrice Betrayed*.

## Personal Mission

This aspect is a goal or desire that isn't shared with the rest of the crew, and it may or may not be known to them. A marine biologist might have a personal mission related to their research, a captain might seek revenge against an old enemy, or a crew member might be a spy for Quest Inc. Potential personal missions include *Company Man*, *I Must Recover My Prized Sword*, or *Outmaneuver Captain Blue*.

Personal missions are excellent opportunities to prompt challenges or conflicts between crew members, which could stress the crew's teamwork track (page 20). However, these aspects can also be tied closely to your characters' passion or values, and can just as easily provide opportunities to care about a scenario, cooperate with an unlikely ally, or bond with each other.

## Other

While these aspects should give you a solid start, there are many other ways to flesh out your character. Craft one other aspect for your character. It could relate to and expand upon another of your character's aspects, or it could be something else entirely. Consider personal mottos, relationships with other characters, important personal effects or equipment, and personality traits. Other aspects could be *Try Everything Twice*, *Gail's Right-Hand Man*, *Grandfather's Knife*, or *Stubborn as a Mule*.

On the following pages, you'll find an example crew. Their crew concept is *Veterans Working Together for the First Time*.

## Captain Haru Yamamoto

### ASPECTS

**Role:** *Captain of the Isonade*

**Trouble:** *Micromanager*

**History:** *Born to Lead*

**Personal Mission:** *An Admirable Leader*

**Other:** *Strong-Willed*

### SKILLS

**Great (+4):** Diplomacy

**Good (+3):** Contacts, Resources

**Fair (+2):** Knowledge, Manipulate, Notice

**Average (+1):** Combat, Pilot, Scavenge, Will

### STUNTS

**Even-Keeled:** When an opponent attempts to create an advantage against you with Manipulate by toying with your emotions—such as by provoking you into a rage or making you fear for your life—you gain +2 to defend with Will.

**Always Know Someone:** As the primary contact person for your crew, you've made a lot of connections. You gain +2 to create an advantage with Contacts in attempts to find an expert on a particular topic.

**Backseat Expert:** When helping another character to provide a teamwork bonus (*Fate Core*, page 174), if you have at least a Good (+3) rank in the skill the other character is using, you give them a +2 bonus instead of a +1.

### STRESS

**Physical**

**Mental**

### CONSEQUENCES

**Mild (2):**

**Moderate (4):**

**Severe (6):**







## Serena Powers

### ASPECTS

**Role:** *Free-Spirited Pilot*

**Trouble:** *Earnest to a Fault*

**History:** *A Whole New Person Now*

**Personal Mission:** *Explore Everything*

**Other:** *Attentive to Detail*

### SKILLS

**Great (+4):** Pilot

**Good (+3):** Knowledge, Notice

**Fair (+2):** Engineer, Resources, Will

**Average (+1):** Athletics, Contacts,  
Diplomacy, Combat

### STUNTS

**Evasive Maneuvers:** +2 to defend with Pilot against torpedoes or other ranged attacks.

**Adroit Maneuvers:** +2 to overcome with Pilot when avoiding environmental hazards such as debris.

**Practical Cartographer:** +2 to create an advantage with Pilot when you rely on your expert knowledge of the ocean floor to figure out the most efficient route.

### STRESS

Physical

Mental

### CONSEQUENCES

**Mild (2):**

**Moderate (4):**

**Severe (6):**

## Raul Chavez

### ASPECTS

**Role:** *Remarkably Calm Mercenary*  
**Trouble:** *Poor Choice of Enemies*  
**History:** *Lost Scholarship*  
**Personal Mission:** *Long-Lost Brother*  
**Other:** *Proud Crew Member*

### SKILLS

**Great (+4):** Athletics  
**Good (+3):** Combat, Manipulate  
**Fair (+2):** Physique, Notice, Stealth  
**Average (+1):** Engineer, Resources,  
Scavenge, Shoot

### STUNTS

**No Weapons Onboard!:** +2 to create an advantage with Combat in attempts to disarm your opponent.

**Furious Punch:** +2 to attack with Combat while you and your opponent are unarmed and engaged in close combat.

**Wheedle:** When negotiating a contract or price, you can use Manipulate instead of Diplomacy.

### STRESS

Physical       Mental

### CONSEQUENCES

**Mild (2):**  
**Moderate (4):**  
**Severe (6):**



## Frankie West

### ASPECTS

**Role:** *Gunner's Mate Extraordinaire*

**Trouble:** *Short Fuse*

**History:** *Former Quest Contractor*

**Personal Mission:** *Nothing Better Than Adventure*

**Other:** *Always Looking for a Deal*

### SKILLS

**Great (+4):** Shoot

**Good (+3):** Notice, Scavenge

**Fair (+2):** Combat, Physique, Pilot

**Average (+1):** Athletics, Diplomacy, Engineer, Resources

### STUNTS

**Trained Gunner:** When using Shoot in submarine battles, if you inflict a condition on an opposing ship, you may choose which system the condition affects.

**Expert Gunner:** +2 to attack with Shoot when using your ship's torpedoes.

**Insider Ties:** +2 to create an advantage with Contacts while talking to a current or past employee of Quest, Inc.

### STRESS

Physical

Mental

### CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2):

Moderate (4):

Severe (6):



## Blair Evans

### ASPECTS

**Role:** *Enthusiastic Biologist*  
**Trouble:** *Absent-Minded Scientist*  
**History:** *Land Was Never Home*  
**Personal Mission:** *Discover a New Species!*  
**Other:** *Bag of Useful Things*

### SKILLS

**Great (+4):** Knowledge  
**Good (+3):** Diplomacy, Resources  
**Fair (+2):** Contacts, Scavenge, Will  
**Average (+1):** Combat, Manipulate, Notice, Stealth

### STUNTS

**Academic Networking:** +2 to create an advantage with Contacts while finding a scientist expert.  
**Fauna Behavior Expert:** When you create a situation aspect related to your knowledge of undersea animal behavior, allies who invoke it for a bonus gain +3 instead of the usual +2.  
**Biology PhD:** +2 to create an advantage related to biology with Knowledge.

### STRESS

Physical                       Mental

### CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2):  
Moderate (4):  
Severe (6):





## Darryl Jordan

### ASPECTS

**Role:** *Steady Engineer*

**Trouble:** *Pessimistic Streak*

**History:** *Mechanic Family Background*

**Personal Mission:** *Loyal to the Captain*

**Other:** *Creative Problem-Solver*

### SKILLS

**Great (+4):** Engineer

**Good (+3):** Scavenge, Physique

**Fair (+2):** Combat, Notice, Pilot

**Average (+1):** Athletics, Knowledge,  
Resources, Will

### STUNTS

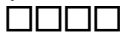
**Torpedo Expert:** During a battle, when you use teamwork to help the gunner by overseeing the reloading and firing of torpedoes, you give them a +2 bonus instead of the usual +1.

**Overclock:** If your ship doesn't already have a lasting condition, you can deal 2 shifts of stress to it to give a +4 bonus to a Pilot roll being made by another character. This hit bypasses the teamwork track and can only be reduced by conditions.

**Cryptographer:** +2 to overcome with Will while dealing with a code-related challenge such as an encrypted message or a puzzle lock.

### STRESS

Physical



Mental

### CONSEQUENCES

**Mild (2):**

**Moderate (4):**

**Severe (6):**



## Skills

*Deep Dark Blue* uses 15 skills. While many are the same as those in *Fate Core*, some of them have been combined or are entirely new.

The skill pyramid is the same as *Fate Core*: a character starts with one Great (+4) skill, two Good (+3) skills, three Fair (+2) skills, and four Average (+1) skills.

New skills are in italics.

Athletics

**Combat**

Contacts

**Diplomacy**

**Engineer**

**Knowledge**

**Manipulate**

Notice

Physique

**Pilot**

Resources

**Scavenge**

Shoot

Stealth

Will

## Combat

Combat is the same as Fight from *Fate Core*, but includes guns. Guns are both dangerous and impractical, so they are rare, though not nonexistent, in the deep blue.

### GUNFIRE IN THE DEEP

In real-world submarines, anything flammable is strictly prohibited. Firearms are, accordingly, unthinkable. While *Deep Dark Blue* is a little more forgiving, GMs may still want to include a penalty for use of guns.

When a PC attacks with a firearm inside a vessel and misses, the player must spend a fate point or damage the vessel instead. The hit deals shifts equal to the margin of failure. For example, if you fire a gun on your ship and fail by four shifts, you can either pay a fate point or deal a 4-shift hit to the sub. This can be absorbed by the crew's teamwork track ("Put that gun away, you idiot!") and by the submarine's conditions.

## Contacts

The available networks in the frontier are the corporations, other crews, and smaller, independent operations, be they bases, mining operations, or scientific ventures. The only difference in Contacts from *Fate Core* is that the logistics of meeting are a bit more difficult in the lonely frontier.

## Diplomacy

Diplomacy combines Empathy and Rapport from *Fate Core*. You might use this when negotiating a good bargain, convincing someone to do you a favor, or identifying how favorably someone feels about you—all while employing honest, above-board tactics.

Diplomacy cannot be used to attack, but you can use it to defend against attempts to trick you or harm your reputation, especially those that use Manipulate.

## Engineer

Engineer is similar to Crafts from *Fate Core*, allowing you to work effectively with the machinery of submarines. Using Engineer requires an appropriate set of tools; if you don't have them, you can use Scavenge to try to improvise tools. Subs usually have the appropriate tools onboard. Unless a stunt specifically says otherwise, you cannot use Engineer to attack or defend.

You can use Engineer to repair a submarine as an overcome action. See page 26 for more details.

## Knowledge

Knowledge replaces Lore from *Fate Core*, but it functions in the same way. It represents knowledge of the ocean and in particular the Benthic Zone, encompassing science, rumors, and legends.

## Manipulate

Manipulate combines Deceive and Provoke from *Fate Core*. Use it to get what you want from people, without any scruples getting in your way.

You can make mental attacks with Manipulate if the circumstances are right. To do so, you must invoke an aspect related to emotional or physical power over your opponent, letting you cause them emotional harm. For example, you might gaslight or undermine the confidence of someone who trusts you, or you might interrogate someone you'd tied up. Manipulate cannot be used to defend against such attacks—doing that requires Will—but it can be used to defend against someone using Diplomacy to get what they want out of you.

## Notice

Along with the uses given in *Fate Core*, Notice is used to spot sabotage. When used in this way, the passive opposition to this overcome action is equal to the saboteur's Engineer rank at the time of sabotage.

## Pilot

Pilot functions like Drive in *Fate Core*, but it's just for piloting submarines.

Pilot can be used to attack a submarine by ramming it, but usually only in dire circumstances or by unusually tough subs. There's more about submarine combat on page 28.

## Resources

For most characters, Resources mostly reflects available cash and credit, but it can also include other forms of wealth. It may be trickier to liquidate some types of wealth, such as copies of patents, valuable weapons, drugs, and so on.



## Scavenge

This skill represents the ability to interact with wrecked, failing, and cluttered environments in a safe, efficient, and effective manner. Large shipwrecks and abandoned bases often contain riches, if you know where to start your search. If you don't, you could waste valuable time and oxygen traversing through trash.

Scavenge is used to overcome obstacles related to finding, taking, or fixing objects or machinery. Use Scavenge to pick a lock, repair a broken item, or find objects of value in a pile of junk.

With Scavenge, you can create aspects representing how knowing of the location or improvising something useful out of rubbish aids you. You could turn up *Just the Right Cord* to help with a critical repair on your ship, grab a *Large and Heavy Something* to chuck at your opponent during a fight, or find a *Tight Hiding Spot* to squeeze into while another crew member enters the wreck.

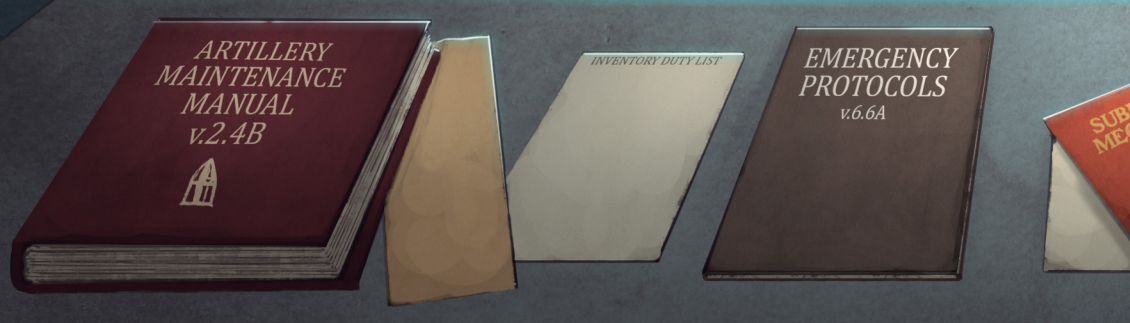
Scavenge is not used to attack or defend.

## Shoot

Shoot does not include handheld firearms—that's in Combat. Instead, it is used to fire a submarine's weapons, namely torpedoes.

## Will

Beyond Will's uses in *Fate Core*, you can use Will to create advantages on yourself. For example, an engineer might use Will to create the aspect *Chaos Helps Me Focus*, representing her ability to concentrate on fixing the damaged engines in the midst of a battle.



## Stunts

The stunts here are organized by crew role, designed to provide a core set of stunts useful for each archetype. Even so, you can pick any stunts that fit your character or make your own, as in *Fate Core*.

### Captain Stunts

**Crisis Mode:** When your ship is under fire, you can inspire your crew to fight on without panicking. Once per conflict, if your ship has gained any consequences during the scene, you can create the situation aspect *Inspiring Presence* with one free invocation on your turn without spending an action.

**Never Surrender:** If you know that your submarine has been breached by intruders, you and all crew members who can see or hear you receive +1 to attack with Combat and defend with Will.

**Valiant Leader:** If your ship takes a condition during a conflict, you gain +2 to Will until the end of the scene.

### Pilot Stunts

**Adroit Maneuvers:** +2 to overcome with Pilot when avoiding environmental hazards such as debris.

**Evasive Maneuvers:** +2 to defend with Pilot against attacks, excluding ramming.

**Practical Cartographer:** +2 to create an advantage with Pilot when you rely on your expert knowledge of the ocean floor to figure out the most efficient route to your destination.

**Prickly Sixth Sense:** You've been at this long enough that you get a bad feeling you can't explain when entering dangerous territory. You cannot be surprised while piloting a sub.

### Co-Pilot Stunts

**Gold in the Wreckage:** +2 to create an advantage with Scavenge when locating the most promising part of a wreck for the crew to explore or getting your search for valuables done quickly.

**In Tune:** +2 to overcome or defend with Notice while trying to avoid incoming torpedoes.

**Stealth Mode:** You can run your sub's engines at full capacity without causing excess noise. If another sub attempts to create an advantage with Sensors against you, your ship's Engines rank adds no bonus to their roll.



## Engineer Stunts

**Counter-Saboteur:** +2 to overcome with Notice to spot evidence of sabotage.

**Saboteur:** When on a submarine or sea base, you can create an aspect with one free invocation as long as you have several uninterrupted minutes and access to the engine or controls. You don't need to roll to accomplish this.

## Mercenary Stunts

**Aggressively Defensive:** When you defend against an unarmed attack with Combat and succeed with style, you can invoke an aspect for free to deal a 2-shift hit to your attacker. If you do, forgo the free boost from succeeding with style.

**Agile Advantage:** +2 to create an advantage with Athletics when fighting inside a sub.

**Lethal Punch:** When attacking with Combat, if you and your opponent are unarmed, your attacks gain Weapon:2.

**No Battlefield Like a Sub:** You're familiar with the design of submarines and their dangerous spots, enough so that you can find these spots quickly even in unfamiliar territory. During a conflict on a submarine other than your own, you get one free invocation of the submarine's aspect.

**No Battlefield Like Home:** You're intimately familiar with the design of your ship and all of its dangerous spots. At the beginning of a conflict that takes place inside your sub, you get a free boost called *Home Turf*.

## Scientist Stunts

**Academic Networking:** +2 to create an advantage with Contacts when locating a scientist expert.

**Aim for the Underbelly!:** During a chase or conflict with an undersea creature, you can spend your turn to learn one of its aspects, which you gain a free invoke on, without rolling. You can give that free invocation to any crew member who can see or hear you.

**Scientific Authority:** You can use Knowledge instead of Provoke to intimidate someone when your scientific knowledge or authority matters.



## Stress, Consequences, and Teamwork

Each character has a physical stress track, mental stress track, and consequence slots, as in *Fate Core*.

As a whole, the crew also shares a **teamwork track**, similar to a character's physical and mental stress tracks. The teamwork track starts with two stress boxes. If the captain's Diplomacy rank is Good (+3) or Great (+4), the track gets a third box. Superb (+5) or above gives it a fourth box.

When the sub or the crew as a whole takes stress in submarine combat, those shifts can be absorbed by the teamwork track. While the crew as a whole doesn't have consequence slots, the teamwork track being full has ramifications. If it is full, it cannot absorb stress from submarine combat, so stress must instead be absorbed by the ship's conditions (page 26).

When the crew faces challenges or encounters something that causes internal conflict, they run the risk of straining their team cohesion. This comes into play in two ways.

- The GM can damage the crew's teamwork track by compelling an aspect that represents circumstances threatening crew cohesion or morale. Instead of proposing a complication, the GM deals one stress to the teamwork track. Crew members directly involved receive a fate point each in return.
- An NPC can attack the teamwork track with Manipulate. The captain defends against these attacks with Diplomacy; if the captain is unaware or otherwise unable to defend, the passive opposition is Mediocre (+0).



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Captain Van Anandel and his crew on the **Yellowtail** have just finished up a submarine battle. During the battle, they filled one stress box on the teamwork track. They still have two boxes remaining since Captain Van Anandel has Good (+3) Diplomacy. The opposing sub has fled, but the **Yellowtail** has been damaged and is **Dead in the Water**. The GM compels this aspect to target the crew's teamwork track, filling the second stress box. In exchange, Captain Van Anandel receives one fate point.

While the crew works on repairs, the GM compels two crew members' aspects to provoke an argument between them. Rowan is working on fixing the engine, while Elliott hovers nearby. The GM compels Rowan's aspect, **Works Best Without Interruption**, and Elliott's, **Constant Worrier**. Elliott talks loudly and anxiously about the damage to the ship, rubbing Rowan the wrong way as he works on repairs. Eventually Rowan completes the repairs but not before bickering with Elliott, filling the last stress box on the teamwork track. Both Rowan and Elliott receive a fate point.

Finally the crew gets the submarine up and running again, and Captain Van Anandel navigates to the nearest base so the crew can resupply and relax. He chooses the quickest route, aiming to avoid a second encounter with their earlier enemy. If they run into trouble again, any successful attacks on the sub won't be able to be absorbed by the teamwork track, instead translating directly into damage.

Captain Van Anandel gets the **Yellowtail** through the minefield and to the sea base without further trouble. Once they reach the base, the crew is able to relax, drink, and restock, clearing the teamwork track.

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### Clearing Stress from the Teamwork Track

At the end of a conflict, the captain can roll Diplomacy to clear a stress box on the teamwork track. The difficulty of this roll is the sum of all stress box values checked. For example, if the teamwork track's first and third stress boxes are filled, the difficulty is Great (+4). Succeeding on this roll only clears the highest stress box, however, and the captain can roll this only once between disembarkments.

When the crew visits an undersea base with the proper facilities for blowing off steam, clear all stress boxes on the teamwork track. The crew must stay for a day and be able to relax and make use of the base's facilities.

## THE SHIP

What is a crew without a ship? The vessel might be owned jointly, held privately, or on loan from a corporation, but regardless, there can be no crew without a sub.

Submarines have two aspects: a **concept** and a **trouble**. The concept can be anything that captures the feeling, era, specialty, or history of a ship, from *Bucket of Bolts* to *Sleek Loaner with Strings Attached*. A trouble could be anything from *Stolen* to *The Loudest Damn Ventilation System* to *Unreliable Navigation System*. Players, talk about and agree on the ship's name, aspect, and description.

In addition to its aspects, each submarine has a **class**. The class determines the scale of the submarine, its crew size, and its systems.

Submarines have four systems: **Engines**, **Sensors**, **Life Support**, and **Comms**. Each system on a sub has one or more **conditions**, which can be used to absorb stress during conflicts. You can find more about conditions on page 26 and in the *Fate System Toolkit* (page 18).

Additionally, a submarine's Engines and Sensors systems are rated as skills.

- Add the sub's Engines rank to the pilot's Pilot rolls. A pilot always has the option of using less than the sub's full Engines rank in an effort to be stealthier.
- Add the sub's Sensors rank to any crewperson's roll that makes use of the ship's sensors, including sonar.

### SIMPLIFIED SUBMARINE RULES

Looking for deep-ocean adventures without all of the focus on submarine stats? If so, you can treat the ship more as a weapon than as a character, with the following changes:

- Subs start with just one aspect, their concept.
- Submarines don't have a class. Instead, your submarine is Large if you have a crew of four or fewer, and it's Huge if you have a crew of five or more.
- Instead of taking conditions, submarines take consequences. Submarines start off with one moderate consequence slot and one severe slot. If someone on the ship has Engineer at Good (+3) or better, the ship gains a mild consequence slot.

## Submarine Classes

Submarines come in five basic classes. Each class will list the following attributes.

**Scale:** Large or Huge

**Crew:** The minimum number of crew members needed for the submarine to function, and the maximum number of crew members for which it's designed.

**Refresh Cost:** The cost in refresh of the sub for the PCs who own it.

**The submarine's systems,** including skills and conditions.

### S Class: Short Range

S Class submarines are often maintained by deep-sea bases, but are not well equipped to travel far from home.

**SCALE: LARGE**

**CREW: 2-5**

**REFRESH COST: 0**

#### MEDIOCRE (+0) ENGINES

4  *Dead in the Water* (lasting)

#### MEDIOCRE (+0) SENSORS

4  *Sensor-Blind* (lasting)

#### LIFE SUPPORT

4  *Breathing CO<sub>2</sub>* (lasting)

#### COMMS

4  *Radio Silence* (lasting)

#### NOTES

S Class submarines do not have torpedoes.

### M Class: Mining

M Class ships are on the smaller side, but have large cargo bays. Some have been altered, removing mining equipment and reducing the cargo bay size to add torpedo bays and more crew space.

**SCALE: LARGE**

**CREW: 2-8**

**REFRESH COST: 2**

#### MEDIOCRE (+0) ENGINES

4  *Dead in the Water* (lasting)

#### MEDIOCRE (+0) SENSORS

1  *Damaged Sensors* (fleeting)

4  *Sensor-Blind* (lasting)

#### LIFE SUPPORT

1  *Damaged Life Support* (fleeting)

4  *Breathing CO<sub>2</sub>* (lasting)

#### COMMS

4  *Radio Silence* (lasting)

## R Class: Research

Traditionally built for research expeditions, R Class submarines are popular in the Frontier. Many have been repurposed for freelancing and exploration.

**SCALE: HUGE**

**CREW: 4-20**

**REFRESH COST: 4**

### MEDIOCRE (+0) ENGINES

<sup>1</sup> *Dead in the Water* (lasting)

### AVERAGE (+1) SENSORS

<sup>1</sup> *Damaged Sensors* (fleeting)

*Sensor-Blind* (lasting)

### LIFE SUPPORT

<sup>1</sup> *Damaged Life Support* (fleeting)

*Breathing CO<sub>2</sub>* (lasting)

### COMMS

<sup>1</sup> *Damaged Comms* (fleeting)

*Radio Silence* (lasting)

## E Class: Exploratory

These sizable submarines are built with deep-sea exploration in mind.

**SCALE: HUGE**

**CREW: 8-50**

**REFRESH COST: 6**

### AVERAGE (+1) ENGINES

<sup>1</sup> *Damaged Engines* (fleeting)

*Dead in the Water* (lasting)

### AVERAGE (+1) SENSORS

<sup>1</sup> *Damaged Sensors* (fleeting)

*Sensor-Blind* (lasting)

### LIFE SUPPORT

<sup>1</sup> *Damaged Life Support* (fleeting)

*Breathing CO<sub>2</sub>* (lasting)

### COMMS

<sup>1</sup> *Damaged Comms* (fleeting)

*Radio Silence* (lasting)



## W Class: Warship

Expensive to build and requiring a large crew to maintain, W Class submarines are usually corporate property, if not corporation-run.

**SCALE: HUGE**

**CREW: 20-100**

**REFRESH COST: 8**

### FAIR (+2) ENGINES

- 1 *Damaged Engines* (fleeting)
- 2 *Lopsided Engines* (sticky)
- 4  *Dead in the Water* (lasting)

### AVERAGE (+1) SENSORS

- 1 *Damaged Sensors* (fleeting)
- 4  *Sensor-Blind* (lasting)

### LIFE SUPPORT

- 1 *Damaged Life Support* (fleeting)
- 4  *Breathing CO<sub>2</sub>* (lasting)

### COMMS

- 1 *Damaged Comms* (fleeting)
- 4  *Radio Silence* (lasting)



## Conditions

Conditions work much like consequences: they start as an aspect with one free invoke, and remain until cleared. However, conditions in *Deep Dark Blue* also have other specific effects, listed later in this section.

**Fleeting conditions** are relatively simple to repair. Anyone can run system maintenance with Engineer against Average (+1) opposition. This process takes about an hour and removes all fleeting conditions.

**Sticky conditions** take a few hours to repair, and can usually be repaired with the materials a ship has on hand. A crew member can repair a sticky condition with Engineer against Great (+4) opposition.

**Lasting conditions** represent major damage to the ship. They last for at least one full session and require a great deal of time and expertise to repair. A crew member can repair a lasting condition with Engineer against Fantastic (+6) opposition. These repairs take about half a day, but the work-hours may be split between two engineers.

If a submarine is taken out by receiving more damage than it can absorb with its listed conditions, it receives the condition *Hull Breach*.

### Engines Conditions

**Damaged Engines (fleeting):** The engines are slightly damaged, giving a -2 penalty to any Pilot rolls on the sub.

**Lopsided Engines (sticky):** The ship's engines are damaged in a lopsided fashion, giving a -4 penalty to any Pilot rolls on the sub.

**Dead in the Water (lasting):** Your ship cannot move. Pilot rolls on the sub are impossible.

### Sensors Conditions

**Damaged Sensors (fleeting):** Sonar is off, giving a -2 penalty to Shoot rolls against nautical targets.

**Sensor-Blind (lasting):** Sonar is broken, giving a -4 penalty to Pilot and Shoot rolls against nautical targets.

### Life Support Conditions

**Damaged Life Support (fleeting):** It's harder to breathe and think with less oxygen in the air, giving a -1 penalty to all rolls.

**Breathing CO<sub>2</sub> (lasting):** Every ten minutes, this condition attacks everyone on the sub, who defend with Physique. The attack begins with a Mediocre (+0) result, increasing by +1 each time it attacks again until the condition is repaired. Characters. Unlike other conditions, this condition can be temporarily repaired with an emergency Engineer check against Fair (+2) opposition, taking half an hour. These emergency repairs last for several hours before they must be done again; each time emergency repairs must be made beyond the first, add +1 to the passive opposition, until permanent repairs can be made.

## Comms Conditions

**Damaged Comms (fleeting):** It's harder to hear people on the other end, giving a -2 penalty to any Manipulate or Diplomacy rolls against nautical targets.

**Radio Silence (lasting):** You can't communicate at all. This includes the use of active sonar, which gives a -4 penalty to Pilot and a -2 penalty to Shoot against nautical targets.

## Hull Breach

When a ship gets a **Hull Breach**, water begins leaking into the ship. This is represented by a stress track with six boxes. The track starts with all of its boxes clear, except for those used to absorb shifts from the attack which caused the breach.

At the beginning of every exchange, fill the lowest clear box of the **Hull Breach** stress track. If there is no clear box to fill, the sub and its crew are taken out.

When the sub with a **Hull Breach** is attacked but cannot absorb shifts with the crew's teamwork track or the ship's conditions, the **Hull Breach** track absorbs the shifts. This stress track can absorb a single attack with multiple stress boxes. If the **Hull Breach** track cannot absorb an attack, the ship and all those on it are taken out.

A character can try to clear a stress box from the **Hull Breach** track by overcoming with Engineering. First, the acting player picks a stress box they wish to clear and rolls Engineering, against passive opposition equal to the shift value of the chosen stress box. For example, if the chosen box was worth two shifts, the opposition would be Fair (+2).

After resolving this roll, the **Hull Breach** attacks the repairing character with the icy, fast flow of rushing water. The result of this attack is equal to the shift value of the highest filled stress box. Characters attacked by the breach defend with Physique. Characters who are taken out by the **Hull Breach** drown.

The **Hull Breach** can be compelled to attack one character on the sub in the same way.

When the conflict ends, the stress track clears and stops filling until the **Hull Breach** track absorbs shifts again. However, the sub gets **Weakened Hull** until it docks and repairs.

### HULL BREACHES AND GROUP SIZE

You may find that these rules for hull breaches are too difficult if you only have a couple players, or too easy if you have more than four or five. If so, consider making one of these changes.

**For two players:** If a character repairs with Engineering and succeeds with style, this also clears the next lowest filled stress box on the **Hull Breach** track. For example, if you succeeded with style on clearing the 3-shift stress box, this would also clear the 2-shift stress box or, if that was clear, the 1-shift stress box.

**For many players:** Instead of filling the lowest clear stress box on each exchange, fill the two lowest clear boxes.

## Submarine Combat

Most submarine combat involves torpedoes. A crewperson on a suitably armed ship can use Shoot to attack another ship. The other ship's pilot defends with Pilot.

Attacking another sub or sea creature requires invoking a situation aspect created with Sensors. In general, the faster a sub travels, the louder its engines, and the easier it is to spot with sonar. When rolling to create an advantage with Sensors by locating or targeting a sub, add the targeted sub's Engines rank as a bonus to your roll.

You can use Pilot to attack by ramming your submarine into another, but if successful, your ship takes as much damage as the defending ship.

To fix one of the submarine's conditions, you must successfully overcome with Engineer against Great (+4) difficulty for fleeting or sticky conditions or Fantastic (+6) difficulty for lasting conditions. Fixing a condition normally takes an hour of uninterrupted time. Alternatively, you can spend a turn rushing the job, increasing the difficulty by +2 but clearing the condition immediately on success. Rushed fixes only last for a half day at the most, so a hurried combat fix will need to be finished up soon after a conflict ends.

## Scale and Combat

Combat can involve participants as small as a single person or fish, or as large as a leviathan. To better model these differences in size, *Deep Dark Blue* uses the scale rules from the *Fate System Toolkit* (page 67).

- **Individual:** People in diving suits, as well as much undersea wildlife.
- **Large:** Small submarines and sharks.
- **Huge:** Blue whales, large submarines, and most sea bases.
- **Gargantuan:** Only expansive sea bases and abominations (page 37). It's rare to see anything truly gargantuan in the deep sea.

In a conflict with entities of different scale, the larger entity is better at dealing damage. For each step separating the larger and smaller entities in scale, increase the larger entity's Weapon rating by 2.

However, a larger entity is also easier to hit. When using Sensors to aim torpedoes at a larger opponent, the smaller attacker gets +1 to attack for each step of separation in scale.

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Una is in a diving suit (Individual scale) and is fighting with a whale (Huge scale). While it's not impossible for Una to win, the whale is at a distinct advantage. Its attacks have Weapon:4 against Una.

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### Combat Inside a Sub

Guns on submarines are dangerous proposition at best, given the potential consequences of a spark in an enclosed environment. All but the most foolhardy captains ban them from their vessels. Crossbows and other ranged weapons don't pose the same risks, but are not ideal in cramped submarines. In a few deep-sea bases, however, they can come in handy if a fight breaks out or a fugitive tries to escape.

Close-quarters combat is the most likely sort of combat in submarines and sea bases alike. Some people carry knives, but many specialize in unarmed combat, even using their environment—such as *Hot Pipes* and *Sharp Angles*—to their advantage.

## ADVANCEMENT

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As crew members grow and change, so will their relationship with their ship. In campaigns, the sub isn't a monolithic, unchanging entity. Ships benefit from milestones just like characters do.

### Minor Milestones

When the crew hits a minor milestone, you may do one of the following:

- Rename your ship's trouble aspect or an aspect you've added at a moderate milestone.
- Swap two equivalent ship conditions. For example, if Sensors has a fleeting condition and a lasting condition, and Engines has a lasting condition, you may add a fleeting condition to Engines to remove the fleeting condition from Sensors.

### Significant Milestones

When the crew hits a significant milestone, you may do one of the following:

- Gain both of the benefits of a minor milestone.
- Give your sub an additional aspect. This can be anything about your submarine that could come in handy, such as *Marine Sciences Lab*, *Sound-Proofed*, or *Outfitted for Trench Diving*.

### Major Milestones

When the crew hits a major milestone, you may do one of the following:

- Clear all of the ship's conditions.
- Rename your sub's concept.
- Increase your sub's Engines or Sensors rank by one.

After a significant or major milestone, circumstances might call for trading in your submarine for a new one. Perhaps the crew's ship is too recognizable after some infamous deeds, or it took irreparable damage in a climactic fight. Regardless of why, selecting a new ship is a serious matter and shouldn't be done lightly.

If you choose to get a new submarine, the crew as a whole pays its refresh cost. Improvements to your old sub do not carry over to your new vessel, including additional aspects and improved Engines or Sensors ranks.



## TRAVEL AND FORTUNE IN THE BENTHIC FRONTIER

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Travel through the deep ocean is largely uneventful, punctuated by the occasional serious hazard. While most of the commonly traveled areas have been well mapped, the topography around mid-ocean ridges is slowly changing with geological activity. Less familiar areas may have uncharted trenches, wrecks, or other secrets.

Nearly all submarines currently operating in the Frontier are nuclear-powered, fueled by highly enriched uranium. While expensive and dangerous, this method is preferred because it requires no oxygen, emits no exhaust gas, is relatively quiet, and is highly efficient.

### Sea Bases

While much of the work in the deep ocean is done on submarines, sea bases serve two important roles. They can provide constant care at large, active mining sites, monitoring progress and discouraging competing companies from encroaching on the territory. Additionally, some sea bases have regular connections with the surface, primarily in the form of shipments, providing opportunities for submarines to restock without spending significant time in surfacing and returning to shore.

Bases are good places for ships to stock up on necessities such as food, air and water filters, and uranium. They also provide opportunities to meet folks outside of one's own crew, and many bases take advantage of this by including a cramped bar or tavern where visitors are encouraged to eat, drink, and socialize. Independently owned and operated sea bases are often ideal as neutral meeting spots for conversations between business partners, friends, or rivals that are better conducted in person.

### Notable Locations

#### R.A. Cooper's

Known to most simply as Cooper's, this sea base is located past the edge of Atlantean Enterprises' main territory, out toward Dead Man's Trench. It was established by Rashida Alexa Cooper, an entrepreneur who sold investors a decade ago on the potential profits of a long-term deep-sea base unassociated with a mining operation. Cooper makes her income from exorbitantly priced supplies, mail service, and transport back to the surface, as well as by renting out rooms to scientists and the rare tourist who can't afford Neptune's Lodge. Lately, Rashida's been having some trouble with packages and mail she's sent out never making it to the surface—or at least not to the right people.

### **Neptune's Lodge**

Andrew Norris, hotel mogul and wealthy entrepreneur, recently invested in the first deep-sea base catering exclusively to tourists. While other sites occasionally see wealthy visitors with a fascination for the ocean, Neptune's Lodge is explicitly designed to attract a steady stream of rich and famous visitors. With a steampunk aesthetic inspired by *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, Neptune's Lodge offers small but stylish rooms, a gourmet chef, and a full staff. A market for freelance guides has sprung up as tourists seek charismatic local experts to take them on tours of shipwrecks and unusual underwater geography, as well as on hunting expeditions. The tourists may be high-maintenance, but they pay well, especially for trips to some of the more notorious parts of the deep blue.

### **AE Northern Mineral Mine**

Formerly Atlantean Enterprises' northernmost mine, this operation and its base were abandoned after less than a year. It was too far from AE's other locations to be practical to keep restocked, and the mine wasn't nearly as rich as geologists had estimated. The abandoned base now serves as a pirate hideout of sorts, home to the Splinters, a notorious crew that patrols the northern waters looking for lone submarines to board and loot. Even in the frontier of the deep ocean, the Splinters are known for their ruthlessness. Their attacks leave no survivors.

### **Johnson Research Base**

The Johnson Research Base was designed and built as a deep-sea research base for Beyond Whales, a nonprofit dedicated to discovering and cataloging deep-sea fauna. It was named for the Johnson Foundation, which funded the base's construction and the first several years of its operation. A decade ago, though, when the Johnson Foundation reduced the base's funding, Atlantean Enterprises swept in and purchased it.

The base is home to fifteen semi-permanent residents; two of whom are scientists affiliated with Beyond Whales, and the rest are Atlantean Enterprises employees.

### **Shizuka Research Collaborative**

The Shizuka Research Collaborative (SRC) was envisioned as a thriving under-sea base dedicated to researching hydrothermal vents and their communities. Initially, the base included chemists, geologists, biologists, and zoologists, with a particularly active team studying the extremophile bacteria that thrive in the vents. As years passed and funding diminished, many scientists left the SRC and not enough came to replace them. Under the guidance of Director Adachi, the SRC has maintained its operations by renting space out to others. Now, the base hosts a general supply store and an office of Duonautics. Thus far they've resisted efforts to add a mining operation, considering the irreversible effect it would have on the vents and SRC scientists' ability to study them, but as the SRC's budgetary woes continue to mount, Director Adachi fears it's looking inevitable.

## Dead Man's Trench

At least four submarines have met their end in Dead Man's Trench. Only recently added to maps, this trench is believed to be at least as deep as the Mariana Trench. The trench got its name after one submarine disappeared here and, weeks later, another submarine went after it to loot the wreckage but never returned. Two more submarines soon followed in their predecessors' folly, and every year or two another ship seems to get the same idea, thinking their ship's strong enough to make it to the bottom and back up again. Recently, Captain Arya brought the *Seastar* down into Dead Man's Trench, boasting new equipment and an onboard abyssogeographer to help them navigate the trench. It's been three weeks and there's no sign of them coming back up.

## Needle Trench

A few years back, one engineer's mathematical error in a delivery for an Atlantean Enterprises base led to a valuable package of uranium drifting miles off course. A submarine sent to retrieve it discovered why the tracking beacon said it was so far away: the package had fallen deep into a previously unknown abyss, Needle Trench. Atlantean Enterprises wrote it off as a loss after multiple crews refused to venture into the trench, given that next to nothing was known about the area or what lurked within it. Rumor has it that an impossibly large beast lives in the trench, which would explain why no other crew has yet to salvage the package and live to brag about it.

## Diving Suits

Originally designed for crew making repairs to mining operations, diving suits have improved substantially in the past decade. These large, bulky suits bear a resemblance to modern-day spacesuits. By wearing a diving suit you can breathe and move underwater, though the latter is difficult as the suit is ***Big and Bulky***. A diving suit may be connected via reinforced air tube to a submarine or base, or it may—as is more common now—have an oxygen tank on its back.

Rich thrill-seekers and daredevil Frontier residents alike don these suits to capture or fight dangerous sealife, hunting them face-to-tentacle rather than ambushing them in a submarine. When doing so, they usually arm themselves with spear guns, though there are tales of diving-suit-clad mercenaries flat-out punching sharks into submission.

## THREATS

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The deep dark blue is, at its most basic level, an inhospitable environment. It's only through a combination of technology, stubbornness, and luck that humans can survive down there. Travel and combat down deep vary in several ways from travel and combat on the surface. Things taken for granted on the surface—light, breathable air, and sound, just to name a few—are much more precious on the ocean floor. Without the secure, specially designed hull of a submarine or a sea base, people wouldn't just drown; they'd be crushed by the immense pressure and subsumed by the icy, stygian blackness.

Unlike on the surface, vehicular movement underwater is not confined in two dimensions. In this respect, it's much more like air combat than like land combat; submarines can go port and starboard, forward and backward, and up and down.

The depths of the ocean are lightless, far darker than night on the surface, where there's at least the stars if not the moon or distant streetlights to offer some drop of light. There are a few bioluminescent creatures, but most of the native sealife is blind, relying on other senses. Submarines are typically equipped with lights to help them see the seafloor, but they are not relied on for navigation.

Instead, submarines use sonar for navigation, communication, and detection of other vehicles and obstacles. Active sonar uses pings of sound and their echoes to locate objects, while passive sonar listens without transmitting. The latter is generally used in tactical or scientific situations, determining the location of sealife or ships without giving away one's own presence.

Finally, the pressure on the ocean floor is immense. People simply cannot survive outside of submarines, suits, or bases that are specifically designed for the depths, drowning and hypothermia aside. The pressure continues to increase the deeper you go; your craft may not survive a journey into a trench. Diving suits and most submarines aren't designed to go much deeper than 6,000 meters, the usual lowest point of the ocean floor; trenches can plummet as deep as 11,000 meters. Increasing pressure can crack and rupture the hull of a vessel not designed for the deep sea, but rapidly reducing pressure can also pose a threat due to decompression.

## Environmental Aspects

Most environmental traits of the ocean can be represented as aspects.

Specific environments the PCs might encounter include *Thriving Whale Fall*, *Black Smoker Vents*, *Reclaimed Shipwreck*, *Seafloor Communication Cables*, and *Volcanic Ridge*.

If you'd like to better define a hazard, you can assign it more aspects, skills, and stunts, as described by the Bronze Rule in *Fate Core* (page 270). Here are some fleshed-out examples.

### Deep Sea Trench

#### *Astounding Pressure, the Great Unknown*

When entering a deep-sea trench and when undertaking any pilot or engineering action outside of regular sub operation and maintenance, the ship's engineer must overcome with Engineer. This is a second roll in addition to the roll normally needed to complete that task. The typical difficulty for this is Good (+3), although especially deep trenches can have Great (+4) difficulty or higher. Additionally, all Pilot rolls in deep-sea trenches gain +2 to their difficulty.

### Underwater Minefield

Mines only detonate, attacking with Good (+3) Combat, if the ship or another entity impacts the ocean floor in this area.





## Luminescent Squid

*Gigantic Fauna*

**SCALE: LARGE**

**SKILLS**

**Good (+3):** Physique

**Fair (+2):** Combat

**Average (+1):** Athletics

**STRESS**

**Physical**



**CONSEQUENCES**

**Mild (2):**

## Colossal Squid

*Whale-Sized Fauna*

**SCALE: HUGE**

**SKILLS**

**Great (+4):** Physique

**Good (+3):** Combat, Athletics

**STRESS**

**Physical**

**CONSEQUENCES**

**Mild (2):**

**Moderate (4):**

## Sleeper Shark

*Big Hungry Scavenger*

**SCALE: LARGE**

**SKILLS**

**Good (+3):** Physique

**Fair (+2):** Combat

**STRESS**

**Physical**

**CONSEQUENCES**

**Mild (2):**



## Sealife

The ocean's benthic zone is home to a range of creatures, though few of them pose direct threats to the PCs. Those that do, such as giant squids, are rare, but encounters with them may be deadly. With no sunlight to fuel photosynthesis, the ocean's ecosystem is based largely on marine snow or, around hydrothermal vents, chemosynthetic bacteria.

The underwater world of the Benthic Frontier is a wondrous one. The crew might watch giant amoebas drift by, single-celled organisms that can grow to over four inches long. Giant isopods, pillbug-like creatures the size of small dogs, may be seen scavenging meals of dead fish and squid on the ocean floor. Sea slugs, sea cucumbers, sponges, and countless smaller species thrive in the Benthic Zone, particularly around hydrothermal vents. Some species, such as anglerfish, may look vicious but pose no threat.

The ocean floor finds itself home to the remains of sealife from the upper zones of the ocean. While most of these creatures are small enough to be negligible to humans, composing a sort of "marine snow" that fuels the bottom dwellers' ecosystem, occasionally a whale carcass falls to the deep. It is unlikely, though possible, that the body itself will endanger a sea base or mining site. Even so, if the carcass simply falls to rest near a base or site, it is bound to attract some of the larger predators in the abyssal zone.

While relatively rare, some animals in the deep sea are large enough to pose a threat to submarines, or even to mining operations or sea bases. While they won't seek submarines out, they may fight to defend themselves or their territory against perceived threats. Many larger predators are particularly attracted to recent whale falls, which provide a bounty of food. These creatures include giant cephalopods—squids and octopi—and sleeper sharks.

Individuals in diving suits would have trouble dealing appreciable damage to these creatures, but it's not impossible.

## Abominations

Lurking in and around the trenches of the Benthic Frontier are creatures that have largely eluded scientific investigation. Up on the surface, abominations are viewed as modern myths, while in the Frontier, all but the most sheltered or skeptical agree there are creatures too vast, rare, and dangerous for science to have identified.

These abominations are not formally recognized by science, with few or no officially documented sightings, but a few researchers who study deep-sea gigantism are quietly investigating their existence. It's a dangerous field, both practically and academically. Finding too little success fuels claims that one's study is no more than cryptozoology, but getting too close to the wrong abomination means the research team won't live to tell the tale.

## Leviathan

*Wrathful Monster of the Depths, Improbably Gigantic*

**SCALE: GARGANTUAN**

### SKILLS

- Superb (+5):** Physique
- Great (+4):** Combat
- Good (+3):** Will
- Fair (+2):** Athletics
- Average (+1):** Stealth

### STUNTS

- Impossible Maw:** If Leviathan has created a *Grapple* aspect on a ship, Leviathan can swallow it whole upon a successful attack.

### STRESS

Physical

### CONSEQUENCES

- Mild (2):**
- Moderate (4):**
- Severe (6):**
- Extreme (8):**

## Dodececephalopod

*Too Many Tentacles, Ever-Grasping*

**SCALE: GARGANTUAN**

### SKILLS

- Superb (+5):** Athletics
- Great (+4):** Stealth
- Good (+3):** Physique
- Fair (+2):** Combat
- Average (+1):** Will

### STUNTS

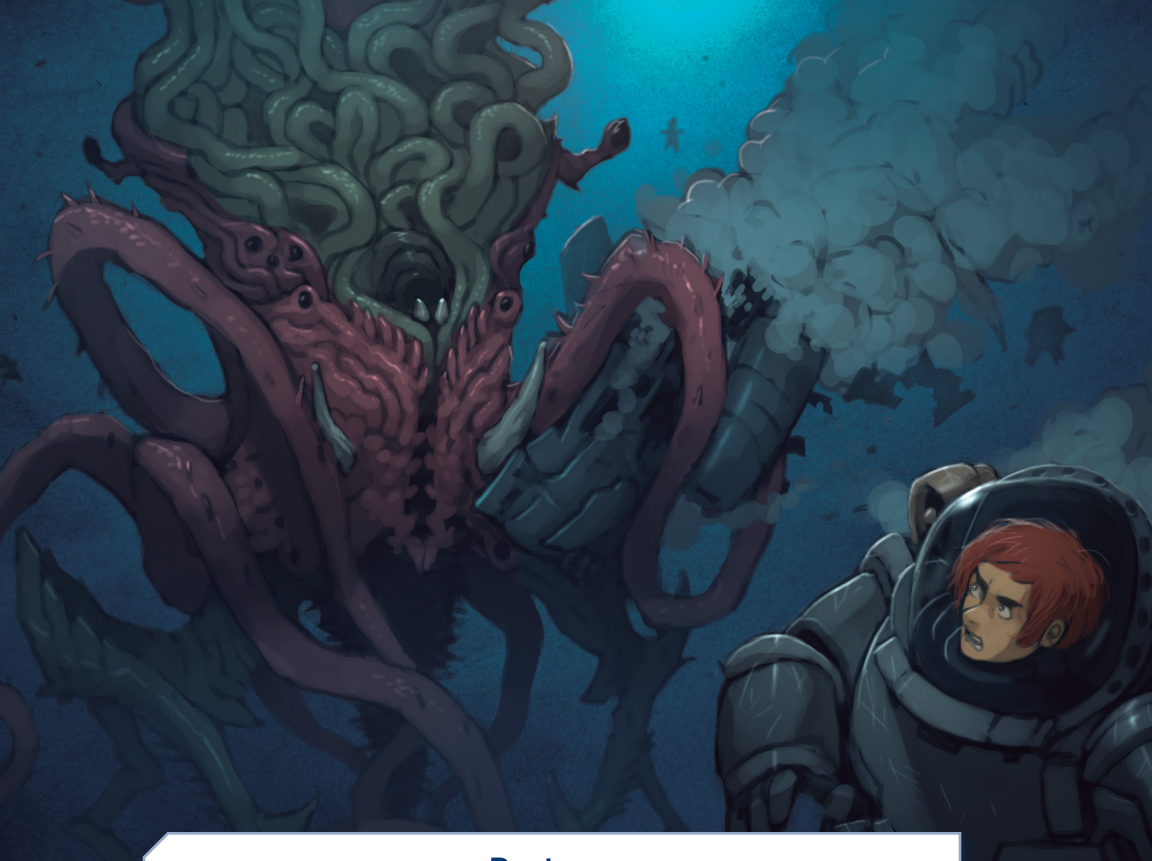
- Impossible Grip:** +2 to create an advantage related to grappling with Combat.

### STRESS

PHYSICAL

### CONSEQUENCES

- Mild (2):**
- Moderate (4):**
- Severe (6):**



## Proteus

*Elusive yet Hungering, Shifting Eldritch Monstrosity*

**SCALE: GARGANTUAN**

### SKILLS

**Superb (+5):** Stealth

**Great (+4):** Athletics

**Good (+3):** Combat

**Fair (+2):** Physique

**Average (+1):** Notice

### STUNTS

**Fluid Form:** Proteus's form is remarkably fluid and flexible, letting it hide until it springs in surprise. On its first turn of a conflict, Proteus may use Stealth to attack. Also, when it defends and succeeds with style, Proteus can clear a stress box.

### STRESS

Physical

### CONSEQUENCES

**Mild (2):**

**Moderate (4):**

**Severe (6):**

## The Greatest Threat of All: Other Humans

The Benthic Frontier attracts adventurers and entrepreneurs, but it also attracts thieves, murderers, and all manner of other low-lives who don't do well in civilized society. Even so, not everyone who's chosen to distance themselves from society is amoral; some people may have been driven to this life by discrimination, hostile communities, or unjust government policies.

GMs, spend some time on fleshing out NPCs' motivations, backgrounds, and methods, but consider ways to subvert stereotypes to keep the players engaged. An ex-convict might have been a victim of harsh drug laws and the prison-industrial complex, for example, while that famous entrepreneur may have no qualms about eliminating her competition by any means necessary.

When building an NPC crew, whether potential ally or active rival to the PCs, it's important to consider the crew's goals. Are they primarily scavengers or researchers? Do they want to avoid violent conflict, or are they prepared to blast submarines out of their way to get what they're after? Do they have a particular reputation to keep up? You can use those goals to craft their crew concept, and from that concept you can design the crew members. Most ships will have a captain, pilot, and engineer, but a research vessel will probably have at least two scientists, while a crew of shady freelancers will probably include a torpedo gunner and mercenaries. You may not need to stat out every crew member, but knowing the general team on board will help you determine the vessel's Pilot, Shoot, and Engineer, even if the PCs never interact with the other crew in person.

### Quest Inc.

Quest Inc. is a publicly traded corporation whose corporate mission statement is "To better life for humanity through utilization of the ocean's riches." In practice, they're a cutthroat organization that takes full advantage of the lawlessness of the deep ocean. They're seeking a monopoly on deep-sea mining, and aren't above sabotage or even murder to accomplish their goals, but you wouldn't know it from looking at their brochures.

Most of Quest's operations are done through contracts with freelance crews, minimizing Quest's responsibility if news of their sketchier actions reaches surface media and shareholders. Initially, signing on with Quest looks legitimate. Like most corporations, they pay a monthly rate, with a substantial bonus at the contract's completion. This bonus incentivizes crews to not go rogue, since the contract itself doesn't have much practical weight in the free-for-all legal environment of the Benthic Frontier. However, crews soon find that what's expected of them goes beyond the demands of most corporate monoliths.

Quest employs a team of contractor liaisons who negotiate contracts and monitor and oversee crews. While the contract lists a number of typical activities the crew may be expected to engage in, such as scouting and making minor repairs to equipment, near the end of their contract many captains find their contractor liaison giving them far less innocuous tasks. These range from exploring dangerous trenches to sabotaging non-Quest bases to outright destroying other submarines. Crews that refuse not only lose the option to renew their contract but don't receive their final payment—including the bonus that makes freelancing worth its while.

### CONTRACT IDEAS

In the next section, you'll find a fleshed-out adventure, but there are countless opportunities for crews in the Benthic Frontier. Many of these opportunities will come in the form of contracts, or jobs given to crews under existing contracts. Here are some ideas:

- An unmarked, unidentified submarine is lurking at the edges of Atlantean Enterprises's territory. AE wants your crew to investigate—and neutralize, if necessary.
- As Duonautics expands their operations, they find a barnacle-encrusted, rusty hull of a sub—one that wasn't here when they did their initial scouting mission three weeks ago. Your crew's task is to board the vessel and find out how and why it got here.
- Pirates have taken over one of Quest, Inc.'s supply bases and are holding its employees hostage. Quest, Inc. is willing to pay well for any crew who gets rid of the pirates, preferably permanently.
- Dr. Megat is looking to hire a crew to take her down to the bottom of the Needle Trench in search of the elusive dodecacephalopod.
- A remote scientific research station lost communications soon after beginning an experimental sonar project designed to attract a rare species of deep-sea shark. Your crew has been sent to go check on them and help restore communications.

## THE RESCUE OF DR. WILLIAMS

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### Summary

The PCs, newly hired by Atlantean Enterprises (AE), are charged with investigating a distress signal from the submarine *Dallas*. The *Dallas* recently terminated a contract with Quest Inc., and its crew includes a scientist that AE has been trying to hire for years. The PCs need to get to the *Dallas* and aid the ship while Quest Inc. tries to scare them off—or destroy them.

### Introduction

The adventure begins at the Johnson Research Base. The crew is here to sign a contract with Atlantean Enterprises, agreeing to work for them for the next six months. The crew's captain will be meeting with Mr. Aaron Dinse, one of AE's Independent Crew Liaisons.

The contract itself is fairly straightforward, offering the typical monthly payment to the crew to split, with an option to renew the contract at the end of the term if both parties are amenable. The contract states that specific assignments could include, but are not limited to, checking on other bases or submarines, carrying supplies between locations, providing routine maintenance to automated mining sites, investigating wrecks and potential mining sites, and defending AE territory from rival incursions. There is no hazard pay, since the job is acknowledged to be dangerous; the contract explicitly states that AE is not responsible for damage to or destruction of the crew's submarine, nor for injury to or death of any crew member. That said, AE has a good reputation in the Benthic Zone for communicating well about mission risks and rarely sending crews into known danger.

Mr. Dinse informs the crew, while they are signing the contract, that AE already has their first task for the crew.

Less than an hour ago, the Johnson Research Base received a distress signal from the *Dallas*, not far over the edge of AE territory. The *Dallas* is a small submarine whose crew had last worked for Quest Inc. Mr. Dinse asks the crew to head to the *Dallas* immediately and assist in fixing the ship if possible, or rescue the crew if not. Even if the PCs can fix the *Dallas*, Mr. Dinse instructs the crew to urge the *Dallas* to stop by the Johnson Research Base.

If asked about potential threats, Mr. Dinse says that Quest Inc. will probably send one of their own ships to aid, and they might not take kindly to the PCs interfering. He warns the crew that Quest Inc. is ruthless; they shouldn't initiate conflict, but if the need arises they may use whatever means necessary to defend themselves or the *Dallas*.



## Atlantean Enterprises

AE is interested in the *Dallas* because its crew includes Dr. Quentin Williams, a world-renowned expert on abyssogeology, specifically hydrothermal vents. The AE has been trying for years to hire Dr. Williams, hoping to have him lead AE's engineers in designing an undersea hydrothermal power plant.

## Heading to the *Dallas*

As Dinse guessed, Quest has sent their own investigation team, aboard the *Little Blue*, to investigate the *Dallas*. Whether they arrive before the PCs, though, depends on the pilot. Have the PCs overcome with Pilot against Great (+4) difficulty. The pilot will likely make this roll, but other crew members may help by stacking advantages.

- **Fail:** By the time the PCs arrive, the *Little Blue* is long gone, having taken Dr. Williams and Seth Lynch. The others have been left behind.
- **Tie:** The *Little Blue* arrives simultaneously.
- **Succeed:** The crew arrives shortly before the *Little Blue*.
- **Succeed with Style:** The crew arrives well in advance of the *Little Blue*.

## Arriving at the *Dallas*

The *Dallas* is currently stuck on the ocean floor. There are only a few emergency lights on inside the ship, and the air feels particularly stuffy. Originally designed as a research vessel, it has no weapons of its own and is relatively small.

### The Dallas

#### CLASS R (RESEARCH)

It currently suffers from the conditions *Dead in the Water* and *Damaged Comms*.

#### ASPECTS

*Rusty Trusty Research Vessel; Falling Apart from the Inside Out*

#### CREW CONCEPT

*Eclectic Band*

#### CREW MEMBERS

Captain Maria Ramirez  
Dr. Quentin Williams  
Tyler Gomez, engineer  
Kerry Parker, pilot  
Seth Lynch, mercenary

## Little Blue

The *Little Blue* is a mercenary ship, sent to the wreck under contract with Quest. Their objective is to take Seth and Dr. Williams back to a Quest base, leaving the rest of the crew in the wreck.

Captain Jacqui Green heads the *Little Blue* and has six crew members under her command. When encountering the PCs, the *Little Blue's* crew believes in shooting first, asking questions later.

### Little Blue

#### CLASS R (RESEARCH)

#### ASPECTS

*Armed and Armored Submarine; Cramped Interior*

#### CREW CONCEPT

*Hardened Gang of Mercenaries*

#### CREW SKILLS

Great (+4) Shoot, Good (+3) Pilot

## Aiding the Dallas

The most sensible course of action for the PCs is fixing the *Dallas*. Their engineer can't make the repairs alone, but working with the PCs he probably can. Alternatively, the PCs might take the crew aboard their ship, but Captain Ramirez only wants to do that as a last resort.

The *Dallas's* systems were sabotaged by a crew member. When investigating the systems in preparation for repairs, a successful overcome action with Notice or Engineer against Great (+4) difficulty reveals the sabotage. Investigation amongst the crew may reveal that Seth, who only joined the crew when they got a contract with Quest, was the perpetrator. Seth was tasked with sabotaging the *Dallas* after the crew terminated their contract, with the aim of keeping the vessel from fleeing too far from Quest territory.

Captain Ramirez refused to renew her crew's contract with Quest after an urging from Dr. Williams. While Dr. Williams is reluctant to share this with others, fearing they might also seek to use his research for aggressive purposes, he was approached by Quest to work with their engineers in weaponizing hydrothermal vents. Dr. Williams was not comfortable with this, as most of his work was done to better understand the origin, composition, and effects of hydrothermal events, applicable more in making mining more efficient.

## The Journey Back

If the *Little Blue* is unsuccessful, they will contact Quest and a second ship, Dreadnaught, will be sent on intercept. The PCs need to make it back to the Johnson Research Base before the Quest Inc. ship meets up with them. This will most likely be a chase, if the PCs realize they're being pursued and decide to hurry.

### Dreadnaught

The *Dreadnaught* is an official Quest ship, owned by the company and operated by employees rather than contractors. Captain Brian Miller leads the crew. He will pursue the PCs until they are nearly at the Johnson Research Base, at which point he will turn around and head back to Quest territory.

As soon as the *Dreadnaught* knows that the *Little Blue* has failed, they will attempt to communicate with the PCs. Captain Miller will radio their vessel and attempt to use diplomacy and empty promises to get them to hand over Dr. Williams. However, if this is unsuccessful, Miller has no qualms about firing on the PCs' ship.

### Dreadnaught

**CLASS W (WARSHIP)**

**ASPECTS**

*State-of-the-Art Submarine; Awkward Turning Radius*

**CREW CONCEPT**

*Well-Oiled Machine*

**CREW SKILLS**

Great (+4) Shoot, Pilot

## Conclusion

The adventure concludes when the PCs return to the Johnson Research Base. If they successfully repaired the *Dallas*, it will also stop at the base to make further repair. If the PCs are bringing the *Dallas*'s crew back on their ship, staff at the base promise to help them.

Either way, Mr. Dinse will thank the PCs. This could certainly be the start of a larger campaign if desired, with the PCs getting tasked to further investigate Quest's schemes.

## The Crew of the *Dallas*



### Captain Maria Ramirez

#### ASPECTS

**Role:** *Captain of the Dallas*

**Other:** *Tireless Pursuit of Success;*  
*I'd Trust My Crew with My Life*

#### SKILLS

**Great (+4):** Physique

**Good (+3):** Diplomacy

**Fair (+2):** Will

**Average (+1):** Combat

#### STUNTS

**Crisis Mode:** When your ship is under fire, you can inspire your crew to fight on without panicking. Once per conflict, if your ship has gained any consequences during the scene, you can create the situation aspect *Inspiring Presence* with one free invocation on your turn without spending an action.

**Valiant Leader:** If your ship takes a condition during a conflict, you gain +2 to Will until the end of the scene.

#### STRESS

**Physical**

**Mental**

#### CONSEQUENCES

**Mild (2):**

**Moderate (4):**

#### NOTES

Captain Ramirez is a Latina woman in her fifties who's been working in the deep blue for over a decade. She's pragmatic and no-nonsense. She only was able to afford her own ship last year, and takes great pride in it. Her crew's safety is her top concern.

## Dr. Quentin Williams

### ASPECTS

**Role:** *World-Renowned Abyssogeologist*  
**Other:** *Science for Science's Sake;*  
*Pesky Moral Compass*

### SKILLS

**Great (+4):** Knowledge  
**Good (+3):** Will  
**Fair (+2):** Contacts  
**Average (+1):** Notice

### STUNTS

**Biology PhD:** +2 to create an advantage with Knowledge.  
**Scientific Authority:** You can use Knowledge instead of Provoke to intimidate someone when your scientific knowledge or authority matters.

### STRESS

**Physical**       **Mental**

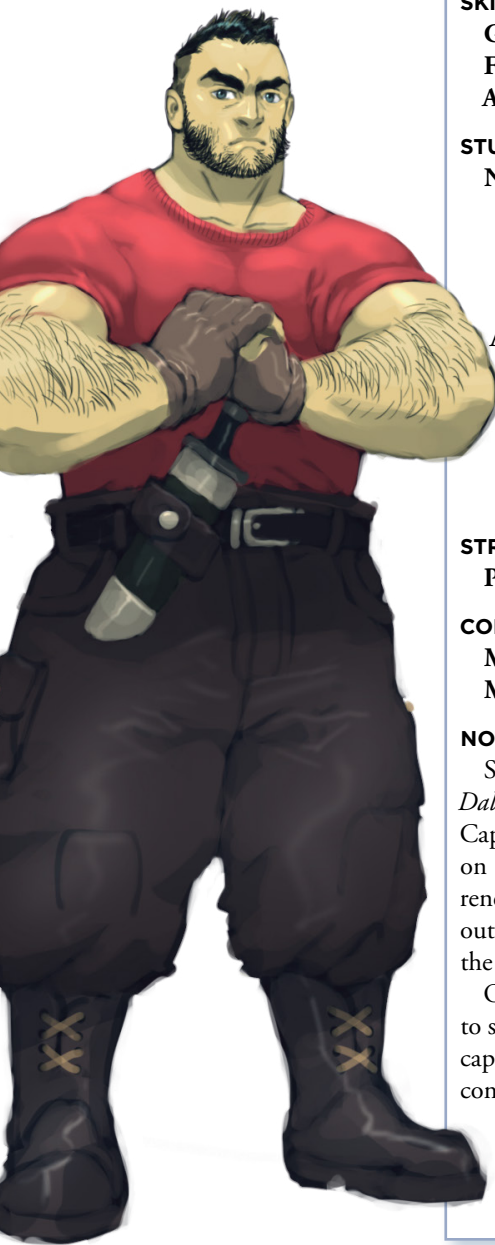
### CONSEQUENCES

**Mild (2):**  
**Moderate (4):**

### NOTES

Dr. Williams, PhD, is a leading expert in abyssogeology, the study of the geology of the deep ocean's floor, partially its hydrothermal vents. He's a biracial man in his early sixties whose first concern is his scientific research. He has little interest in finding ways to monetize his research; rather, he's passionate about the scientific opportunities that traveling with the *Dallas* gives him, with plenty of different vents and geological formations to see throughout their travels.





## Seth Lynch

### ASPECTS

**Role:** *Shady but Effective Mercenary*

**Other:** *No One's More Loyal Than My Knife; Looking Out for Number One*

### SKILLS

**Good (+3):** Combat

**Fair (+2):** Physique

**Average (+1):** Athletics

### STUNTS

**No Battlefield Like Home:** You're intimately familiar with the design of your ship and all of its dangerous spots. At the beginning of a conflict taking place inside your sub, you get a free boost called *Home Turf*.

**Aggressively Defensive:** When you defend against an unarmed attack with Combat and succeed with style, you can invoke an aspect for free to deal a 2-shift hit to your attacker. If you do, forgo the free boost from succeeding with style.

### STRESS

**Physical**

**Mental**

### CONSEQUENCES

**Mild (2):**

**Moderate (4):**

### NOTES

Seth is a short, middle-aged man who joined the *Dallas* soon after their contract with Quest began and Captain Ramirez decided she needed more muscle on the crew. After the captain refused to renew or renegotiate their contract with Quest, Quest reached out to Seth and offered him a large sum to sabotage the ship. Seth's primary concern is his own wealth.

Once the *Little Blue* shows up, Seth won't hesitate to show his true colors, helping the *Little Blue's* crew capture Dr. Williams while leaving the rest of his companions for dead. If the PCs arrive before the *Little Blue*, Seth is still with the rest of the crew, claiming ignorance about the ship's mechanical problems. If confronted, he'll first try to lie his way out, and if that doesn't work, he'll fight.



## Tyler Gomez

### ASPECTS

**Role:** *Novice Engineer*

**Other:** *Fiercely Protective*

### SKILLS

**Good (+3):** Engineer

**Fair (+2):** Combat

**Average (+1):** Notice

### STUNTS

**Torpedo Expert:** During a battle, when you use teamwork to help the gunner by overseeing the reloading and firing of torpedoes, you give them a +2 bonus instead of the usual +1.

### STRESS

**Physical**

**Mental**

### CONSEQUENCES

**Mild (2):**

**Moderate (4):**

### NOTES

After four years in the United States Navy, Tyler knew he wanted to keep working on submarines, but definitely not for the government. Through a few relatives and friends, he ended up in contact with Captain Ramirez, who needed an engineer for the newly acquired *Dallas*. He's still in a bit over his head, but he feels he owes the captain for giving him this chance and he works hard. When the PCs arrive, he's overwhelmed and angry, trying to figure out what went wrong and how to fix it. He's clashed with Seth since the other man was hired, but gets along well with the rest of the crew.





## Kerry Parker

### ASPECTS

**Role:** *Perpetually Exhausted Pilot*

**Other:** *Maria and I Go Way Back*

### SKILLS

**Good (+3):** Pilot

**Fair (+2):** Notice

**Average (+1):** Knowledge

### STUNTS

**Adroit Maneuvers:** +2 to overcome with Pilot when avoiding environmental hazards such as debris.

### STRESS

**Physical**

**Mental**

### CONSEQUENCES

**Mild (2):**

**Moderate (4):**

### NOTES

Kerry has been a friend of the captain for three decades, and they've been working together on and off for just as long. Kerry is a petite, nonbinary-identified person who uses they/them pronouns. Kerry is a close confidant of the captain and loves the life of adventure, but unfortunately the stuffy, noisy atmosphere of the ship has exacerbated Kerry's insomnia. Kerry is a solid pilot and generally a good-humored crew member, but they have a finite supply of patience.

## Quest Inc. Representatives

### Captain Jacqui Green

#### ASPECTS

Role: *Captain of the Little Blue*

Other: *No Qualms About Getting the Job Done*

#### SKILLS

Great (+4): Combat

Good (+3): Manipulate

Fair (+2): Diplomacy

Average (+1): Physique

#### STUNTS

**Never Surrender:** If you know that your submarine has been breached by intruders, you and all crew members who can see or hear you receive +1 to attack with Combat and defend with Will.

#### STRESS

Physical

Mental

#### CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2):

Moderate (4):

#### NOTES

Captain Green is a Quest veteran who is well aware of their shady practices; it doesn't matter to her, because they pay her well. She is terse and has no desire to talk with the PCs. She relies on intimidation rather than negotiation.



### Little Blue Crew Member

#### ASPECTS

Role: *Cold-Hearted Mercenary*

#### SKILLS

Fair (+2): Combat

Average (+1): Physique

#### STRESS

Physical

Mental



## Captain Brian Miller

### ASPECTS

**Role:** *Captain of the Dreadnaught*

**Other:** *Honey-Tongued;*  
*Deceptively Cooperative*

### SKILLS

**Great (+4):** Manipulate

**Good (+3):** Diplomacy

**Fair (+2):** Will

**Average (+1):** Combat

### STUNTS

**False Sense of Security:** When negotiating with other ship captains, Captain Miller's remarkable charm gives him a +2 to Manipulate.

**Crisis Mode:** When your ship is under fire, you can inspire your crew to fight on without panicking. Once per conflict, if your ship has gained any consequences during the scene, you can create the situation aspect *Inspiring Presence* with one free invocation on your turn without spending an action.

### STRESS

**Physical**

**Mental**

### CONSEQUENCES

**Mild (2):**

**Moderate (4):**

### NOTES

Captain Miller is a remarkably young and charismatic man. He reads people quite well and he prefers to talk others into cooperating rather than resorting to force. However, should the PCs prove unwilling to hand over Dr. Williams, he will shut off communication immediately and focus on taking their ship, its crew dead or alive.