

Flood City Synopsis

by Daniel José Older

It's Flood City Day, everyone's excited to celebrate life on the last above-water city on Earth, and Max Salazar once again nearly falls to his death when his jetboots don't work right. His sister Yala saves the day as always, and the two make their way through the friendly and sometimes hazardous streets of Flood City. They almost get fried by the angry phantoms in the Electric Ghost Yard and they're about to get to their mom's hospital when they realize they're being followed. They split up, and Yala, despite her well-honed escape maneuvers, gets cornered by a vapor, a cloud-shaped mystical creature that turns out to be friendly and knows her family from back before the floods. Max gets stopped by two giant blue patrolmen from the Star Guard, an intergalactic peacekeeping authority that helped defend Flood City from the corrupt Chemical Barons. The Star Guards interrogate Max but he gets away and makes it to the floating Hospital where his mom Sarita is a doctor. Sarita and Max head to the Holographer's Tower, where Dr. Maceo and his daughter Djinna (Max's bandmate and secret crush) have a live-holographic map of Flood City that they use to search for Yala. On the bridge of an abandoned steam liner crashed amidst the buildings, Yala and Biaque the vapor discuss her secret plan to join the Star Guard.

Meanwhile in the sky above Flood City, Ato, a young Chemical Baron and his twin brother Get, prepare their cloud cruiser along with an uneasy crew for a raid on the pageant that night. They fend off an attacking swarm of iguanagulls but one tears its way into the ship and is only stopped when ArchBaron Mephim beheads it with his bare hands. Ato, an aspiring zoologist, watches in horror as the ArchBaron secrets away the creature's head. Ato manages to get the iguanagull's body from the disposal and discovers soil – something no one's seen in generations – in its claw. While returning the body, Ato catches Mephim checking in on his secret weapon: a nuclear bomb that he's planning to drop on Flood City.

Max and Sarita find Yala and Biaque at their apartment and Yala confesses she's joining the Star Guard. Max feels betrayed and rushes off to get ready for the pageant. The Flood City Orchestra performs the same Star Guard sanitized history as always: the heroic escape from the floods and first rebellion against the Chemical Barons with the Guard saving the day, right up until Max decides to play something entirely new with his horn solo. It's a mournful, explosive new music and soon Djinna joins on drums and then the whole orchestra is in full swing. Iguanagulls fill the rafters, apparently attracted by the music, and make everyone uneasy. The Barons attack, sending laser fire into the auditorium and everyone scatters. Yala returns fire with the help of Old Cortinas, the leader of the Flood City Rebel Squad. Up on the cloud cruiser, Mephim tries to launch the nuke when he realizes they're getting pummeled but Ato jumps on him just in time and then the ship begins to crash. Max and Djinna make it outside just as the cruiser is hurling down but Biaque turns his cloudy form into a protective bubble around them and whisks them to safety. Mephim and the surviving crew escape into the city. After spending the night cleaning up and helping the wounded, Max and Djinna say goodbye and she boards the Star Guard transporter and heads to training camp.

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On his way home, Max stumbles on Ato, wounded and delirious, and (after nearly crashing on the rocks yet again) brings him to the apartment. Sarita and Max nurse Ato back to health and the two boys begin running around town together, causing trouble for the Star Guard and talking about their different lives. At the Star Guard Academy, Yala makes friends with likeminded cadets, a few from other planets, while trying to survive a rigorous training regiment. Mephim, Get and the other Barons have holed up in a family's house, leaving only a young girl, Effie and her blind brother Dante alive as hostages. Effie and Dante plot their getaway as the Barons prepare to hijack the escape pods from the downed cloud cruiser. Max, Djinna and Ato join forces, having adventures and near misses around Flood City. When the Star Guard catches them but then mistakes Ato for his twin brother Get and lets them go, Max realizes the Barons are in secret talks with the Star Guard. At the Academy, Yala discovers that their trainers are trying to kill them. She and her new friends stage a mutiny and hijack one of the transporters to return home. Back in Flood City, the Star Guard begins withdrawing and they take their military protection and food supply with them. Max jetboots up into the night sky to think about things, playing his horn, and once again the iguanagulls flock around him, soaring gracefully above the city to his music.

Flood City erupts into civil unrest and the rebels try to maintain control. Max, Djinna and Ato realize the Barons will make a grab at the nuke now that no one's guarding the crashed cloud cruiser. They come up with a plan to stop the Barons and ask Biaque to gather the other vapors at the Holographer's Tower. Effie and Dante make their move and, after a brief tussle with the Barons, escape. Two Barons pursue them through the Flood City alleyways until Cortinas the rebel leader saves them and then rallies his troops.

Max explains his plan to the vapors and the three friends head to the downed cruiser. Max and Djinna go in just as the Barons take off in their escape pods. Max and Djinna jetboot after them with Ato fightin off his twin brother Get in one of the pods. They almost shoot down Mephim's pod but then the ArchBaron uses the iguanagull head magic to transform himself into a giant iguanagull/human mutant. He ejects from the escape pod, now with wings of his own and is about to drop the nuke on Flood City when a Star Guard transporter shows up. Max and Djinna prepare to take cover but it turns out to be Yala, who hijacked it and escaped from training camp. Mephim tries to aim at Flood City but there's a thick layer of clouds around it – the vapors have dispersed themselves into cumulus form, making it impossible for him to know where to attack. Mephim nose-dives towards the city, intent on destroying it. When Max realizes he won't catch the ArchBaron in time, he blow his trumpet, summoning the iguanagulls. Mephim the mutant iguanagull fights off Max and the normal iguanagulls in a midair battle. He finally sees the city and drops his bomb but it falls harmlessly into the sea; it was a life-size hologram created by Djinna's dad. In a rage, Mephim attacks Max and they tumble towards the city. At the last second Max hurls them over the Electric Ghost Yard and gets away just as the blue shocks of light wrap around Mephim and pull him into their depths. Max wakes up on the roof of his building, his family and friends standing around smiling at him. They prepare a team to search out the source of the soil Ato found in the iguanagull claw – the only hope for the survival of Flood City.