



A PLAGUE AMONG US

or:

*An Annal of London's Dreadful Visitation
as recorded by the Searchers of the Dead*

CREDIT & ATTRIBUTIONS

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DESIGN INFLUENCES:

Dream Askew, Montsegur 1244, Defiant, Apocalypse World, Nightingales

SPECIAL THANKS:

Brand, my isolation everything.

Alan Tobias & Troels Ken Pedersen for floating me in doubt.

My brave playtesters. Especially Alan, Sara, Avonelle and Rachel.

*A Plague Among Us is dedicated to
the front line workers we've been failing all along.*

*So the next time I tell you how easily I come out of my skin, don't try to put me back in
just say here we are together at the window aching for it to all get better
but knowing as bad as it hurts our hearts may have only just skinned their knees
knowing there is a chance the worst day might still be coming
let me say right now for the record, I'm still gonna be here
asking this world to dance, even if it keeps stepping on my holy feet*

~Andrea Gibson

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INTRODUCING THE GAME

Thank you for facilitating this game! This means teaching the game to others before you join them equally in play. You will need to read through the entire game at least once before teaching the game the first time. To start the game, you'll be giving the players some framing Principles, then some historical context, before you help them find their characters to play.

PRINCIPLES

Play People, Not History

In this game, it's much more important to invest in making your character than it is to get all the details of history correctly. Planes, radios and vaccines are obviously not part of 17th century London, but don't fret over details like what vegetables are available, how much a pair of shoes cost, or what a church service looks like.

Lean Inward

This is not a game about big dramatic action. It is a game about poor, vulnerable women in a dangerous world filled with isolation and uncertainty. When playing, lean inward. As your characters experience the events of the story, what do they miss, what have they lost, how does their experience affect how they live in the world? When facilitating, help others lean inward: apply subtle pressure rather than pushing hard.

Play to your Strengths

This is a game where we facilitate stories for each other. Different players at the table have different strengths and preferences. Some might love to frame scenes, some maybe not or might need support. Some might know exactly what they want for their character's story and some might want others to drive it. It is less important to do a strict distribution of tasks than it is to find your group's sweet spot in play. When you want something or need help, ask for it!

Make Space for Grief

We as players - like our characters - are actively living in a global pandemic. Some of us have lost loved ones. Some of us have been sick. We have quarantined, ached to be with

those that see and love us, lost out on opportunities, been afraid. Playing close to the skin can create strong emotions. If you play this game, play to make room for and sit with the emotions of your fellow players. **We are more important than the game.**

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Read or summarize the following information as the facilitator, or ask for volunteers to read in turns. Let people pass if they would prefer just to listen:

LONDON: 1665

Our game takes place in London, 1665-1666 during the Great Plague. In less than a hundred years the population of the city has exploded from one hundred thousand to half a million. The old agrarian system is failing. Industrialization, capitalism, and colonial expansion is on the rise; people move from rural towns to the urban centre to find work and opportunity. The city is wall to wall buildings and lacking infrastructure.

The following short video paints a very good picture of what the physical world of London looks and feels like at the start of the game. Play it for the players now.

<https://youtu.be/SPY-hr-8-M0?t=17>

THE PARISH

The parish is the heart of civic life. It is the local church, the municipal government, the legal system, the penal system and the social welfare system all rolled into one. Each parish has a churchouse, and a local parish parson who is in charge of it. The heads of the church - bishop prelates - are active members of the House of Lords in Parliament. The parish manages the houses of correction, reform, and illness and also dispenses relief to the deserving poor through alms, loans and pensions. The many people who live in London who are not members of the Church of England are subject to the authority of the city, but are not eligible for aid from the parish.

THE SEARCHERS

Our characters are all Searchers of the Dead. They are poor, mostly elderly women, who live on a meagre parish pension because they are unable to make ends meet. While some have volunteered for this duty, most are compelled into it - refusing the work will end the pension they need to live. Working in pairs, they go to where someone has been

reported sick or dead and determine if there are signs of plague. They then report back their findings to the parish clerk to be recorded in the Bills of Mortality. When plague is found, brutal quarantine measures are enforced. The city has no love of the Searchers.

CHOOSING CHARACTERS

WHO WE ARE

There is - right now - a plague among us. Before we find our characters:

- Ask each player to share a story about a grief - big or small - that they have experienced as a person living in the COVID-19 pandemic.
- In a second round, ask players to tell us something they wanted - big or small - for their future that feels less certain because the pandemic isn't ending.

WHO WE'LL BE

Now, do the following to find your characters:

- Put all character sheets on the table, folded in half with the Dream side visible. Have players take turns reading this text aloud.
- Ask players to choose one that appeals to them.
- Allow players to read the full sheet of the character they have chosen. If anyone feels strongly that they cannot play the character selected, let them swap.
- Review the Searcher Rules (see support handout)

ABOUT THE PLAGUE

London's Plague History

In the 16th and 17th centuries, successive epidemics of the plague in London occurred every 10-30 years. All of the characters of the game would have some memory of the plague that occurred in 1636, and some are old enough to remember the plague of 1625. However these plagues had lower mortality than the Great Plague because London was smaller and less crowded. At the height of the Dreadful Visitation nearly 10,000 people a week were dying of the plague.

TRANSMISSION

Common science at the time attributed spread of the plague to “poisoned air” - breathing air that was foul from rotting organics, excrement, disease or pollution.

Common people also believed it was a punishment from God upon people living wicked or immoral lives. The truth was never suspected at the time: we now know that bubonic plague was brought by rats, and transmitted from infected rats or humans by fleas and lice bites. The overcrowded conditions of London, and the building materials used in housing at the time provided ripe conditions for the spread of the disease.

DIAGNOSING PLAGUE

The most obvious signs of plague were called “God’s Tokens”: black blotches on the skin, blisters, putrid smelling oozing boils and “buboes” - large swollen lumps in the neck, legs, groin, or armpit. People with these outward signs were easily diagnosed as plague victims in late-stage infection. However earlier signs were less clear: fever, seizures, chills, headaches, vomiting, delirium, pneumonia, exhaustion, and joint pain - all common signs of other conditions. When Searchers diagnosed a living person with infection, it was often a difficult and uncertain decision with dire consequences.

CIVIC RESPONSE

The main containment measure of the plague was quarantine either by pesthouse, or being “shut up.” When a homeless person, or person who lived in a rooming house was diagnosed, they would be sent to a pesthouse: a parish-run hospital that had separate wards for infected or exposed people. When plague was found in a house with multiple households or group occupants, the entire household might be shut-up together for 40 days: guarded by a watchman to prevent entry or exit, and marked with a large red cross and the words “Lord Have Mercy Upon Us”. It was both a physical and social curse.

Like in the pandemic today, the wealthy and powerful had more safety options - some had multiple houses, better facilities to avoid plague conditions, more room for isolation, resources to hire care staff - and they had more reasons to be threatened by the social stigma of quarantine.

GAME STRUCTURE & MECHANICS

A Plague Among Us is a story told in five parts. A facilitator is responsible to read and teach the game to the group of players, but once play begins, everyone works together to create scenes and support each other as they tell their stories.

In the Prologue characters will do a short narration in which they show each other their character's lives before becoming Searchers as if it were a painting. They will then play a scene set in the early days of their Searching work, in which they learn about each other and their place in the City. To ease into play, the scenes are preset and there are no challenges for the players.

In **Act I, II & III** players will explore the increasing pressures of working and living in the plague. Each act will feature one spotlight scene for each character. That scene will be framed by another player at the table using supporting game materials, and the scene may include a fellow Searcher. The scene will probably contain a challenge to the safety of the spotlight character, which is resolved with a flip of a coin.

Finally the game ends with an **Epilogue** where we determine what becomes of the Searchers. The Epilogue is not played out, it is only narrated. It will start with a final challenge to safety (flip of a coin), after which the spotlight player will describe their fate as if it were a painting.

GAME COMPONENTS

The game provides a handful of tools to help players create a rich play experience without needing to know the actual history of the Great Plague. The facilitator should introduce these components to the players as they come into use.

Character Sheets: Character sheets provide some background and context to the player, including key personality traits that indicate how the character copes with difficulty, and what they yearn for that the player can lean into when in doubt. Characters also have a **Dream**; the thing they want to be or do or have when the plague is over. This dream will change over the game and under the pressure of the pandemic. When players face a challenge to safety and fail, they will have to reduce and limit the elements of their dream. This process is described in “Eroding Dreams” below.

Transition Cards are read aloud at the beginning of every act to transition our story through time, and through stages of their pandemic. These cards also provide players direction on how to adjust the tone of their scenes from act to act as well as any special instructions for managing challenges called in it.

Scene Cards contain a prompt to build a scene with. There are four set scenes to be used during the prologue, and then the rest should be shuffled and stacked randomly. There are more cards available than will be played in the game.

Influence Sheets are used to help support players create scenes in pre-modern London during the plague. They contain thematic support, pick lists of appropriate faces and places to make scenes with, and they help guide the players towards the game's themes. Lastly, each influence sheet contains a reminder about what triggers a **Challenge** to a player's safety.

Plague Coin: A coin used to determine the outcome of the challenges that are called in scenes. For Fastaval there will be custom plague coins available. Otherwise, any small value coin will do.

MAKING SCENES

1. **Spotlight Player:**
 - a. Pulls a **Scene Card**, and read it out loud
 - b. Chooses an **Influence Sheet** for the scene
 - c. Picks a player to run the scene
 - d. Picks one searcher to join the scene (if there is a search or if desired)

2. **Scene runner:**
 - a. Chooses a **Face** from the Influence Sheet to drive the scene with
 - b. Chooses a **Place** from the Influence Sheet to set the scene in
 - c. Frames the scene described on the Scene Card using the face and place
 - d. Make the challenge relevant and available but keep the tone instructions provided with the Act introduction in mind

3. The **companion Searcher** (if present) should:
 - a. Play to shine a spotlight on the main Searcher and her story.
 - b. Only if you want to, use the Plague Coin to assist the main Searcher if she has failed her challenge.
 - c. NOTE: A player may only assist in a challenge one time per Act.

4. Any player:

- a. Calls for a **challenge to safety** when you recognize that the integrity, safety, or standing of the **spotlight player's Searcher** is in question.

CHALLENGES TO SAFETY

The Searchers are vulnerable women doing dangerous jobs. In Parish life, their integrity as Searchers is critical to their welfare. During scenes, there will be times where they are tempted to break the harsh Search Rules or the Plague Laws. There will be times where their integrity is put into question publicly, or by someone with power or authority even when they have done nothing wrong. When this happens, they must make a **challenge to their safety**.



THE PLAGUE COIN

This is done by tossing the **Plague Coin**. The skull side is a failed result (heads) and the book side is a safe result (tails). When a challenge is called, it always falls on **the spotlight player** and the coin should be tossed as soon as the Searcher's integrity has been put into question. The outcome of the toss will provide narrative resolution for the scene. Where the result succeeds, the Searcher will not suffer negative consequences from the situation. Where a result fails, the scene will end with the players discovering how the Searcher is negatively affected by it and the player will have to erode the Searchers dream. When another Searcher is in the scene, they will have the chance to assist when a challenge fails.

Note: Do not challenge safety in the Prologue. It is only done in the Acts & Epilogue.

CHALLENGE PROCESS

1. In a Challenge to Safety the Spotlight Player:

- b. Tosses the **Plague Coin** to determine the outcome of the scene.
- c. **On a success:** The player narrates the scene resolving without trouble.
- d. **On a failure:**
 - i. The player will have to reduce their character's dream at the end of the scene.
 - ii. If the other player in the scene is unable or unwilling to help, then the spotlight player works with the scene runner to resolve the

scene with the spotlight character in trouble and taking consequences from the world

- iii. If the other player is willing and able to help, then they may assist as below

2. Assisting Searcher: (if present in the scene, and only if the challenge has failed)

- e. The assisting player describes how they help, then tosses the Plague Coin to determine the outcome of the scene.
- f. On a success, the players jointly narrate the scene resolving without trouble
- g. On a failure:
 - i. the Assisting Searcher will also have to reduce their Searcher’s dream at the end of the scene
 - ii. The players jointly narrate the scene resolving with both characters in trouble and taking consequences from the world.

Challenge to Safety Result Summary Table

Flip Result	Scene Outcome	Dream
Spotlight Searcher Flip Success	Positive Resolution (no negative consequence)	No one’s dream is affected
Spotlight Searcher Flip Failure	Negative Resolution & Consequence unless another searcher assists	Spotlight character’s dream erodes at end of scene
<i>On a failure, if there is another Searcher in the scene they may choose to help. If they do then:</i>		
Assisting Searcher Flip Success	Positive Resolution (no negative consequence)	Spotlight character’s dream still erodes at end of scene Assisting Searcher’s Dream is not affected
Assisting Searcher Flip Failure	Negative Resolution & Consequence for both characters	Both characters must erode their dream at the end of the scene

Note: While fictional correlation between the failed challenge and the Dream’s eroded element is nice, players should feel no need to force a fictional connection. Dreams

erode under the cumulative stress of living in the pandemic, not as a result of any given moment of it.

ERODING DREAMS

In the Acts and (sometimes) the Epilogue when you fail a challenge to your safety, you will choose the adjective, noun or reason of your Dream, cross it out, and replace it. The replacement should reduce the dream - making it less somehow (e.g. less certain, less ambitious, less desired, less safe). Aim for any single reduction to be significant, but not extreme.

When you erode your dream, read your current dream aloud, then make the change and read the eroded dream aloud.

You must change all three elements before reducing any one a second time.

For example:

- I will build a safe home so that I live out my days in comfort.
- I will build a safe shack so that I live out my days in comfort.
- I will build a safe shack so that I can stay warm at night.
- I will build a rickety shack so that I can stay warm at night.
- I will build a rickety shack so that I will not die of exposure.
- I will live in a rickety almshouse so that I will not die of exposure.
- I will live in a violent almshouse so that I will not die of exposure.

Note: As adjectives, nouns and reasons change, it's OK to adjust the sentence structure around it to make sense (see the transition from "build" to "live" in the example above). The important thing is to keep meaning and not to change more than one of the underlined elements at once.

ENDING THE GAME

To start the **Epilogue**, each player will make one last challenge to learn their character's fate. Depending on how dire their circumstances have been, the character's survival may now be in question. See below to determine the outcome:

- If all three of the elements have already been reduced and this challenge fails, the character will neither achieve their Dream nor survive.

- If all three of their keywords have already been reduced and they do not fail this challenge, they can choose: live with their eroded dream or die and leave what little is left of it to someone in the fiction that matters to them.
- If not all elements have been changed, or the third element is only changed after failing the Epilogue's challenge, the character both lives and achieves the dream that remains.

Once the players have learned their fate, they should briefly describe or narrate what became of them as if it were a painting.

APPENDIX

ADAPTING FOR ONLINE PLAY

A Plague Among Us can be easily played online. The following adaptations should be made:

- The GM should use the online play package (to be provided on GM sign up) which will have the game handouts, character sheets and references broken up into separate files for easy distribution.
- Players will need two files: one containing Influence Sheets and other Support Material, one with the character they will be playing.
- The GM will read or summarize the historical / plague context information instead of distributing this duty among players.
- The GM will pull and read the act cards and scene card for the players during play.
- All players should have a coin to use as their plague coin and handle their challenges. A “heads” result is failed/unsafe and “tails” is successful/safe.

GLOSSARY

Almshouse: a parish-run house for the destitute sick and infirm.

Ancient: An influential elder of the community who counsels the parson on its behalf.

Chiurgeon: a lesser doctor who performs surgical procedures such as bloodletting, cupping, and amputation and is engaged to check searcher work when disputed.

Dreadful Visitation: a euphemism for the plague

Foundling: An abandoned or orphaned child.

God’s Tokens: Concrete, visible signs of the plague: black spots, boils and buboes.

Pesthouse: a parish-run isolation hospital for those exposed or infected.

Shut-up: A house that is under quarantine. Painted with a red cross and warning: Lord Have Mercy Upon Us, and guarded by a Watchman

Thatcher: A skilled thatch roof maker, certified by the Thatcher’s guild.

Watchmen: Men paid by the parish to put houses under quarantine and stand watch to make sure no one enters or leaves.

Widow-profession: a woman whose husband was a member of a Guild profession, and who is given leave by the Guild to continue his work when he is dead or infirm. (ex: widow-thatcher, widow-apothecary)

AFTERWORD

The Bills of Mortality - the collected findings of the Searchers - are the only reason we really understand how bad The Great Plague was. Writers of the time called the Searchers and other servants of sickness plague vectors. Not despite, but because they were compelled to do the work, they were maligned like witches and accused of being charlatans who extorted and enriched themselves on the tragedy of others. Like the brewers, weavers, midwives and other female pre-modern English workers eventually the Searchers were sidelined, discredited and replaced by men when industrialization made searching part of funerary services and a profitable, respected profession in the eighteenth century.

The parish records give us some of their names. Court records document the accusations against them - and the punishments they endured. But there is no first hand account of their dangerous days: the isolation, pressure, risk, stigma, stress they were under - or any of this work they did that saved lives. Most of these women were not literate, and even when they were, there was no one interested in remembering who they were.

The Great Fire, in actuality, came some months after the plague had died off. The official accounts recorded only six dead in the fire. However modern scholars now think that the death toll was far greater, particularly among the poor. The fire raged so hot that bodies are thought to have turned directly to ash. Of those that survived, hundreds of thousands were left homeless, without resources. And with two thirds of London's parishes demolished, there would have been little relief available to sustain the poor.

I wrote this game to invite players to remember these women and their work, and to consider the difficult and painful lives of the front-line pandemic workers that serve today - whose hardships, contributions and stories may also end up lost to time.

I have been struggling through the pandemic. I suspect you have too. I also wanted to make a game for us. One where we could spend a few hours grieving together, and holding on to the ever-reducing dream of being on the other side of things, free and together in whatever normal we can make.

I miss you, Fastaval. Maybe next year.

HANDOUTS

The following pages contain printout sheets for :

- Order of Play
- Character Sheets
- Act Cards
- Scene Cards
- Influence Sheets
- Plague Laws
- Searcher Rules
- Quick Support for NPC

SCHEDULE OF PLAY

GAME SETUP

- Review Principles (5 mins)
- Provide Historical Context (5 mins)
- Share Pandemic Experiences (10 mins)
- Choose characters (10 mins)
- Learn about the Great Plague (5 mins)
- Learn game structure and mechanics: (15 mins)
 - Overview of game
 - Making scenes
 - Challenges to safety
 - Eroding dreams
 - Additional handouts
 - Plague Laws & Searcher Rules
 - Quick Support for NPC Creation

PLAYING THE GAME

- **Prologue:** How We Live (40-60 mins*)
 - Painting Portraits
 - On Scene per player, no challenges
- **Act I:** How We Work (20-40 mins)
 - One spotlight scene per player, with challenges
- **Act II:** How We Struggle (20-40 mins)
 - One spotlight scene per player, with challenges
- **Act III:** How We Erode (20-40 mins)
 - One spotlight scene per player, with challenge
- **Epilogue:** If We Burn (10-15 mins)
 - Final Challenge
 - Epilogue Portraits

CHARACTER SHEETS

You've been a widow longer than you ever were married. Your William died of consumption nearly twenty years ago, God rest him. You nursed him, you nursed for the hospital, you nursed for the parish. Even the old parish clerk took his last breath with his hand in yours.

People get sick and people die - that's how this life works - they're just doing it faster now, in the Dreadful Visitation. You volunteered to search because you know more than a few things about death.

(fold)

This side up for character selection.

Your name is **Widow Brystowe** , and you are 52 years old

You lean into **practicality**, and yearn for **someone to take care of you**.

Your dream - if you live through this Plague - is to:

Marry a kind man so that you can find some peace and rest.

Your husband Nate was a kind, good man and skilled thatcher and you worked beside him binding the straw tiles that he used to make his roofs. Five years ago he took a bad fall and now suffers from terrible shaking palsy and memory loss. You never had children and are each other's whole world. When he forgets, you're the only thing that can bring him back. The parish gives him a meagre pension and now they've called you against his pension duty to search for them. You'll have to live apart. It pains you to think of him frightened and alone in the almshouse, but you know he wouldn't be alive today if it weren't for the parish's help.

(fold)

This side up for character selection.

Your name is **Goodwife Parsons** - and you are 47 years old

You lean into **hope**, and yearn **to take care of your own.**

Your dream - if you live through this Plague - is to:

Become a guild-certified widow-thatcher so that you can keep your husband safe.

You and your husband gave a life of good service to a well-to-do family, but good service doesn't always lead to a good life. First your hands became too twisted for lacemending. Then your husband died of a cancer, and at last the family fell on hard times and let you go. Your severance was enough to hold you for a while, but now the parish pension is all that keeps you.

When the plague came, you felt certain this was the end for you. You know you're an old, poor woman and no one will even notice that you're gone. You're glad to have been elected as a searcher, as it gives you a reason to keep going.

(fold)

This side up for character selection.

Your name is **Widow Sewen** and you are 64 years old

You lean in to **purpose**, and yearn **to be someone of worth**.

Your dream - if you live through this Plague - is to:

Be hired as a wealthy Lady's housekeeper so you can live a respectable life.

You have four children in the home and seven in the grave. You don't know what has become of your husband. Three years ago he went up to the midcountry to bring in the hops and you haven't seen him since. The parish subsists you on a pension and in return has you foster orphans and sick children when needed.

The parish is your life, and the children are your everything. Your eldest girl is twelve now - old enough to look after the others. You'll be a searcher if they need you to, but it will pain you to be away from your children until it's done.

(fold)

This side up for character selection.

Your name is **Mother Nashe** and you are 46 years old.

You lean into **anger**, and yearn for **family**.

Your dream - if you live through this Plague - is to:

Establish a parish-funded foundling house so that you will never be alone.

The parish clerk calls you an “unfortunate” for never managing to find a husband. But you can’t find what you don’t look for. You worked in the back of a bookbinder’s shop, and for 20 years enjoyed the loving attention of the bookbinder’s wife. The old man, grumpy and impotent, never paid any mind to the arrangement, but when she died he made you go.

They’ve elected you as a searcher because you can read and write, but you don’t relish the idea of inspecting the dead.

(fold)

This side up for character selection.

Your name is **Katheren Foxe** and you are 55 years old.

You lean into **rationality**, and you yearn for **connection**.

Your dream - if you live through this Plague - is to:

Publish a celebrated book of poems so that you can memorialize your sapphic love.

The current situation in London is certainly dire, but you're not new to plague. You lost your husband, three sons and two daughters in the plague of 1636. Locked up in your house under strict quarantine, you watched each of them die in pain. You prayed to the Lord for His Mercy. When the quarantine lifted you were alone, and the parish clerk told you you were blessed.

You've been searching for the parish ever since and consider it your divine calling. It doesn't stop the nightmares from coming, but it helps to keep them at bay.

(fold)

This side up for character selection.

Your name is **Widow Wells** and you are 57 years old.

You lean into **faith**, and you yearn for **peace of mind**.

Your dream - if you live through this Plague - is to:

Be elected as a wise ancient (parish councillor) so that you can repay your debt to God.

You were seventeen when you ran away from your father's house with a handsome Venetian merchant prince. He put you up in a London bawdyhouse as his private mistress for over a decade. Five years ago when he did not return from his travel, you were forced to take on other patrons, and eventually worked for the house.

When the brothel keeper got into a dispute with a local magistrate, he shut down the house and you ended up locked up in Bridewell Prison for Reform. You worked long hours beating hemp into hangman's rope, kept your nose clean, and played the good repentant. When they let you out, you took a job cleaning and laundering at the parish almshouse. The prospect of searching is terrifying to you.

(fold)

This side up for character selection.

Your name is **Anne Axtons** and you are 37 years old.

You lean into **daydreaming**, and you yearn for **adventure**.

Your dream - if you live through this Plague - is to:

Find your princely lover in Venice so that you can be cherished and kept in style.

Your husband deserted you and your six surviving children when the youngest ones were still on the breast. You were lost, but other women showed you how to survive. Since then you've lived in a workhouse with an extended family of women and children.

Together, you spin thread for a local merchant. Around the clock, chatter and children and the click clack woosh of the spinning wheels has been the music of your life. You never had any surplus but you were all together and worked hard and were happy.

Earlier this year, you ended up in parish care when you were trampled by a horse cart in the street. Now they want you to search. You are sure that it will mean your death, but you'll do what you need to do to get back home.

(fold)

This side up for character selection.

Your name is **Mother Barrett** and you are 67 years old

You lean into **hard work**, and you yearn for **community**.

Your dream - if you live through this Plague - is to:

Return to your joyful home so you can be seen and loved.

Your husband Edus was a travelling knife grinder, and you and your daughters worked as costermongers; you hawked shellfish in the street to pedestrians and housewives. It was a lean life, but the living wasn't bad.

Three years ago your husband borrowed money to purchase a new whetstone - and fell behind on the repayment. When he couldn't settle, he was sent to Marshalsea Debtor's Prison and you were left to fend for yourself. You've been mudlarking on the banks of the river - salvaging wood, rope and trinkets from the shores to resell. When all else fails, you seek relief at the parish. You're glad at the opportunity to find new work that's easier on the body, if not the stomach.

(fold)

This side up for character selection.

Your name is **Goody Bright** and you are 61 years old.

You lean into **optimism**, and you yearn for **independence**.

Your dream - if you live through this Plague - is to:

Raise a sizable sum of money so you can bring your family back together.

ACT CARDS

PROLOGUE: HOW WE LIVE

The plague has come to London. However, none of us yet know how dark the times will get. Our characters have been called by the parish to serve. You'll leave those you love behind. You'll walk freely through the streets. You'll meet your fellow Searchers as you come to the House of Isolation.

First, paint us a portrait of who you've been, then play the Prologue Scenes.

In the prologue, Influences are pre-set and there are no challenges to safety. Use this time to show us who you are, share what matters to you and to build at least one relationship: with your own, a Searcher, or a member of the community.

ACT I: HOW WE WORK

The plague creeps out into the city. And where it goes, you follow. House after house, street after street, you go - red staves in hand - to judge the dead, the dying, and the people they will leave behind. Hundreds of souls are lost this week, and paranoia, fear and suspicion follow the sickness. No one wants a judgement from God.

Use these scenes to explore **the rising emotions of the world and the difficulties of the work**. Challenges to safety are now in effect. Where they fail, make life uncomfortable but not dangerous.

ACT II: HOW WE STRUGGLE

The plague is everywhere. Every week it now takes thousands. No corner of the city lacks the signs of plague. Red crosses announce it on quarantined doors, fumigation censors smoke the unclean air, dead corpses lay abandoned in the street, churchbells ring out in remembrance. Everyone holes up in isolation, and panic has set in.

Use these scenes to explore the **terror of the plague**. Where challenges fail, make life dangerous but not intolerable.

ACT III: HOW WE ERODE

The plague seems everlasting. The disease feels inevitable - like God has pronounced an end to the city itself. The population is weary to the bone: isolated, angry, terrified and desperate for hope and relief.

Use these scenes to explore the **terrible weariness of living in the pandemic**. Where challenges fail, make life intolerable, but not deadly.

EPILOGUE: IF WE BURN

The plague does not announce its departure. But day by day your searches slow, and in time you find that the corpses you search have been claimed by plague only as much by consumption, convulsion, or the pox. But just as normal starts crawling back, starts to breathe and then to bloom, The Great Fire ignites in a bakery on Pudding Lane.

Just like the plague, the fire spreads from building to building and soon it is everywhere, gutting the city. Months from now the city will still be smouldering and the sky and streets still gray with ash. The fire burns the crowded shacks, the jettied houses, the rats and fleas and lice and ends the bubonic plague in the city once and for all.

But what becomes of the Searchers in the end?

One by one, each Searcher will now roll a final challenge to her safety, and tell us, as if painting a portrait, what becomes of her.

- If all three of the Searcher's Dream elements have already been reduced and they fail this challenge, they will neither achieve their Dream nor will they survive.
- If all three of their keywords have already been reduced and they do not fail this challenge, they can choose: live with their eroded dream or die and leave what little is left of it to someone else in the fiction.
- If not all elements have been changed, or the third is only changed after failing the Epilogue's challenge, the character lives and achieves the dream that remains.

INFLUENCE: WE SERVANTS OF SICKNESS

The plague is God's punishment upon the wicked - and punishments do not exact themselves. Few people appreciate the weight of the essential work that you do. Some pity you as Handmaids and Footmen of Disease. Many fear you as Harbingers of Death. Far too often people curse you: Opportunistic Thieves and Liars lining your pockets with the tragedy of others. Only those that serve the plague know the toll it takes.

FACES:

Jack Knox: a watchman, who wards houses shut up in quarantine

Goodwife Snowden: a searcher, who diagnoses the sick and the dead

Lucretia Treat: a keeper, who nurses the infected

George Starkey: a body collector, who carts the dead to the pits

Cuddy Bickel: a saltpeter man, who collects house urine for plague cures

Gideon Herring: a surgeon, who cuts people open to confirm Searcher findings

Mary Olyve: an widow-apothecary, who mixes remedies against the sickness

Someone of your own making:

PLACES:

The gloomy back lanes: where the death workers walk.

At a house that is shut up under quarantine orders.

In the house of isolation: where the Searchers live.

In the pest house: where the healthy exile their sick.

In the yard: where the bodies pile high, waiting for the pit to be dug.

Somewhere of your own making.

**MAKE A CHALLENGE AGAINST YOUR SAFETY ANY TIME
THE PLAGUE OR SEARCHER LAWS ARE VIOLATED OR YOU COME UNDER SUSPICION**

INFLUENCE: THE TRANSITIONING CITY

The City is the centre of all things. It teems with people who pour in from farmlands and foreign lands. It is a place of new opportunity, claustrophobic congestion, cold indifference, and occasional, surprising kindness. Not all people of the transitioning city are protected by the powers or the charity that governs it.

FACES:

Eamon O’Niall: a Catholic servant labourer from Ireland

Manuel Musafia: a Jewish watchmaker from Portugal

Margaret Burton: a brothel keeper

Astrea Denham: a playwright and poet

Roger Loder: a Waggoner that transports goods and people in and out of London

Sarah Bamoo: a glove-maker from Jaffna (Sri Lanka)

Alice Phesy: a persecuted Quaker seamstress

Susan Lark: a blind washerwoman

Barnabe Cain: a bachelor apprentice

Innocent Street: a young foundling child (and pickpocket)

Someone of your own making:

PLACES:

Near a quay on the banks of the Thames, where the boats come and go.

In the streets where the mongers call out their wares.

On a winding cobblestone alley in the shadows cast by jettied houses.

Inside Paul’s Walk the entrance to the great cathedral, London’s social & economic hub.

Inside the walls of Bridewell Prison where wayward women and poor orphans are held.

In the square where corporal punishments are meted out on the wicked.

In a huge tenement, rammed into the skeleton of a former manor house.

Somewhere of your own making.

**MAKE A CHALLENGE AGAINST YOUR SAFETY ANY TIME
THE PLAGUE OR SEARCHER LAWS ARE VIOLATED OR YOU COME UNDER SUSPICION**

INFLUENCE: THE PARISH

The parish holds us. The parish keeps us. The parish administers and administrates our lives, our pensions and our problems. The parish has provided for us, and now the parish has demanded we serve God in the time of plague. The parish punishes us if we fail our duty. The parish holds our lives in its hands. May Lord have Mercy Upon Us.

FACES

Thomas Goodforde: the parish parson, who ministers to our spiritual selves.

Nicholas Heild: the parish clerk, who documents Searcher findings.

Richard Beadle: the churchwarden, who manages the parish facilities.

John Furrow: a constable that enforces the parish rules and runs down offenders.

Lady Elinor Swanton: a parish ancient, and councillor to the parson.

Margory Bullock: the rectory cook, who prepares meals for staff and poor relief.

Fortune Row: a parish ward, who swings censors in the streets to smoke the plague.

Someone of your own making:

PLACES

In the parson's library, books stacked high from floor to ceiling.

In the brewhouse, warm, moist, and heady with fermenting hops.

In the church hall, where the parish members come and go.

In the almshouse, where the parish infirm live.

In the old churchyard, among the tombs, under the shade of the trees.

In the constabulary house where offenders are taken to be held.

Somewhere of your own making.

**MAKE A CHALLENGE AGAINST YOUR SAFETY ANY TIME
THE PLAGUE OR SEARCHER LAWS ARE VIOLATED OR YOU COME UNDER SUSPICION**

INFLUENCE: OUR LORDS

The burdens of our Lords are heavy in these times; great and influential souls from aristocratic peerage and members of the wealthy gentry. Together, they bear the terrible weight of the city's refuse; strangers from other lands, religious dissenters and the poor fill the streets with sin, crime, squalor, vagrancy and plague. Many of our Lord luminaries are forced by plague to escape to their country lands for safety. The weight and stress on those remaining is unbearable. It falls to our Lords to uphold the city's civility, and correct the rampant, dishonest immorality.

FACES

Lady Katherine Hastings: a philosopher and benefactor.

Nathaniel Doblin: a Justice of the Peace, who dispenses justice on the wicked.

Baronet Whitworth Trigge: a High Street banker.

Safka Balavich: a Russian translator and furrier with The Muscovy Company.

Anne Silkin: a merchant tailor's wife.

Francis Wolley: a scholar, linguist and private tutor.

George Lowe: a footman.

Polly Parks: A scullery maid.

Someone of your own making:

PLACES

Behind the Turk's Head coffee house, where men of politics come to debate.

The Royal Exchange courtyard, where one in three shops is closed for business.

At Newsome House, a private academy for wealthy children.

In the master's bedroom full of carved wood and velvet tapestry.

In the great room, before the hearth and under the Coat of Arms.

In the servant's quarters behind the kitchen that is never quiet.

Somewhere of your own making.

**MAKE A CHALLENGE AGAINST YOUR SAFETY ANY TIME
THE PLAGUE OR SEARCHER LAWS ARE VIOLATED OR YOU COME UNDER SUSPICION**

INFLUENCE: OUR OWN

Our children, our husbands, our lovers, our friends, and our peers. They still exist somewhere out there where we are forbidden to go. If we go to them, we may bring the punishment of plague and God upon them - and on ourselves. If we do not see them soon, we may shrivel, and wither and freeze like flowers in frost.

FACES

_____ 's own: _____

_____ 's own: _____

_____ 's own: _____

_____ 's own: _____

_____ 's own: _____

PLACES

In our home: familiar yet new, meagre yet so full it hurts.

In the bed together: where time itself has stopped.

In someone else's house who is due home at any moment.

Far outside the city's gates at an hour when no one hopes to be.

On a rooftop: caught between the stars above and distance below.

In the thieves alley: urgent, spontaneous, desperate or dangerous.

Somewhere of your own making.

**MAKE A CHALLENGE AGAINST YOUR SAFETY ANY TIME
THE PLAGUE OR SEARCHER LAWS ARE VIOLATED OR YOU COME UNDER SUSPICION**

SCENE CARDS

PROLOGUE SCENE CARDS

Prologue Paintings

Each Searcher: describe a scene from your life before the plague as if it were a painting.

Show us what we should know about you.

Prologue

Show us how you were compelled to serve.

Use: The Parish

Prologue

Show us how hard it was to leave someone behind.

Use: Our Own

Prologue

Show us what it feels like to carry the red stave through the streets.

Use: The Transitioning City

Prologue

Show us the first time that you searched the dead.

Use: Our Lords

Prologue

Show us the first night alone in the house of isolation.

Use: We Servants of Sickness

ACT I & II SCENE CARDS

Act I & Act II

You must decide to shut-up a house with unclear information.

Act I & Act II

Someone steals something from a house under quarantine.

Act I & Act II

Someone begs you to take their child to safety.

Act I & Act II

You have an illicit opportunity to enrich yourself.

Act I & Act II

Someone from your life comes to find you.

Act I & Act II

You are a witness to a grave violation of plague mandates.

Act I & Act II

You must raise money quickly or lose something important.

Act I & Act II

Someone reaches out to you for comfort and solace.

Act I & Act II

Someone offers you a bribe in return for your silence.

Act I & Act II

Someone gives you a moment of unexpected hope and joy.

Act I & Act II

You are accused of being a thief / a witch / a whore.

Act I & Act II

You have a rare day that makes you feel like you did before the plague came.

Act I & Act II

Someone from your life feels betrayed by your absence.

Act I & Act II

You find plague in a home that feels just like the one you used to live in.

Act I & Act II

Someone you care about needs your help.

ACT III SCENE CARDS

<p>Act III</p> <p>Someone makes you the focus of their rage and fear.</p>	<p>Act III</p> <p>Someone accuses you of giving a false report.</p>
<p>Act III</p> <p>Someone you care about is infected.</p>	<p>Act III</p> <p>Someone offers you a forbidden kindness.</p>
<p>Act III</p> <p>Someone lies and you pay the price.</p>	<p>Act III</p> <p>Someone blames you for bringing the plague upon them.</p>

PLAGUE LAWS

No quarantine order may be broken.

No furniture, clothes or goods may be removed from a quarantined house.

No one may enter London without a certificate of health.

No public gatherings, fairs, or funerals shall be held.

No new lodgers, tenants or guests shall be entertained at any house.

No burying of the dead in church tombs or churchyards.

Sworn servants of sickness must fulfill their duties and rules.

All must fast and pray on Wednesdays and Fridays so that God may be inclined to remove his severe hand from us.

SEARCHER RULES

Searchers must report promptly and accurately on the findings of the search.

Searchers must carry a red stave in public so others may know them.

Searchers must shun the company of others: live in isolation, stay out of public areas, and may not take on other employment.

Every woman so sworn shall, for any corruption or other false reporting, stand on the pillory and bear corporal pain in accordance with the judgement of the court.

QUICK NPCS: NAMES

James Balmford	Margaret Pelling	Dr. Goddard	Thomas Sherwood
Jacke Hodges	Ryckie van Dijck	Gerard Boate	Sally Lyon
William Sermon	Raphael Thorius	John Buggs	Simon Forman
Mary Trye	Henry Stubbe	William Boghurst	Richard Godfrey
Robert Sprackling	Charles Goddard	Thomas Bulwer	Goodwife Goodgame
Henry Best	Catherine Hall	Geoffrey Wild	Benjamin Moss
Sarah Beattie	Richard Barber	Jervase Bellace	Robert Swift
John Cane	Edward Wren	William Unglee	Barnabie Griffyn
Michael Whale	Isaac Mot	Edith Parsons	Sicilia Thornton
Henry Wilshire	Elizabeth Stott	Andrew Reade	John Wade
Wolfraed Smith	Thomas Hoskins	Helen Farrow	Thomas Farmer
Elizabeth Barwicke	Joane Farre	William Cooper	Isabella South
Tichard Todd	Margery Walker	Agnes Pattens	Ann Syme
Edward Reo	Susanna Symonds	Alice Marsh	James Grager
Katherine Cocklyn	Isabel Burroughs	William Fould	Elin Kilby
Anne Ayscough	Samuel Adams	Albert Gouge	Henry Blythe
Hannah Baker	Elizibeth Edwardes	Margery Dunne	Timothy Hollinshed
Nell Webb	Liza Powell	Mary Compton	Robert Clever
Jon Dod	Barnabe Rich	Frances Cosredine	Abigail Hellam
Richard Painter	Garthine Walker	Haham Sasportas	Richard Symonds
Lily Basse	Margaret Yard	Dorothy Hove	John Feltham
Nigel Dixon	Madok Dawkes	Winifred Bland	Susan Chamberlayne

QUICK NPCS: TEMPERAMENTS

Pick two to make an NPC, cross them out as you go:

Rough	Rugged	Grumpy	Honest	Kind	Loud
Cynical	Bitter	Nasty	Serious	Shy	Careful
Ragged	Philosophic	Quick	Capable	Frightened	Timid
Charismatic	Sly	Vain	Loud	Hollow	Thoughtful
Exhausted	Vicious	Arrogant	Patient	Hopeful	Strong
Hardened	Ruthless	Scared	Yearning	Cautious	Brutish
Slow	Ambitious	Anxious	Sad	Dreaming	Curious
Unstable	Wise	Cunning	Greedy	Angry	Complex
Broken	Considerate	Callous	Cheerful	Jaded	Talented