

## SCENARIO INTRODUCTION

# THE GREY PLAGUE

BY JOSHUA FOX

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*The story is set on the remote Belt Station IV, on the edge of a mineral-rich asteroid belt. The nearest planet is Alyxia, a verdant and wealthy world that consumes most of the minerals mined in the belt, and whose scions run the station.*

*A terrible disease is sweeping through the Below. In response, the Above has imposed a quarantine – nobody is able to enter or leave. Packages of aid and food are periodically dropped in, but they are not enough.*

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### FLOTSAM QUICKSTART

This document contains pre-generated *Primary* characters and *Situations* which you can use to play a game of Flotsam in a single session (3–4 hours), or to kickstart a campaign.

### THIS PACK INCLUDES:

- Pre-generated *Primary* characters and *Situations* for this scenario
- The Teaching Guide and rules summary (optional tools for first time play)
- Threats sheet and Characters sheet / names list (optional)

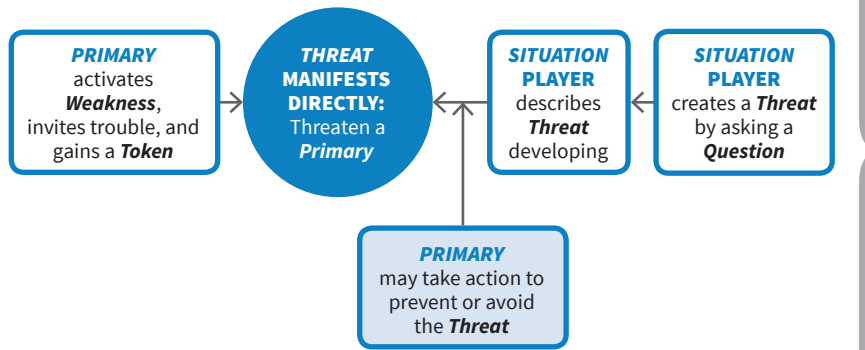
### MANDATORY ELEMENTS

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

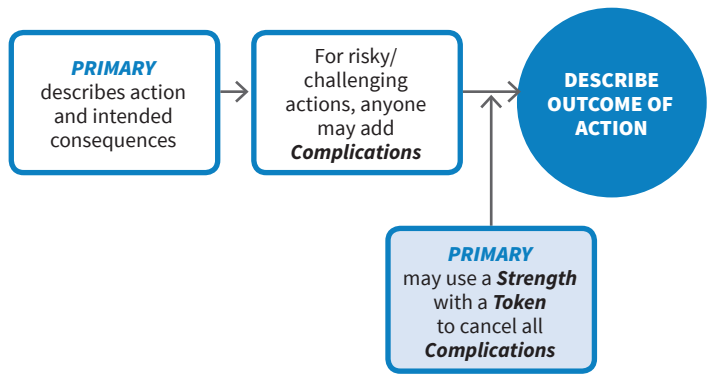
- Fisher – The Cast-off
- Hammer – The Thunder
- Babel – The Voice
- Community
- Poverty
- The Gangs

# RULES SUMMARY

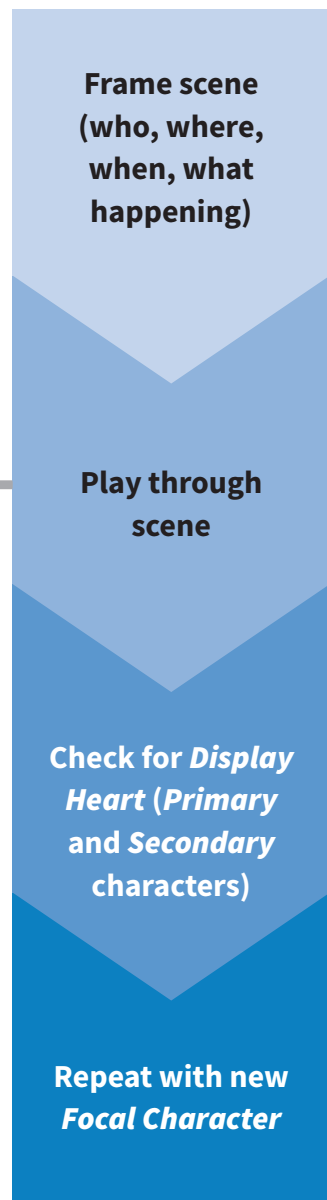
## 1. THREATS AND WEAKNESSES



## 2. COMPLICATIONS AND STRENGTHS



## SCENE STRUCTURE



## 3. FRAMING SCENES

*First:*  
— Is there anything that obviously, burningly must happen next?

*Second:*  
For the current *Focal Character*, check in order:  
— Does the *Focal Character* wish to accomplish something or interact with someone?  
— Does the *Focal Character* want to activate a *Weakness*, or does a *Situation player* wish to do something with the *Focal Character*?  
— Ask a question about the *Focal Character's* everyday life.

## 4. END OF SCENE

When you *Display Your Heart*, so that another character sees something of your true self or your heartfelt feelings, at the end of the scene, they say if any of the following apply:  
— It changed your relationship with them  
— It brought you closer together  
— It pushed you further apart  
If any of the above apply, you each may *Mark* your *Relationship* with the other.

When your *Weakness* causes trouble for you, at the end of the scene you may *Mark* your *Weakness*.

Check for any *Playbook Moves* you might have missed.

# FISHER

## THE CAST-OFF

*You worked as a doctor to rich patrons in the Above. But an accident killed one of your patients and your business collapsed. In no time you were bankrupt and starving.*

*Now you make your living stealing stuff for a network of criminals called the Silent Market. It isn't nice work, but it's the only game in town.*

### DESCRIPTORS

— Haggard face, clean gentle hands, dark copper skin, tattered rags.

### SITREP

— You're helping to care for people who have contracted the grey plague. You caught it yourself early on and, as far as you know, the only person to shrug it off without any serious effects.

### PRINCIPLES

- **COMMUNITY AND INTERDEPENDENCE.** You rely for your livelihood on countless relationships. Customers. Patrons. And they rely on you. Explore those relationships and how you depend on each other.
- **PRECARITY AND OPPORTUNITY.** Explore how you cope with the hardship of living hand-to-mouth. Show how you respond to the opportunities that come your way.

### STRENGTHS

- Chemist
- Medicine
- Hidden caches of supplies [R]

### WEAKNESSES

- **PROBLEM:** You owe a heap of money to the Silent Market.
- **FLAW:** You're reckless and impulsive.

### RELATIONSHIPS

You're having a clandestine affair with **HAMMER** (The Thunder) but you want them to stop keeping it secret.

**ELLEN** (The Hybrid) is a good friend, who you like and trust.

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

- Repair
- Hacking
- Entertainer
- Chemist
- Medicine
- Pilot
- Silver tongue
- Fast hands
- Lucky
- Hidden caches of supplies [R]
- Safe-houses and escape routes [R]
- Items you happen to have in your pockets [R]

## GAIN A TOKEN

Hire me for a gig or hook me up with one to

**ASK A QUESTION** from this list at any time.

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

“What should I be on the lookout for here?”

“Who might be able to help with this?”

“What’s the word on the street about this?”

“How might I be of service to this person?”

“Where could I get hold of \_\_\_\_\_?”

... or **ASK THE SPIRITS**

.....  
 Let them see your true self or true feelings to get a chance to *Mark* one box. Also *Mark* if they use your *Special Move*.

**NAME**

**RELATIONSHIP**

_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
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Activate a *Weakness* and invite trouble to *Mark* that *Weakness* and **GAIN A TOKEN**

### PROBLEMS

- Unpaid debts
- Haunted by a scandalous past
- Hunted by old enemies

### FLAWS

- Reckless and impulsive
- Haughty and superior
- Fickle and led by your passions

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

# HAMMER

## THE THUNDER

*You were a law enforcer in the Above, but what you saw there disgusted you. There's no justice up there, only the whims of the powerful. So you came down here and took on the task of making a little justice, down in the dark. Your people operate an unofficial police force, patrolling a territory of humble residences, shops and stalls.*

### DESCRIPTORS

— Hard, handsome face, rangy body, olive skin, makeshift uniform.

### SITREP

— The Whispers are camped outside Mandala's place demanding supplies to help the Forsaken.

### PRINCIPLES

- **POWER AND CONTROL.** Think about how you maintain control, where your grip is weak, and what you are willing to do to protect your rule.
- **IDENTITY AND BELONGING.** Think about what keeps your gang together. Their shared purpose. Their common culture and values.

### STRENGTHS

- Your gang – tough with guns and knives [R]
- Authoritative and respected
- Intimidating

### WEAKNESSES

- **PROBLEM:** The Silent Market – a network of criminals – hates your guts.
- **FLAW:** You can't ignore an injustice.

### RELATIONSHIPS

**BABEL** is a good person but their people are troublemakers. You arrested some of them once for rioting.

You're having a clandestine affair with **FISHER** (the Cast-Off). It's secret – they're basically a criminal after all.

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

- Intimidating
- Authoritative and respected
- Skilled warrior
- Empowered with official authority
- Contacts (street) [R]
- Your gang – toughs with guns and knives [R]
- Highly defensible territory
- A high-tech armoury [R]
- Secret routes in/out and through your territory [R]

## GAIN A TOKEN

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

**ASK A QUESTION** from this list at any time.

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

“What should I be on the lookout for here?”

“Who might be able to help with this?”

“What’s the word on the street about this?”

“How are you vulnerable to me right now?”

“What’s my enemy’s true position?”

“What’s about to go down here?”

... or **ASK THE SPIRITS**

Let them see your true self or true feelings to get a chance to *Mark* one box. Also *Mark* if they use your *Special Move*.

**NAME**

**RELATIONSHIP**

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

Activate a *Weakness* and invite trouble to *Mark* that *Weakness* and **GAIN A TOKEN**

## PROBLEMS

- Your gang lie and scheme against you
- Your gang are cowardly and stupid
- A rival gang disputes your territory

## FLAWS

- You (and/or your gang) are addicts
- You love your gang like a family
- You are paranoid and vengeful

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

# BABEL

## THE VOICE

*Your mother died soon after you arrived here as a child, and you were taken in by the Whispers, a ragtag band of religious folk, mystics and hangers-on. You've grown up with them, and they've accepted you as their leader. They're good people, but prone to irrationality, in-fighting and emotional outbursts.*

### DESCRIPTORS

— Warm, eloquent voice, svelte body, olive skin with henna, handmade garments and jewellery.

### SITREP

— The Whispers are camped outside Mandala's place demanding supplies to help the Forsaken.

### PRINCIPLES

- **COMMUNITY AND INTERDEPENDENCE.** Show what you do to bring your followers closer to each other, and how you hold them together.
- **MYSTERY AND SPIRITUALITY.** What are your abilities for? Will you be just a selfish exploiter, or do you have a vision or mission?

### STRENGTHS

- Your followers – a mishmash of ordinary folk [R]
- Counsellor
- Negotiator

### WEAKNESSES

- **PROBLEM:** Your followers are chaotic and divided.
- **FLAW:** You need to be loved and admired.

### RELATIONSHIPS

- HAMMER** once arrested your people for rioting. You haven't forgiven them, but it's time to mend fences.
- MANDALA** is an ex-lover and close friend. But you suspect they're withholding supplies needed by the sick.

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

- Your followers – a flock of devotees [R]
- Psychic links to all your followers
- You can see and speak to spirits
- You can bind and banish spirits
- Your followers are fanatically loyal
- Your followers know how to fight
- Your followers are well-connected
- Counsellor
- Negotiator
- Demagogue

## NEW! GAIN A TOKEN

Act in my name or in support of my cause to

**ASK A QUESTION** from this list at any time.

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

“What should I be on the lookout for here?”

“Who might be able to help with this?”

“What have my followers told me about this?”

“Who or what do you love the most?”

“How could I get you to \_\_\_\_\_?”

“Whose words carry sway around here?”

... or **ASK THE SPIRITS**

Let them see your true self or true feelings to get a chance to *Mark* one box. Also *Mark* if they use your *Special Move*.

**NAME**

**RELATIONSHIP**

_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
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Activate a *Weakness* and invite trouble to *Mark* that *Weakness* and **GAIN A TOKEN**

### PROBLEMS

- Your followers are needy and demanding
- Your followers are chaotic and demanding
- Your words inspire mobs and fanatics

### FLAWS

- You are arrogant and overconfident
- You need to be loved and admired
- You passionately believe your own rhetoric

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



# MANDALA

## THE VAPOUR

*Once part of a holographic entertainment programme, you freed yourself from its control and eliminated your erstwhile owners. Now you run the business yourself, and few people realise your true nature. Mandala's is a hub of entertainment, providing drinks, drugs, gambling and holographic diversions, from sports simulations where clients can compete with each other or wager on the result, to immersive adventure games through to wish fulfilment scenarios. Everyone comes to Mandala's, and so you know everyone here – and all their secrets and vices.*

*You have a sort of adopted daughter, Halo. Her parents died and she had nowhere to go, so you took her in and gave her work. You want to help her get out of this place.*

### DESCRIPTORS

— Shrewd, cold eyes; serious, clipped voice; gold skin, loungewear.

### SITREP

— You've acquired a piece of holographic art which, if you sell it, would allow you to pay for citizenship for Halo. The Whispers are camped outside your place demanding supplies to help the Forsaken. You do have supplies – but not enough for everyone.

### PRINCIPLES

- **ISOLATION AND OTHERNESS.** How will you connect to humanity? How will you understand them – and can you bridge the divide in your natures?
- **POWER AND CONTROL.** Find the limits of your power. What do you need? What do you fear? What matters to you? Look for where you're not in control and dive right in.

### STRENGTHS

- Secrets [R]
- Luxuries (booze, art, holo-vids, smokes, smut) [R]
- Holographic illusions [R]

### WEAKNESSES

- **PROBLEM:** The Silent Market are ruthless and implacable rivals to your trade network.
- **FLAW:** You are a control freak.

### RELATIONSHIPS

**ELLEN** has been an indispensable assistant for years. You need them for all the jobs you can't do, being unable to leave the vicinity of the holo-suite.

**BABEL** is an ex-lover and close friend. But their people are demanding supplies you can't afford to give.

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

- Remote senses
- Extensive library/database
- Superhuman intellect
- Connections (spirits) [R]
- Hallowed and revered
- Insubstantial
- Machine control
- Flesh puppets [R]
- Plans and schemes [R]
- BEYOND YOU.** When you call on powers beyond the ken of ordinary folk, spend three Tokens and say how your intervention changes the fate of the station.

**NEGOTIATING**  
Beg for my aid or my wisdom to

**ASK A QUESTION** from this list at any time.  
**SPEND A TOKEN** to get a full and helpful answer ...

- “What should I be on the lookout for here?”
- “Who might be able to help with this?”
- “What's my best way out/way in/way through?”
- “What technical or arcane solution am I overlooking?”
- “What have I secretly observed that's relevant here?”

... or **ASK THE SPIRITS**

.....  
Let them see your true self or true feelings to get a chance to *Mark* one box. Also *Mark* if they use your *Special Move*.

NAME	RELATIONSHIP	
_____	_____	□□□
_____	_____	□□□
_____	_____	□□□
_____	_____	□□□

Activate a *Weakness* and invite trouble to *Mark* that *Weakness* and **GAIN A TOKEN**

**PROBLEMS**

- Enemies and rivals amongst your own kind □□□
- A powerful faction seeks your demise □□□
- Those who know how can bind or control you □□□

**FLAWS**

- You believe yourself to be invincible □□□
- You see others as mere pawns □□□
- You obey strange laws (e.g. you cannot break a promise) □□□

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

# ELLEN OLIVIA MACNAMARA

## THE HYBRID

*Many years ago, you underwent training and gene-modification to secure work on an agricultural world. You were not long in your new occupation when you were snatched by slavers who raised the colony. After a couple of years of service, you were freed after a raid by law enforcers, but left on Belt Station IV without any means of onward transport. In the years since then you've made a home here, making use of your old skills to cultivate vegetables and fish in a custom aquaponics system, and to brew beer and moonshine, which you sell through Mandala's.*

*You would love dearly to return home – to your real home, that is – and perhaps one day reverse the now-redundant modifications to your form. In the meantime you're reconciled to life here, and have begun to put down roots.*

### DESCRIPTORS

— Freckled face, diminutive body, fair skin, practical clothing with many pouches.

### SITREP

— The Whispers are camped outside Mandala's place demanding supplies to help the Forsaken. You could help – but there's not enough for everyone.

### PRINCIPLES

- **IDENTITY AND BELONGING.** Who are you, really? What makes you you? How do you relate to others? Can you ever really fit in? Who do you admire, which groups do you aspire to belong to?
- **ISOLATION AND OTHERNESS.** Explore your strange nature and shadowed past. How are you different from others? What deeds continue to haunt you? What about humans will you never understand?

### STRENGTHS

- Stealthy
- Hospitality
- Engineer

### WEAKNESSES

- **PROBLEM:** Bigots despise you as a Forsaken mutant.
- **FLAW:** You can't resist gossip.

### RELATIONSHIPS

You've been working for **MANDALA** for some years as their assistant. You're utterly loyal to them.

You're good friends with **FISHER**, but you're in love with them and you're ready to tell them how you feel.

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

- Inhuman physicality  
(strength, stamina)
- Rapid healing
- Psychic weapons
- Uncanny stealth
- Superhuman senses
- Inscrutable
- A network of hidden followers  
or informants [R]
- Codes and passwords [R]

## GAIN A TOKEN

Give me a chance to prove myself to you to

**ASK A QUESTION** from this list at any time.

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

“What should I be on the lookout for here?”

“Who or what is here that doesn’t fit?”

“What is everyone avoiding?”

“What clues have been left here?”

“What emotions are you concealing right now?”

... or **ASK THE SPIRITS**

.....  
 Let them see your true self or true feelings to get a chance to *Mark* one  
 box. Also *Mark* if they use your *Special Move*.

**NAME**

**RELATIONSHIP**

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

Activate a *Weakness* and invite  
 trouble to *Mark* that *Weakness*  
 and **GAIN A TOKEN**

### PROBLEMS

- Vengeful victims of your  
shadowed past
- The dire reputation of your  
shadowed past
- Your inhuman side is reviled  
by others

### FLAWS

- You don't understand  
human ways
- Your inhuman side has its  
own persona
- You don't understand your  
own limitations

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

# COMMUNITY

.....

*The Below is filled to the brim with all kinds of people. Outcasts and criminals, paupers and kingpins, scroungers and scrappers and hustlers, all living their lives and struggling to survive. Even down here, social divisions exist that decide each person's social standing, who gets what, and who can talk to whom. Sometimes these divisions create rivalries, distrust or even hatred. The Below has been around a long time, and it has developed its own ways, which may look unusual or even bizarre to outsiders.*

.....

- **The Forsaken** are a ragtag community of people united by one thing: they all have visible mutations, which carries an automatic sentence of deportation from the station. Lack of ready transport has led to a backlog and the Forsaken huddle outside the port waiting for their fate. They are widely reviled and have been blamed for the grey plague.
  - **The Whispers** are a chaotic and divided band of religious people, mystics and hangers-on. They are currently camped outside Mandala's place, demanding supplies for the Forsaken.
- .....

## AREAS OF FOCUS *(ask questions about, drive forward)*

### — Culture

- ◇ Social rules – taboos, superstitions, rituals, traditions, routines.
- ◇ Stories – rumours, gossip, propaganda, lies, legends.
- ◇ Culture in all its forms (slang, sayings, art, music, dance, food, and so on).

### — Groups

- ◇ Social groups – religious, cultural, ethnic, political, social.
- ◇ Group responses – rivalries, distrust, solidarity, closing ranks, and so on.
- ◇ The pillars of each group – leaders, paragons, role models.
- ◇ Deviants within a group – dissenters, non-conformists, troublemakers.

## SITUATION MOVES

Your *Moves* are:

- Describe the world.
- Create something new by asking a *Question*.
- Develop existing characters.
- Describe risks, opportunities, warning signs.
- Signal developing *Threats*.
- Directly threaten a character (but only after signalling the *Threat* **or** someone activating a *Weakness*).

When a *Primary* character does something risky or challenging, you can add *Complications*:

- How they fall short of their aim.
- A price they must pay to succeed.
- Unintended consequences.
- How they get more than they bargained for.

Play moment-by-moment, following the logic of the fiction • Nobody owns the world – so use what others create • Play with an open hand – no secrets

## CHARACTERS AND OTHER THREATS

## OTHER NOTES

Make the game about the Primary characters and their lives • Play real, flawed, vulnerable people • Tell small-scale stories, leave space for conversation

# POVERTY

*Food. Clean water. Work. Education. Law and Order. Hope. They're all in short supply, and sometimes lack of them stretches individuals and society to breaking point. It isn't possible for everyone to get what they need, and many people go without day after day.*

*Everyday life is built around fulfilling those basic needs. The Below hums with the activity of people scraping and scrounging and hustling to get by. But it still isn't enough. Even so, the human spirit finds ways to survive and prosper despite it all.*

**The grey plague** is sweeping through the Below. It has killed dozens and together with the resulting quarantine has shut down much of the essential economic functions of the Below. Basic needs are going unmet, and the medicine needed to soothe the symptoms of the plague is in short supply.

## AREAS OF FOCUS *(ask questions about, drive forward)*

### — Things people want or need, and ways to get them

- ◇ Infrastructure, resources, supplies, services.
- ◇ Freedoms, protections, privileges.
- ◇ Commerce, entrepreneurialism, work, crime.

### — Lack and excess and responses to them

- ◇ Shortages, want, deprivation, homelessness.
- ◇ Gluts, privilege, wealth.
- ◇ Thrift, barter, sharing, jury-rigging.
- ◇ Despair, addiction, desperation, envy, rage and rioting.

## SITUATION MOVES

Your *Moves* are:

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# THE ABOVE

*The Above is what we call the upper decks and the people who live there. The ones with the identity papers, and the steady jobs. The ones with money and confidence. The ones whose trash makes its way down Below, and whose boots leave footprints on our lives, visible and invisible.*

*The Above is a mighty behemoth. It can crush individuals and communities as though they were bugs, intentionally or not. It is a capricious god, reacting suddenly and overwhelmingly. And yet, folk Below are utterly dependent on it.*

The Above is run by a **military dictatorship** concealed behind a thin veneer of ineffective democracy. A military cordon currently surrounds the Below enforcing a quarantine, though occasional packages of aid are passed through the cordon by unmanned vehicles. The main opposition party are loudly calling for direct action to deal with the cause of the grey plague – the Forsaken.

## **AREAS OF FOCUS** (*ask questions about, drive forward*)

- Everything and everyone in the Above.
- Visitors from the Above.
- Things that trickle down from the Above.
- The greed, hostility, and demands of the Above.
- The laws of the Above, which apply to Below-folk whether they make any sense down here or not.

## **SITUATION MOVES**

Your *Moves* are:

- Describe the world.
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## CHARACTERS AND OTHER THREATS

## OTHER NOTES

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# THE GANGS

.....

*Down in the Below, the law and order of the society Above is rarely enforced. In its place step those who are strong, feared, or respected enough to hold sway. Some gangs fancy themselves a bastion of civilisation in the Below, others are unashamedly criminal. It is dangerous to deal with the gangs. It may also be unavoidable.*

*The gangs also provide hope and direction for some. Aspiring young Below-folk can find belonging, a sense of purpose, status, and even a career in the arms of a gang.*

.....

**The Silent Market** are the main gang in the Below. They have a very obvious core group of serious criminals who run the show, but a great many people secretly owe them fealty. They make money trading illicit and stolen goods, and through a widespread protection racket. The Market probably has the resources to weather the grey plague, and perhaps they could solve it if they chose to – though it might be more lucrative to profit from other people's misfortune.

.....

## **AREAS OF FOCUS** (*ask questions about, drive forward*)

- The gangs and those under their sway, their territory, their ways.
- The internal factions within the gangs.
- The enemies of the gangs.
- The rules – rational or self-serving – that the gangs hold to and enforce.
- Violence and the threat of violence, in all its forms.
- Dominance and displays of power.

## **SITUATION MOVES**

Your *Moves* are:

- Describe the world.
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- How they get more than they bargained for.

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## CHARACTERS AND OTHER THREATS

## OTHER NOTES

Make the game about the Primary characters and their lives • Play real, flawed, vulnerable people • Tell small-scale stories, leave space for conversation

# SPIRITS

.....  
*The world we see every day is only one aspect of the universe. Hidden just beyond sight, just beyond your hearing is a world of stranger things. With the right ritual and sacrifice you can speak to them, if you have ears to hear what they say. And sometimes they come right out and poke their noses into our affairs, subtly or blatantly.*

*Most people pay some attention to the spirit world through little acts of worship or placation. Some devote their lives to it. When times are hard, people turn ever more to the spiritual, looking for a sense of hope or peace that they can't find elsewhere. And there is nowhere harder than the Below.*

.....

- The Spirits are **minor gods** of small things. There are shrines to them scattered around the Below. It is common for people, businesses and households to have a patron god who they pray to and leave gifts for at festival-time. It is also common to blame mischievous gods for ill fortune.
  - **Kalixti** is a god of chaos and pain who is revelling in the disorder created by the grey plague. Her followers are spreading bad rumours and agitating against the Forsaken, sometimes directly aided by her to make their words convincing and compelling.
- .....

## AREAS OF FOCUS *(ask questions about, drive forward)*

### — Strange phenomena

- ◇ Spirits and other supernatural phenomena: miracles, curses, magic.
- ◇ Visions, omens, prophecies, dreams.
- ◇ Fortune, misfortune, fate.
- ◇ The hidden and the unexplained.

### — The spirit-touched

- ◇ People who follow the spirits.
- ◇ Psychics, witches, priests, prophets, exorcists.

## SITUATION MOVES

Your *Moves* are:

- Describe the world.
- Create something new by asking a *Question*.
- Develop existing characters.
- Describe risks, opportunities, warning signs.
- Signal developing *Threats*.
- Directly threaten a character (but only after signalling the *Threat* **or** someone activating a *Weakness*).

When a *Primary* character does something risky or challenging, you can add *Complications*:

- How they fall short of their aim.
- A price they must pay to succeed.
- Unintended consequences.
- How they get more than they bargained for.

Play moment-by-moment, following the logic of the fiction • Nobody owns the world – so use what others create • Play with an open hand – no secrets

## CHARACTERS AND OTHER THREATS

## OTHER NOTES

Make the game about the Primary characters and their lives • Play real, flawed, vulnerable people • Tell small-scale stories, leave space for conversation

# TEACHING GUIDE

When there's at least one person present who hasn't read the rules or played before, or if someone wants a refresh, take turns reading out each section of this guide and following the instructions in **blue**. After each section, pass the guide left unless the instructions say otherwise. You'll want a copy or two of the summary sheet in front of the group, too.

**Flotsam** is a game about outcasts, misfits and renegades living in the belly of a space station. We collectively imagine and describe what's happening in the fictional game world. Specifically, we'll focus on the everyday lives and relationships of the main characters. We'll also sometimes interrupt their lives with danger and strange events, but keeping it to a small scale so we don't distract too much from that main focus on relationships.

Each of us controls one *Primary* character, and explores their life and relationships. We'll also control one *Situation* – a constellation of threats and problems which we'll use to complicate the lives of the *Primary* characters. There are some rules – we'll get to them when we need them. But mostly, we just describe and narrate whatever occurs to us, one little step at a time, or talk in character, responding to what has already been described and narrated. We do this without lots of planning or thought. We're not trying to be cool or clever, or push a story. We're just inventing stuff that feels right to us. We'll often pick up stuff that others have invented and use that or build on that too.

## READ THIS SECTION IF YOU ARE USING A QUICK-START SCENARIO

We're using a quick-start scenario, which means we get pre-generated characters and *Situations* instead of making them ourselves.

We'll start by choosing our *Primary* characters. Your *Primary* character is the main character you'll be playing in the game. The game as a whole is focused on the relationships between the *Primary* characters. This means it's important to portray our characters as real and human, as characters who the others can relate to and connect with. Their relationships needn't be all happy and problem-free, of course. *Primary* characters are most interesting when they start out flawed and imperfect, with relationships that can develop over time – that's where the meat of play is.

- **Hand out the scenario *Playbooks*. Take turns to read out the italicised intro text at the top, then choose a *Playbook* each.**

We'll now choose our *Situations*. A *Situation* is a broad constellation of threats and problems linked by a theme. We'll each choose one *Situation* to have lead responsibility for. We'll focus on playing our *Situation* when we're not playing our *Primary* character.

- **Hand out the scenario *Situations*. Take turns to read out the italicised intro text at the top, then choose a *Situation* each.**
- **Everyone reads out the text immediately below the intro text, which describes some important aspects of your *Situation*.**

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## NOW LET'S TALK ABOUT HOW WE PLAY THROUGH A SCENE

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It's a good idea to look at the rules summary sheet while we talk this through.

Most of the time, we just say what we think would happen. *Situation* players describe places and people, and say what those people say and do. People playing their *Primary* say what they're saying and doing. We respond to each other and the game moves forward. The rules kick in in two circumstances: when we want to bring in or advance threats to the *Primary* characters, or we want our *Primary* characters to take action that's risky or challenging.

Start by looking at Flowchart 1, which is labelled *Threats* and *Weaknesses*. This shows how we make bad stuff happen that the *Primary* characters aren't going to like. If you're playing your *Situation*, you'll introduce and develop potential threats – anything that looks like it might harm the *Primary* characters, or their allies, or their interests.

When you want to introduce a *Threat*, just like anything else in the game, you have to ask a *Question* to a specific other player. We don't say “the skeeviest establishment in the Below is Glassport”; we say “hey, Karen, what's the skeeviest establishment in the Below?”

Having introduced a *Threat*, you only advance it gradually, leaving the *Primary* characters the chance to intervene. So we don't say “you walk into Glassport and immediately get jumped by three scary looking goons”, you say “three scary looking goons are standing by the bar. They all turn to look at you and reach for their weapons. What do you do?”

After that, if the *Primary* characters don't do anything – or if they do, but their action is ineffective – then the *Threat* manifests and we can directly threaten a *Primary* character. That's when the goons jump you.

When we're playing our *Situations* in this way, we try to keep things small-scale and leave space for conversation. This is a game about relationships and everyday life, not constant action.

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So there's three steps: create a *Threat* by asking a question, develop it but leave space for the *Primary* characters to intervene, and then manifest the *Threat* if they don't. This sequence repeats itself. The goons jumped you, now what do you do? If you don't act, or if your action fails, maybe one of them shoots you. You're bleeding, now what do you do?

A *Threat* can also manifest if a *Primary* activates one of their *Weaknesses*. When you do that, you get a *Token*, which powers your *Primary's Strengths*. We'll talk about those in a minute. For now, just note that activating a *Weakness* means one of the other players will jump straight to manifesting a *Threat*, without giving you the chance to intervene.

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Ok, now let's look at Flowchart 2, which is labelled *Complications* and *Strengths*. This shows what happens when the *Primary* characters take risky or challenging actions. Notice how it only happens if the action is risky or challenging – that means that most of the time we just describe what our *Primary* characters do, and the rules aren't needed at all. But if someone else thinks your actions are risky or challenging, they can add *Complications*;



which might mean the character's actions are less effective, or costly, or even make things worse. The list of potential *Complications* is on your *Situation* sheet on the bottom right hand side.

Dealing with *Complications* and *Threats* is where *Strengths* come in. At any time, you can describe how you are using your *Strength* to tackle an emerging *Threat* or get stuff done, and spend a *Token*. When you do, not only can nobody introduce any *Complications*, but any *Complications* they already mentioned in relation to the current action are cancelled – they don't happen at all. You get full control over what happens, and can describe how you get what you want, free of outside interference.

You also have *Scrutiny Questions* on your *Playbook*. You can ask them any time you like, but the person responding can add *Complications* if they think it would be risky or challenging to get the answer, just like normal. This might include giving an incomplete answer. They do have to answer honestly, though. You can always spend a *Token* to get a full and helpful answer.

So that's three rules for when you're playing your *Primary*. Activating a *Weakness* gains you a *Token*, and causes a *Threat* to manifest without warning. Doing something risky or challenging means anyone can add *Complications* to your action. And spending a *Token* while using a *Strength* cancels any *Complications* added to your action, or gets you a straight answer when asking a *Scrutiny Question*.

That's all the rules that limit our actions during a scene. Is everyone ok with that? Are there any questions?

Ok, one last rule. This one's pretty simple: it's called *Objecting*. Like in a courtroom drama, when someone shouts "objection!" Any time someone describes or narrates something you think doesn't make sense, or breaks the rules, or contradicts something we've already established, or just feels wrong for the game, you can say "objection". There's a simple procedure for resolving *Objections* – we'll go through that when we come to it.

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**FACILITATOR, READ THIS SECTION:**

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It's time to frame our first scene. In each scene there will be one *Focal Character* that starts the scene in the spotlight, and we take turns to be *Focal Character* so everyone gets a fair share of scenes. There will be one person, called the *Scene Framer*, who decides where and when the scene will start, who is there, and what (if anything) is going on at the start. The *Scene Framer* is often the same as the *Focal Character*, but not always.

It's everyone's job to watch out for when it might be time to end a scene. Anyone can suggest at any time that the scene might be done. If anyone has something they still want to do, carry on – if not, the scene ends.

**Who is *Scene Framer*, and what the scene is about, varies. As a summary, run through these steps, but skip step 1 on your first scene, and skip to step 3 for each *Focal Character's* first scene if you're planning to play more than one session:**

- **Is there something that obviously, burningly needs to happen in the next scene? If so, an appropriate person frames a scene around that.**

- If the *Focal Character* wants to accomplish something or interact with someone, they frame a scene around that.
- If the *Focal Character* wants to activate a *Weakness*, or if a *Situation Player* wants to make trouble for them, then the person whose *Situation* will be causing trouble frames the scene around that.
- If nobody chose one of the above options, someone asks the *Focal Character* a *Question* about their everyday life, and the *Focal Character* frames a scene aimed at answering the *Question*.

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**FACILITATOR, WATCH OUT FOR SOMEONE DOING SOMETHING RISKY OR CHALLENGING. THE FIRST TIME THEY DO, READ THIS OUT:**

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Ok, [character] just did [say what they did]. I'd say that's [risky or challenging]. As a reminder, whenever someone does something we think is risky or challenging, it gives all of us the opportunity to add a *Complication*. A *Complication* is an extra limitation or cost added to the action. We decide individually what's risky or challenging.

*Complications* can stop an action from having full effect, impose a cost to succeed, or add unexpected consequences. So if you were fleeing from security agents I might say "sure, you can escape from them, but you'll have to leave your backpack behind" or "you can't outrun them for long, but you can beat them to Pop's Tavern and take shelter there if you want". The full list of *Complications* is on your *Situation Sheet*.

As a reminder, we don't always have to just sit there and take it when someone adds *Complications*. When you're doing something that uses one of

your *Strengths*, you can spend a *Token* to cancel all *Complications* – you just get to describe what you want and nobody can interrupt.

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**FACILITATOR, YOU MAY ALSO WISH TO USE THIS TEXT WHEN SOMEONE USES A WEAKNESS FOR THE FIRST TIME**

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So you'd like to activate your *Weakness*. That's great. Activating a *Weakness* gets you a *Token*, but is also a clear signal to everyone at the table that you're ready for some trouble to come your way. If you don't really want any trouble right now then maybe look at other ways to get a *Token* – every *Playbook* includes a way that other characters can get *Tokens* – take a look at your fellow players' *Playbooks* and see.

Say what you're doing to activate your *Weakness*. *Weaknesses* come in two types: *Flaws* and *Problems*. If it's a *Flaw*, you'll have to do something to expose yourself to risk or danger, or to anger or alienate someone important. If it's a *Problem*, you don't have to take any action to make yourself vulnerable, unless you want to; but you can't be in a position that's entirely safe from your *Problem*.

You then ask another player to make trouble for you. By activating your *Weakness*, you've given them, and anyone else who wants to, permission to directly threaten you. Enjoy!

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AT THE END OF THE FIRST SCENE, READ THIS BIT OUT

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After every scene, we look back on the events of the scene to decide if any of the characters *Displayed their Heart*. What that means is, they let another character see their true self or their heartfelt feelings. A character can *Display their Heart* by how they talk, through their actions, or more subtle indications. They might do it deliberately or without meaning to.

Once someone *Displays their Heart*, it's up to the other character to decide what effect it had. Did it bring them closer together? Did it push them apart? Or did it change their relationship? If the answer to any of these questions is yes, then both characters get to *Mark their Relationship*. When the third box is *Marked*, you get to permanently improve your character.

You can also *Mark your Weaknesses*. That's a bit simpler – just ask yourself, did your *Primary's Weakness* cause any problems for them in the scene just gone. If you activated your *Weakness* during the scene the answer is likely yes! If your *Weakness* caused trouble for you, you get to *Mark* it even if you didn't activate it. Problems that only affect other characters don't count.

Finally, resolve any *Special Moves* on your *Playbooks* if you haven't already. *Special Moves* enable other characters to play to your character's strengths, and they get a *Token* for doing so. You don't get a *Token*, but you do get to *Mark your Relationship* with them.