

GURPS®

Fourth Edition

ZOMBIES DAY ONE™



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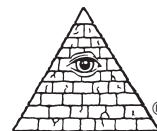
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*The T-Virus is protean,
changing from liquid to airborne
to blood transmission, depending
on its environment.*

*– Red Queen,
in Resident Evil*

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*Timmy: Does, uh, your zombie
wanna play? What do you call
him anyways?*

*Cindy: I don't know.
Right now I'm just calling
him "Daddy."*

– *Fido*

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INTRODUCTION

GURPS Zombies offers a near-infinite variety of zombies, adaptable to any genre and play style. If it has a flaw, it's that there's so much to absorb. The GM must pick a genre, come up with a setting, work out how and why zombies are involved, choose or design the zombies, consider their impact on the game world, and ponder who the PCs are and how *they* fit in. Phew! All that work can leave the GM thinking, "My brain was eaten by *Zombies*."

Fortunately, *GURPS Zombies: Day One* is here to help. Like a hero appearing in the nick of time with a machete in one hand and a shotgun in the other, it cuts the ravaging horde of choices down to a manageable size and opens multiple escape routes. In more prosaic terms, it sketches out eight campaigns in more depth than "Zombies run rampant. Survivors hold out at mall. Everybody dies. News at 11." And for each, it explains what chunks of *Zombies* are and *aren't* vital, counsels the GM on themes, pacing, and pitfalls, and advises the players on creating and playing suitable characters.

Unlike the zombie plague, however, *Day One* doesn't take away free will – it infects the mind only with adventure. It points the players in the right direction without solving all the heroes' problems for them. It helps the GM get past the tedious decisions and on to the *interesting* ones. In fact, because the GM is welcome to use a single framework as written, mix and match aspects of several, or mine some or all for ideas, *Day One* adds a fun new choice: What do you want to try first?

RECOMMENDED BOOKS

The campaign frames in *GURPS Zombies: Day One* are sufficiently stats-light that they don't absolutely require any

particular *GURPS* supplement. In fact, as a source of ideas, *Day One* is useful with *any* RPG that has rules for zombies. Still, it supports and makes frequent reference to *GURPS Zombies*, so that book is highly recommended. Add the *GURPS Basic Set* and you'll have everything you need to get started – though other *GURPS* releases may prove helpful, and the *At a Glance* box in each chapter includes a short list of these.

PUBLICATION HISTORY

This is the first edition of *GURPS Zombies: Day One*. To reduce page-flipping, some bits and pieces of *GURPS Zombies* appear in forms modified to suit particular campaign frames. The overwhelming majority of the content is completely new, however.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sean "Dr. Kromm" Punch set out to become a particle physicist in 1985, ended up the *GURPS* Line Editor in 1995, and has engineered rules for almost every *GURPS* product since. He developed, edited, or wrote dozens of *GURPS Third Edition* projects between 1995 and 2002. In 2004, he produced the *GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition* with David Pulver. Since then, he has created *GURPS Powers* (with Phil Masters), *GURPS Martial Arts* (with Peter Dell'Orto), *GURPS Zombies*, and the *GURPS Action, GURPS Dungeon Fantasy*, and *GURPS Power-Ups* series . . . among many other things. Sean has been a gamer since 1979. His big non-gaming interests are mixology and Argentine tango. He lives in Montréal, Québec with his wife, Bonnie, and their cat, Zephyra.

ABOUT GURPS

Steve Jackson Games is committed to full support of *GURPS* players. Our address is SJ Games, P.O. Box 18957, Austin, TX 78760. Please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE) any time you write us! We can also be reached by e-mail: info@sjgames.com. Resources include:

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Internet. Visit us on the World Wide Web at sjgames.com for errata, updates, Q&A, and much more. To discuss *GURPS* with our staff and your fellow gamers, visit our forums at forums.sjgames.com. The web page for *GURPS Zombies: Day One* can be found at gurps.sjgames.com/dayone.

Bibliographies. Many of our books have extensive bibliographies, and we're putting them online – with links to let you buy the resources that interest you! Go to each book's web page and look for the "Bibliography" link.

Errata. Everyone makes mistakes, including us – but we do our best to fix our errors. Up-to-date errata pages for all *GURPS* releases, including this book, are available on our website – see above.

Rules and statistics in this book are specifically for the *GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition*. Page references that begin with B refer to that book, not this one.

CHAPTER ONE

EMPIRE OF THE NECROMANCER- KING

Nobody knows the Necromancer-King's true origins. Tales speak in turns of a power-hungry vizier to a forgotten monarch, the insane master of a far-off wizards' guild, a lone megalomaniac who performed forbidden rites, and even a demon sent to punish mortals. What *can* be verified is that He commands the Powers of Evil – through black magic, a foul pact, or diabolical birthright – and has conquered most of a continent and turned its inhabitants into undead troops. Equally clear are His goals: use the Dark Legions to achieve world domination and then cast down the gods!

Unless the Powers of Good stop Him, that is. As the sun sets on the land of the living, the last of the great nations – the Radiant Realm – stands between the Necromancer-King and His objectives. As long as the Realm survives, the gods have faithful through which to channel their power and the Necromancer-King cannot fulfill His dark destiny. And the Realm has a powerful weapon in its Champions: great heroes blessed by the gods and sworn to avenge the fallen.

Will the Champions defeat the Necromancer-King, find and destroy the Dark Heart (His fabled place of power), and free the souls of the Dark Legions? Or will they falter and fail, leaving the gods without worshippers and thus power, and damning the fallen for eternity?

DAY ONE

The campaign starts *in media res*, with the PCs – Champions, naturally! – taking on the Necromancer-King's

forces. Their world's plight is known to them. Zombies pose a perpetual danger but rarely a surprise.

If the PCs start at the bottom of the suggested power level (250 points), this may well be their first mission, perhaps even their awakening to power as they defend their village against a raid by the Dark Legions. The closer they are to the high end (400 points), the higher the stakes. The mightiest heroes could even make a grand entrance commanding Realm troops in a large-scale battle against the Legions (see *Hordes in GURPS Mass Combat* on p. 28 of *Zombies*).

AT A GLANCE: EMPIRE OF THE NECROMANCER-KING

Genre: Dark Fantasy.

Tech Level: 3 (with elements of 0-4).

Power Level: Born Zombie-Killers (250-400 points).

Supernatural Powers: A wide range for PCs and the NPC arch-villain.

Scope: Widespread Outbreak (a continent on the verge of apocalypse).

Zombies: Many types, slow and fast – all mindless undead servitors, none of them infectious.

Useful Supplements: *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy* series, *GURPS Low-Tech*, *GURPS Magic*, *GURPS Mass Combat*, and *GURPS Powers*.

A WORLD IN DECAY

The lay of the land is up to the GM. The Necromancer-King's Evil Empire might be as modest in size as Europe west of Russia, with the Radiant Realm a hard-to-conquer corner up in the mountains (like Switzerland), on an island (like England), or at the utmost extent of the landmass (like Portugal, if the Dark Legions are sweeping from east to west).

In an epic campaign, the Powers of Evil may rule a territory as vast as Eurasia, with the Realm being the size of Western Europe or the Indian subcontinent. To save time, the GM could choose one of those examples, start with a map of the real world, and change place names and geographical details to taste.

THE RADIANT REALM

The heroes' homeland is a quasi-medieval fantasy kingdom of the kind customarily used as a setting for *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy*. That means it's nominally TL3, save for when it would be cool to have rapier-toting courtiers riding in carriages, knights in full plate surveying the battlefield with spyglasses, and so on – then it's TL4. The GM may include any TL1-4 artifact or social concept, and even let Champions have experimental gunpowder weapons. *GURPS Low-Tech* would come in handy here.

For those wondering about how such a civilization could thrive in a state of perpetual siege, the answer is that it's propped up by magic and the Powers of Good (the gods). It enjoys high mana *and* high sanctity; thus, training alone suffices to cast simple spells. This ensures that crops are unfailingly bounteous, for instance. The fact that people stay fed and borders remain garrisoned keeps the royalty and nobility in power. However, this occupies the Realm's magic-wielding manpower, leaving Champions to do the praying and spellcasting in war.

The existence of nonhumans is up to the GM. In a smallish Realm, it's best to stick to humans. In a huge land, there may be nonhuman provinces or territories. If so, then their dead are among the Dark Legions as well.

The City of Light

The capital of the Radiant Realm is a metropolis with a population out of proportion to what TL3-4 could realistically support. Details aren't *that* important, as if the war reaches its walls, all is lost. However, the PCs might swing through on their way to some adventure; if so, the GM should offer them the best equipment, training, and magic their world has to offer. There's no better place to look!

Holdouts

At the GM's option, lesser powers than the Radiant Realm may be holding out as well. These should be militarily inferior, and lack high mana and sanctity. They would make good homelands for exotic or nonhuman Champions. There might even be a few islands of light *inside* the Evil Empire! It's most fun if these are discovered in play.

The Armies of Radiance

In *GURPS Mass Combat* terms, the Realm can field all TL1-3 element types, the *ne plus ultra* being Heavy Cavalry (knights) and Pikemen. They also have Battle Mages, but no other fantastic elements. They're *always* outnumbered but well-led, with even second-rate generals boasting Strategy levels of 13+. They have at least Good gear, with knights



sporting Fine or Very Fine equipment. Troop quality is Good or better owing to battle hardening. So far, they've managed to repel the Dark Legions by fighting defensively from behind fortifications. Offense is left to Champion-led war bands.

THE EVIL EMPIRE

The Necromancer-King's conquered territories are devoid of communities of living subjects. Almost everyone has been turned into a zombie of some kind. Anyone alive is either a visiting Champion or a survivor eking out a subsistence living at TL0-1, hoping to make it to the Radiant Realm. Black magic has blighted the land; plants and animals are twisted and monstrous (the *GURPS Creatures of the Night* and *Dungeon Fantasy* series offer plenty of ideas).

As the gods haven't yet been defeated, sanctity mostly remains normal. The presence of black magic relies on mana. However, there are locales where necromancy taxes *both* of these supernatural resources, either reducing levels to low or imposing an "aspect" that gives from +1 to +5 to Necromantic spells and a corresponding -1 to -5 to Healing.

Zombies are everywhere. Near the Empire's leading edge, zombies mill around newly assimilated villages, awaiting deployment. Columns of zombies shamble from front to front, battle to battle. Occasionally, parties of zombies march *into* the Empire bearing body parts and captives . . . to return with new, more-terrifying undead in their ranks.

The Dark Heart

The GM should hide the Necromancer-King's seat of power in some easily defended locale deep in the Empire. The Powers of Good know neither its location nor its nature, as it's shielded from divination. The Dark Legions' thralls don't have this information to give up. Rumors speak of an unearthly tower jutting up from the bottom of an unnatural caldera, defended by a great rim wall; a sinister, near-vertical peak looming high over an inhospitable mountain range; and a dungeon so deep that heroes could make a career of exploring it. Only the GM knows for sure!

The important part is that there are just three ways to get to this place:

1. Push back the Dark Legions, battle by battle.
2. Raid deep, either shadowing a prisoner-taking party that's headed into the Empire or infiltrating back along the tracks of zombies shambling out.
3. Be taken captive!

Upon reaching the Dark Heart, Champions might be able to unseat the Necromancer-King by smashing the fabled Soul Stone (a sort of Soul Jar), striking Him down directly with a legendary weapon, or blasting the place to oblivion. That, too, is left to the GM.

The Dark Legions

The Dark Legions consist almost entirely of what *GURPS Mass Combat* terms Light and Medium Infantry. Troop quality is often Inferior (zombie villagers), with zombified warriors qualifying as merely Average. Equipment is heavily reused and

battle-damaged, and thus Poor to Basic. Leadership is *terrible*, as the Necromancer-King no longer trusts free-willed subordinates and mentally commands His armies, often several at once; His *effective* Strategy skill hovers at around 12, though it might be 20+ in person (signs of such brilliance shine through whenever He realizes a particular conflict is essential).

What lets the Legions prevail is the fact that they're numerous (often outnumbering the Realm's armies by a factor of 10 or more), suffer no ill effects from forced marches, and can fully replace combat losses overnight – and even grow in number – unless the corpses of both sides are ritually consecrated one at a time, or burned to ash.

THE FALLEN

Zombies in this background are RPG monsters that bear minimal similarity to beings of real-world folklore. On a meta-game level, they symbolize little individually, although the *setting* is certainly a study in totalitarianism. Mainly, the undead are opponents for heroes to slaughter – but because destroying one and consecrating or burning the corpse saves the victim's soul, the label “unfortunate zombie” is as valid as “fodder zombie” (see *Zombies*, p. 11).

ground that raises corpses at sunset, unless they're cremated or sanctified, and these undead are undeniably cursed. The Necromancer-King doesn't *animate* zombies, but has a mental link that lets Him command them remotely and peer through their eyes, and uses black magic to *alter* them (which *does* require mana, as well as His personal intervention).

Turning Points

Zombification starts with a corpse and isn't infectious, so heroes needn't worry about turning. However, any cadaver in the Evil Empire *will* rise as a zombie at sunset unless cremated – dismemberment won't do! Prayer also works, but requires a Religious Ritual roll by someone with Blessed, Power Investiture, or True Faith. A Final Rest spell, while costly and used only when other options aren't practical or available, is also effective.

*A forest to hell
comes alive with
death.*

– *Tagline for
Versus*

THE GORY DETAILS

Each zombie *used* to be someone, and the peculiar necromancy of the Necromancer-King traps the individual's soul and taps it for energy to make the body get up and walk around – over and over again.

The Meat

Zombies here are always undead. Some are fresh and *almost* resemble living people. Others are decaying. Many have been reanimated repeatedly after succumbing to combat injuries, and thus are missing important body parts.

The Motivation

The power behind the Dark Legions is supernatural but not a magic spell. It emanates from the Necromancer-King's pact with evil forces on a par with the gods, and draws on a variety of sinister sanctity, not mana. The Evil Empire is unhallowed

BY THE NUMBERS

To create suitable zombies, start with *Necromantic Reanimates* (*Zombies*, pp. 99-101) and apply these changes:

Vital Signs: In addition to the Rotting, Mummified, and Skeletal Corpse meta-traits, Intact Corpse is an option.

Sustenance: Swap out Dependency on mana for Dependency on a “Very Common” variety of sanctity. Heroes can't exploit this to interfere with existing zombies but *can* use prayer to prevent reanimation (a Religious Ritual roll by a holy person).

Fatal Flaws: The zombies aren't preserved by magic, so they slide down the scale from Intact Corpse, through Rotting Corpse, to Skeletal Corpse, unless mummified. Many have missing limbs.

Mutatis Mutandis: All zombies have the Can Be Turned By True Faith quirk *and* the Desecrator perk: holy folk can repel them, but any ground they occupy unchallenged at sunset joins the Evil Empire and becomes unhallowed. Some variants have a level or two of boosted ST, DX, Basic Speed, or Basic Move – or of Damage Resistance or Striking ST. A few exhibit capabilities like those of *Fantasy Monsters* (*Zombies*, pp. 95-96), from the Pestilent Presence or Toxic perk to Paralyzing Scratch. Any changes exist in all zombies in a given encounter.

Apply the resulting template(s) to a full spectrum of people, from children, through formerly hale adults (warriors and non-warriors alike), to the elderly.

“The Dead are following,” said Legolas. “I see shapes of Men and of horses, and pale banners like shreds of cloud, and spears like winter-thickets on a misty night. The Dead are following.”

– J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King*

CAMPAIGNING AGAINST THE NECROMANCER-KING

A campaign in this background sees the heroes repelling zombie legions and raiding deep into enemy territory to destroy dark power sources: cairns, henges, and so on. Each victory pushes back the border of the Evil Empire and brings them closer to conflict with their nemesis, who hurls ever-more-powerful – yet always *mindless* – undead at them. If the Champions survive, they may find the Dark Heart, defeat the Necromancer-King, lift the curse on the land, and free the souls of the remaining undead.

SETUP

The campaign starts out much like any sort of fantasy game with a major “Good vs. Evil” element, but with a few twists.

Starting Conditions

Champions might start as anything from 250-point *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy*-style heroes to 400-point hunters built on *GURPS Monster Hunters* templates adapted to a low-tech setting, as the GM prefers. Contagion isn’t an issue, so there are no tough calls to make regarding immunity. Since everyone is aware of what they’re facing, there are no major decisions to make regarding preparedness, either.

Homework

The GM’s major preparations will consist of mapping the setting (*GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 16: Wilderness Adventures* is useful for this – and so is the trick of altering a map of the real world), dreaming up variant zombies, and maintaining force rosters for *GURPS Mass Combat* purposes. It can’t hurt to keep plenty of figures around to use in smaller-scale fights, either.

Most important is dotting the map with places of evil power to strike at, and deciding where, when, and how the Necromancer-King’s forces will attack. The former might be random, but the latter shouldn’t be – zombies are mindless, but the Necromancer-King isn’t, and the GM ought to play His part intelligently. If the Champions are raiding, put zombies in their most likely path; if they’re famously powerful, toughen the opposition; and so on. The overall feel should

be more “military campaign” than “hack ‘n’ slash adventure with wandering monsters.” Still, the Necromancer-King *isn’t* an oracle, and knows only what His zombies see and what’s going on in His places of power. Don’t cheat!

RULES

Few of the special rules in Chapter 4 of *Zombies* matter, as the zombies attack with weapons instead of teeth, can’t infect others, and behave like low-quality troops rather than predatory hordes. Still, *Horde Action* (*Zombies*, pp. 114-117) can save time, and *Turning the Tide* (*Zombies*, pp. 117-118) will be important if any of the PCs are holy folk.

On the other side of the battlefield, Champions on deep raids will need *Staying Out of Reach* (*Zombies*, pp. 120-122). They ought to pay attention to *Survival Gear* (*Zombies*, pp. 47-48), too – they can’t resupply in the Evil Empire!

Rules to Avoid

All rules tied to contagion and biohazards are irrelevant. Ditto those for curing zombies (you can turn them into corpses but you can’t bring back dead friends) and inventing new zombie types (only the Necromancer-King does that, and His methods are *not* scientific).

MOOD AND PACING

The most important thing for the GM to bear in mind is that the thrill of this campaign comes from being outnumbered, surrounded, . . . and the world’s most capable zombie-killers! From the Necromancer-King’s perspective, the war is won but for a few holdouts standing between Him and taking down *deities*. The Champions beg to differ, and are the last bulwark between the gods and oblivion. Thus, *everything they do must be epic*. If the heroes perish, it will be because they went down fighting under the weight of thousands, not due to *Bleeding* (p. B420), *Infection* (p. B444), or the like.

The GM needs to make Big Plans for every adventure. One may see the Champions spearheading a *GURPS Mass Combat* action to defend or take back a village. Another might involve them raiding a “dungeon” that emanates evil for miles around, destroying the unholy artifacts within, and pushing back the borders of the Evil Empire. Enough of this and they’ll be poised to strike at the Dark Heart, relying on great gear, potent spells, and pure grit to operate without supply, playing the cat-and-mouse game of commandos vs. *armies*. At the end, the PCs should have a shot at *winning* – and if they lose, let it be heroically!

Just as important, never lose sight of the fact that each zombie was formerly a person, their soul now trapped until dispatched permanently. Reward the players – with strategic gains and perhaps bonus character points – if the PCs give the fallen honorable deaths, take time to pray for each one instead of just burning them en masse, and try to identify the

dead. If they’re respectful despite being hardened, the gods *will* notice and show approval by granting them the occasional power-up.

TOUGH CALLS

This setting is spared the squabbling of true survival horror and the difficult decisions about bitten survivors that arise in classic zombie-movie scenarios. Still, the GM has a few judgment calls to make:

Can I play a zombie? No. Zombies are always mindless NPCs.

Can I raise zombies? No. Only the Necromancer-King does that. Champions lack access to spells like *Zombie*, *Control Zombie*, *Zombie Summoning*, and *Mass Zombie*, and to similar abilities from powers or other magic systems.

Can I replace my Champion? Yes, it’s fine to bring in a new Champion. If the heroes are in the Evil Empire, this might involve waiting until they return to civilization. If that seems unlikely, the GM may arrange for a lone survivor from a defeated raiding party to find the group, possibly ruling that such a replacement PC has fewer points or little gear. Champions can’t be brought back from the dead, though – the gods disapprove of that, for obvious reasons, and nothing like *Resurrection* spells or elixirs exists.

Unlimited Power!

The Necromancer-King is as powerful as He needs to be. The GM who wants to use character points should *start* at double the Champions’ power level. If the Evil Empire is vast and thus calls for a mightier ruler, go higher – the heroes will require more adventures to reach Him, earning the points needed to stand a chance.

CHAMPIONS

Champions are the cream of the crop – they command varying degrees of power, but no one would seriously claim to be *more* capable of battling the Powers of Evil. Whether or not they like to admit it, each Champion is favored by the gods (read: “is worth lots of character points”). In some cases, this is overt: the hero has holy powers. In others, it’s a subtle stacking of the deck.

CHARACTER CREATION

Champions must be compatible with a TL3-4 world, and boast combat abilities and a capacity to operate without resupply. To ensure this, the GM may wish to use character templates. The ones in *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy* fit with minimal changes – at most, the GM might add Rank, Social Regard, Status, etc. to give the campaign a social facet.

Power Level

The GM will set this at between 250 and 400 points.

Character Types

Three archetypes are essential:

Holy folk possess some or all of *Blessed*, *Power Investiture* (in *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy*, *Holiness* will also suffice), and *True Faith* (for repelling zombies). They’ll wield other holy abilities, too, whatever form they take – most

often spells or powers. A Higher Purpose pertaining to battling the undead is likely as well. The *Religious Ritual* skill is essential for blessing cursed bodies and ground.

Warriors have high physical attributes and secondary characteristics, many combat advantages (*Combat Reflexes*, *High Pain Threshold*, and so on), excellent fighting skills, and preferably some of the skills *GURPS Mass Combat* asks of war-leaders: *Leadership*, *Strategy*, and *Tactics* – and possibly *Administration* and *Intelligence Analysis*.

Gear Check

Champions need the standard hardware that TL3-4 fantasy adventurers carry around: weapons, armor, and survival basics like backpacks, canteens, rations, rope, tents, and 10’ poles. As TL4 gunpowder weapons are slow, unreliable, and not great against Unliving zombies, it’s hard for them to get out of hand – the GM might want to add them to the mix. Holy folk will bring along blessed symbols to use with *True Faith*, while wizards have whatever paraphernalia their magic calls for. Enchanted gear and blessed equivalents exist in this setting, and are better than ordinary equipment (see *Zombies*, p. 47). As there’s no infectious zombie plague, no special countermeasures are needed.

Wizards use whatever magic system the GM prefers. In most cases this means having lots of IQ, an enabling advantage such as Magery, and the skills used for magic-working (typically spells). Their focus is on magic for destroying unholy places of power, blasting hordes of undead, and sustaining the group far from resupply.

When using *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy* templates, these essentials favor clerics, holy warriors, knights, and wizards – and possibly scouts for tracking enemy movements on deep raids. Above the 250-point power level, any profession can take lenses to add such abilities.

The templates on pp. 39-41 of *Zombies* can work, too. Start with hardened survivors optimized for TL3 and then add a couple of slayer lenses from among BZK, combat monster, holy warrior, and magician to reach 250 points. If using this option *and* the previous one, make sure all the spells and powers agree.

GURPS Monster Hunters templates are good for high-end heroes, but will take some work to adapt to TL3. Crusader, sage, warrior, and witch are *by far* the most fitting picks. Good



motivational lenses are avenger, chosen one, clergy, and soldier.

When creating characters free-form, players ought to review the notes above (and the associated templates) for inspiration.

Required Traits

If the GM wants to play up the “favored by the gods” angle, it would be reasonable to require everyone to have one of Daredevil, Destiny, Luck, or Serendipity to represent the stacked deck. If using templates, add the relevant trait(s) to advantage options and consider raising the power level a bit to pay for them.

Appropriate Traits

The campaign should allow True Faith and some or all of holy gifts built with *GURPS Powers*, abilities from *GURPS Powers: Divine Favor*, and Power Investiture-based “cleric spells.” It also requires a magic system for wizards, whether that means *GURPS Magic* or *GURPS Thaumatology: Ritual Path Magic*. And a few perks from *Zombies*, pp. 31-32 fit well: Rest in Pieces, SOP (On Alert), and Won’t Rise.

ACTING THE PART

Champions are the chosen saviors of humanity and should behave as such. This means being not only tough and self-sufficient, but also altruistic and respectful of the gods (though not necessarily pious). This doesn’t imply that they’re all righteous, self-sacrificing paladins, however! Champions are just as likely to be secular warriors sworn to preserve their homeland or bloodline, hot-headed youngsters out to earn a name by saving the world, or scholars bent on studying the Powers of Evil in order to learn how to defeat them.

Never forget that Champions live in a world at war. They’re not going to be soft or easily frightened. They definitely won’t be surprised at the sight of zombies.

Finally, remember that it’s good roleplaying to lament the fate of the undead and to be offended by the power that raised them. Gleelessly slaughtering zombie villagers is inappropriate. *Grimly* slaughtering them, and then gleefully dismantling the nearest place of evil power . . . now *that* fits!

Replacing Champions

As there’s little chance of one bite ending a career – and because the heroes are so powerful – PC death shouldn’t be commonplace. Still, the Dark Legions *are* a horde, and the Champions *could* be overrun and unable to retreat. Those traveling across the Evil Empire are especially in danger of being swallowed up. With dangerous military actions and behind-the-lines raids being the campaign’s main activities, the GM is advised to present an upfront policy on replacement characters: power level, equipment, and so on.

Not Champion Material

Character types that *don’t* suit this setting are player-character necromancers and zombie-masters (the GM should *forbid* zombie Allies, Mind Control modified to influence zombies, and magical abilities for raising or controlling undead), and TL5+ heroes (or at least their high-powered weaponry). Selfish PCs, like *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy* assassins and thieves, need a hefty dose of altruism to justify divine favor. Noncombatants are likely to perish in short order.

CHAPTER TWO

FIELDS OF FEAR

The place: somewhere in the American South. The time: sometime between the 1830s – when the Voodoo Queens of New Orleans were at the height of their powers – and the outbreak of the American Civil War in 1861. Cash crops such as cotton, sugarcane, and tobacco build the fortunes of the privileged few. The engine of their prosperity is the plantation, whose opulent “big house” stands as a symbol of affluence . . . and in stark contrast to the shanties of the slaves who work the land.

As cheap as slave labor is, however, *free* is even better. Somewhere on a particularly successful patch of land, in a particularly splendid plantation house, a particularly greedy and twisted man heard tales of Voodoo and reasoned, “If there’s any truth to these stories about zombies, I could *really* clean up, what with lower food costs, fewer overseers, and round-the-clock productivity.” One trip to New Orleans later and this “gentleman” had located a sorceress of renowned skill – a pretty one with passing looks, naturally – and offered her a way into wealthy white society if she could do what her reputation claimed she could. She could, he did, and the plantation grew more profitable.

But greed and black magic are a corrupting cocktail. Team up a planter who doesn’t deem slavery exploitative enough with a bokor willing to sell out her people and beliefs, and . . . well, the selling out and exploitation won’t end. Drifters are disappearing. More and more townsfolk seem to “wander off.” And the plantation? Doing better than ever.

DAY ONE

The campaign starts with the PCs – residents of a good-sized town – being asked to investigate a nearby plantation. At least one of them needs a reason to say “yes.”

The most basic incentive is a missing person, perhaps a member of their family or that of someone who hires them. A more complex option is being retained as spies by a rival plantation, either to discover trade secrets or to dig up “dirt” that could shut down the competition (given the time and place, proof of miscegenation would suffice). If the local religious community fears black magic, *they* might foot the investigators’ bill.

Whatever the rumors, those in the know *won’t share them at first* – nobody wants to look crazy! Nobody wants a rich plantation owner as an enemy, either. The campaign should start out like a TL5 private-detective game, boasting Southern charm tempered with weighty social issues. The cunning GM will keep **GURPS Zombies** out of sight.

AT A GLANCE: FIELDS OF FEAR

Genre: Historical Horror.

Tech Level: 5.

Power Level: Heroic (100-150 points).

Supernatural Powers: Subtle magic for the NPC villain.

Scope: Local Incident (a plantation and its surrounds).

Zombies: One type of slow, mind-controlled, *living* slave, not infectious.

Useful Supplements: *GURPS High-Tech*, *GURPS High-Tech: Adventure Guns*, *GURPS Horror*, *GURPS Social Engineering*, and *GURPS Thaumatology*, and possibly *GURPS Monster Hunters 2* or *GURPS Mysteries* for detailed investigation rules.

TOWN AND COUNTRY

The GM chooses the date and location. A familiar backdrop – one for which the GM has reference materials, or that’s the setting of a favorite novel or movie – is best. For instance, 1830s Louisiana, 1840s Virginia, and 1850s Mississippi would all work, but the specifics differ.

What’s crucial is plantations, slaves, and a volatile mixture of class politics and prejudice. Plantation owners are often filthy rich, but they’re not most white people; most white people are poor, often sharecroppers or laborers. Still, they are white, and would probably favor the cause of a rich landowner who shares nothing but

their skin color over that of a slave who shares everything *but* their skin color.

As offensive as that is the modern reader, remember that it was supported by the laws of the land. The South at this time wasn’t a lawless outback but a prosperous agricultural power with a genteel ruling class. The heroes can’t walk around shooting people, least of all respected landowners. If they want to prove something, they must do so in a court of law. And if they find zombies, they can’t traipse in and destroy them – because these ones are *living people*, and killing them would be a property crime (and grounds for a fine) if they’re slaves, murder otherwise.

TOWN

The campaign's hub is a town large enough to be home to at least one PC of sufficient means to play at being a sleuth or a spy instead of earning an honest living, plus several others who are that individual's hired help or equally affluent peers. The place should be sufficiently populous that it takes a while for somebody to be missed. It needs crime, a rumor

VILLAINS TWO

This campaign's principal villains are the man who owns the evil plantation (Himself) and his sorceress (the Voodoo Queen). Names are left to the GM – reading these notes won't reveal *which* wealthy household is zombifying people! Character sheets are likewise up to the GM, but these descriptions should help with that.

Himself

The man behind the whole sick operation is, superficially, the epitome of the Southern gentleman. He dresses nicely, pays lip service to honor, and never fails to fulfill a financial obligation. He's also a smooth-talking businessman with an unnerving talent for finessing contracts and greasing the right palms to stay on the friendly side of anyone who matters. At heart, he's greedy, merciless, and utterly fickle.

Once the truth surfaces, the *players* may want to confront him. This should be difficult for their *characters*, if they respect law and custom. Word against word, his will prevail unless they build an airtight case. Still, if the heroes throw caution to the winds, he's also a physical threat: fit, capable with sword and pistol, and an accomplished horseman. If the campaign has a suitable weirdness level, he may well have sold his soul for even more gifts.

Voodoo Queen

An accident of birth means the woman who creates and controls the zombies doesn't *look* like a person of color. She capitalizes on the difference between her heritage and her appearance, her attitude being, "Lucky me – too bad for you." She is poisonously selfish, and happy to enslave any enemy of any color, unless they can do something for her. Her rich lover has much to offer: comfort, privacy, victims . . .

Despite passing looks and considerable beauty, the Voodoo Queen *doesn't* visit town. She has no interest in the pursuits considered proper for a woman of her adopted station. Stories of fragile health do the trick, although she's happy enough to put in an appearance when guests come around.

The Voodoo Queen is skilled at some form of slow, ceremonial magic. Path magic from *GURPS Thaumatology* – or its variant in *GURPS Thaumatology: Ritual Path Magic* – would fit well. She *can* curse people, not to mention poison them and add them to her workforce. Investigators who finagle a polite visit are one impertinent question away from a *Datura* julep.

mill, and factions of tough, hard-drinking laborers backed by nearby plantations. There should be every reason to suspect plain old foul play when a body turns up – or *doesn't* turn up. And it needs to offer enough work to attract drifters who can go missing.

The specifics are flexible. The GM who wants an "occult investigators" feel can give the town a bookstore, a "curiosity shoppe," a church with a well-traveled preacher who has seen some strange things, superstitious parishioners, and so on. If there will be old-timey gunplay, there should be places to obtain guns and ammo. The community might be prosperous, with shops selling fashionable clothing, people sipping absinthe, and clean-swept streets; then again, it may be gritty, with more than its share of drunks and thugs. Or both.

THE PLANTATION

The PCs' ultimate target needs to be far enough outside town that it's inconvenient to shuttle back and forth. Even 20 miles ought to do when the only options are horses and shoe-leather. The route should have isolated twists and turns – places where superstitious folk can glimpse supernatural bogeys lurking and where *human* monsters can lie in wait. If the chosen backdrop allows, there might be cypress swamps or hills or other obstacles, too. The point is, if something happens on the road, there won't be witnesses.

On the other hand, plantations need to move crops off the land to be profitable, so it's important not to play up the isolation *too* much. There will be a road, if a creepy one, and perhaps a river landing. What hides the truth from casual travelers is the place's sheer size: traversing the distance between the road and the big house takes more than a few minutes, and those workers in the distance are probably just ordinary slaves – it's hard to tell from this far off.

The Big House

The plantation house itself is a sprawling marvel of French Colonial, Gothic Revival, or perhaps Greek Revival architecture. Welcome visitors should be impressed by its sheer splendor, while sneaky ones will need hours to search all its nooks and crannies. There are undoubtedly secret rooms, closets with mysterious little doors in the back, and lots of locks. But there's nothing *obviously* incriminating to be found here.

The Outbuildings

A plantation also needs barns and stables, and various structures for processing crops, whether that means drying tobacco or ginning cotton. There are buildings for storing equipment and bales of valuable commodities. If there's a river, there's a boathouse. All this is perfectly normal. There are two telltale oddities, however:

Overseer's House: With its shuttered windows and locked doors, even a glance at the outside should raise suspicions. The inside is where the Voodoo Queen does her work. If the magic she uses supports such things, there *are* hexes waiting to be triggered. There are certainly Fright Check-worthy props sitting around. However, there are no monsters to fight or mundane traps to avoid.

Only an occultist is likely to realize what goes on here – and that won't be enough to prove anything to a judge (though it may convince a mob).

Slave Cabins: Anybody with any investigative skills at all will realize that nobody actually lives in these rundown structures. There are signs of people *being* here, but not of cooking or sleeping or family life . . . or any other kind of life.

THE TRUTH

What's actually going on is that Himself, the Voodoo Queen, and a tiny number of servants are the only people on the grounds who aren't zombies. All the heavy labor is done by slaves-turned-zombies, drifters-turned-zombies, enemies-turned-zombies, nosy-investigators-turned-zombies

. . . Created by the Voodoo Queen, these creatures toil day and night. They're sent off to far fields or hidden in cabins when polite company stops by, but they don't need an overseer – or any other supervision that magic can't provide. When one of them finally drops dead, it's time to kidnap and zombify a replacement.

Discovering this truth isn't the hardest part, although it should be the basis of at least one full adventure. *Proving* it is. Courts don't take kindly to someone accusing a genteel woman of witchcraft – especially not when her man owns the judge.

And anybody who *does* get too close is going to face not only Voodoo curses but also straightforward violence. A wealthy plantation owner can afford to hire plenty of thugs, pay for their liquor, and put weapons in their hands. And if the goons start to talk, well, they join the workforce.

There's superstition in Haiti that the natives brought here from Africa. Some can be traced back as far as ancient Egypt. And beyond that yet in the countries that were old when Egypt was young.

– Dr. Bruner, in *White Zombie*

THE WORKFORCE

The zombies in this story are produced by what Haiti knows as Vodou and the South calls Voodoo. They *aren't* monsters to fight – in fact, they won't fight back if threatened – but rather a clear-cut case of the unfortunate zombie (*Zombies*, p. 11). Horror flows from the fear of *becoming* a zombie. There's also a heavy dose of social criticism in the mix, for gamers who desire it: the zombies embody everything that's wrong with a society that accepts slavery and racial inequality as “just how things are.”

THE GORY DETAILS

Each zombie is a living person. In theory, it's even possible to find a cure in the form of an “uncrossing” spell or potion supplied by a friendly magic-worker.

The Meat

The zombies in the fields are alive. They look like underfed, overworked people with bloodshot eyes – not like walking dead. However, it isn't usually obvious *who* the person is, due to the distorting effects of malnutrition and sun-blistered skin. (Rolls for this are at -5 or worse.)

The Motivation

The zombies are products of black magic *and* mind-altering drugs. The supernatural *is* at work, but noxious potions are integral to the curse – one cannot be separated from the other.

Turning Points

While zombification isn't infectious, the heroes *do* have to worry about being made into zombies! This would start with exposure to the zombie drug, placed in food or drink (or forcefully administered, if the villains' thugs capture them). That allows a HT-6 roll to resist . . . and in the case of captives, nothing prevents the enemy from administering a new dose. The result is a trance that's easily mistaken for death, after which the victim is afflicted with Slave Mentality and can be told not to resist the sorcerous mind-control ritual. The whole process takes about 24 hours – someone who was alive and lucid last night could be drooling and cutting cane tonight.

The cure involves breaking the spell and then suspending doses of the zombie drug. The first requires finding a friendly Voodoo magician – or perhaps digging through obscure books. The second uses the rules for withdrawal (p. B440); the GM decides whether to treat the dependency as psychological or physiological.

BY THE NUMBERS

Vodou Slave (*Zombies*, p. 102) works fine as written. No special notes are needed to fit this into the campaign frame – the zombie curse of the Voodoo Queen isn't grounds for Dependency on mana or special zombie features, but simply an explanation for how a drug found in the real world produces results that aren't.

HARROWING THE FIELDS

The campaign begins with investigation. The heroes might pursue what appears to be a string of missing-persons cases and discover that all clues point to the same plantation – or perhaps they start out taking notes on an unusually productive plantation for someone who already suspects that something is amiss. The more the PCs poke around, the scarier things get . . . and if they survive the mundane thugs and mysterious accidents (curses!), they have to prove their case or assassinate two wealthy citizens. And neither resolution removes the need to cure the victims, which is a quest in itself.

SETUP

The campaign should *seem* to be a historical (TL5) crime story and grow more twisted and horrific as the truth becomes apparent.

Starting Conditions

The heroes are capable 100- to 150-point mystery-solvers. While they need no *special* material preparations, they'll probably want Bowie knives, revolvers, and so on. The GM may want to peruse *GURPS High-Tech* and *High-Tech: Adventure Guns* to figure out what's available, given the campaign's starting date.

A particular issue is that of PC resistance to being zombified. Resistant to Poison (or a more specific form of Resistant) should affect the Voodoo Queen's zombie drug, while she rolls her curse at a penalty if the subject has a defense against magic, such as Magic Resistance. The GM must decide how much hand-tipping is too much. It may be better to assign such traits in secret; see *Knowledge of Immunity* (*Zombies*, pp. 151-152).

Homework

There's no need for encounter tables, hordes of zombie miniatures, or large numbers of zombies templates – zombies aren't the enemy here. The real work consists of coming up with character sheets for Himself and the Voodoo Queen, and mapping out the town, the plantation, and the route in between.

RULES

The many rules *Zombies* offers for handling zombies in action won't matter, as the PCs won't be battling zombies. Just treat the zombies as ordinary people, subject to the limitations of their template. However, if one of the *investigators* is zombified and stashed in a pine box, don't overlook *Digging Out* (*Zombies*, p. 123)!

Fright Checks (*Zombies*, p. 109) should play a role in the campaign, though. Initially, the heroes *won't* be expecting the occult, never mind zombies. Each time they discover a new truth – a Voodoo workspace full of skulls and blood, an unresponsive slave toiling in the dark, an unresponsive *acquaintance* working the fields, etc. – there's a chance for a scare.

The GM may want to use *A Better Tomorrow* (*Zombies*, pp. 129-133) for attempts to revive rescued zombies. After the truth is discovered, a doctor with the Physician skill – or a native medicine man with Esoteric Medicine – could try to invent a cure using that knowledge plus Occultism and Pharmacy (Herbal). The GM might also let *Resuscitation* (*Zombies*, p. 133) work on a zombie killed by the taste of salt, justified by anachronistic science or simply the mad kind.

Rules to Avoid

Just about every rule pertaining to zombie action is irrelevant – these zombies aren't contagious, don't attack people, don't mutate into weird new forms, can't be turned by holy folk, or any of that. Inventing new zombie types is *especially* unsuitable.

MOOD AND PACING

This campaign revolves around the slow revelation of the occult – *not* tangling with zombies. While zombies are pivotal to the plot, they symbolize its mysteries; discovering their existence doesn't mean battling monsters right now, but rather dealing with villains later on. The GM shouldn't lose sight of this, as portraying unfortunate curse victims as B-movie adversaries means irreversibly changing genres from subtle historical horror to splatter.

The first adventure might be a "prequel" that has little to do with the central storyline, serving to establish the heroes as investigators and troubleshooters; perhaps they have to solve a robbery or a murder, or claim a bounty. After that, they find themselves pointed at the plantation, whether as detectives on a missing-persons case or as spies funded by the competition. This overture might span an adventure or two: nosing around, looking for trouble, and finding it – likely in the form of good ol' boys with axe handles, hired by Himself. And just when it looks like another crime story, the PCs glimpse things that give them pause . . .

How the adventurers proceed from there is up to the players, but investigating the plantation is inevitable. Socially adept PCs will wheedle a "polite" invitation (and risk poisoning if they aren't circumspect), stealthy ones may sneak onto the property (and face shotguns and dogs if they're noticed), and violent ones might stomp right in (ditto). Once they find evidence of Voodoo and experience a few Fright Checks, they'll have another adventure ahead of them in the form of locating a subject-matter expert – or doing the research themselves, if one of them is an occultist. Their new enemies will strive to thwart this, of course.

Then it's time to build a case, which won't be easy. A drifter or a townie whose heart is still beating and who isn't protesting his fate is of little value as a witness or as evidence. How the investigators prove black magic is up to them. Meanwhile, they'll have enemies in Himself and the Voodoo Queen. The former will equip his goons with guns, making the winding road outside town – and the darker doorways and rougher drinking establishments *in* town – dangerous.

The latter will work her curses, causing buildings to burn, horses to spook, bridges to collapse into the creek, and all manner of other “accidents.”

If the heroes persevere, they’ll eventually reveal the truth. This is likely to involve the villainous pair fleeing with plenty of gold and silver, leading the PCs on a hectic chase – preferably down a creepy road or river through the backcountry. Backward villages are places best left unvisited, but a Voodoo practitioner might be welcome. Pursuit could end in the middle of nowhere or lead to urban action in the streets of New Orleans.

When it’s all over, there’s still the epilogue of saving the innocent victims. This is its own adventure, involving either a quest for a talented sorcerer or crafting a cure the hard way. It may attract unwanted attention – the PCs could find *themselves* accused of black magic, or even awaken Things best left asleep.

Throughout, it’s essential to emphasize the setting’s gritty nature. Firearms are slow, unreliable caplocks that use black powder, belching smoke (*GURPS Tactical Shooting*, p. 16) and fouling barrels (*GURPS High-Tech*, p. 86). Medicine is crude, infection (p. B444) is a killer, and any bullet wound

can mean a slow death. People are often uneducated and frequently suffer from Intolerance. The investigators *will* be making Fright Checks (pp. B360-361) when they discover occult truths – or find little dolls of themselves, stuck through with pins. And since horses are far more reliable and commonplace than steamboats and trains, and as there’s no telegraph network to carry calls for help before 1860, the heroes will be solving their *own* problems.

TOUGH CALLS

The GM is liable to face several tricky questions:

How do we deal with race? The setting is home to prejudice and slavery – a hero of color *will* suffer from a Social Stigma. An armed group that spends all its time solving mysteries instead of tending crops or shops is most likely to consist of privileged white people, and the GM is within his rights to require this. If the players seem incapable of handling such matters tactfully, it’s best to pick another campaign type.

What happens if I become a zombie? All zombies in this setting are controlled by the Voodoo Queen. A PC who succumbs to her powers becomes an NPC. If his associates manage to snatch him from her grasp and cure him, he’ll become a PC again, and be able to recount what happened! In the meantime, the player is entitled to play a replacement character – but the GM should forbid any attempt to introduce precisely the occultist or scientist the heroes need, as that would be an abuse of player knowledge to short-circuit the plot.

Can I know Voodoo? No. Magical powers are for NPCs, and the GM may even leave them vague and hand-waved so the players *can’t* divine what system is in use.

Startling Realizations

If the *investigators* uncover evidence of sorcery but the *players* misinterpret it, the GM may secretly roll against the heroes’ Occultism (defaults to IQ-5), with success providing a hint. Those from slave or Caribbean backgrounds get +2, as do Native American PCs (who grew up hearing tales such as that of the Raven Mocker’s heart-stealing witchcraft), and success by 5+ might even provide a clue about countermeasures.

DETECTIVES AND DILETTANTES

The PCs are, for whatever reason, a group equipped to investigate mysteries and/or snoop into others’ business. Details can vary: wealthy amateurs, early detective agency, law-enforcers, or whatever else the players and GM agree to. They need *some* reason to work together, however – if only “the wealthiest of us hired (or owns) the rest.”

CHARACTER CREATION

Everyone must suit the American South of the mid-19th century, which is a pure TL5 setting without (PC-controlled!) magic. The majority should be white, English-speaking Southerners, though there’s room for Cajuns, Yankees, Europeans, or even Mexicans, or – with appropriate Social Stigmas – black slaves, Native Americans, or free Caribbean immigrants. Whatever their origin, they won’t last long if they *aren’t* resourceful, strong-willed troubleshooters!

Power Level

The GM might pick 100 or 150 points – or, for a real challenge, 50-point “ordinary folks.”

Gear Check

Investigators have access to TL5 equipment invented as of the campaign’s start date; see *GURPS High-Tech* and its supplements. They’ll definitely want guns, tools (especially *burglar’s* tools), and medical gear. For getting around, they’ll need horses and tack – or maybe a coach or a carriage. Law-enforcers will have specialty items such as shackles and leg irons, while period spies may have cipher wheels, invisible ink, and false-bottomed bags. No special countermeasures are needed to avoid zombie plague (a *paranoid* investigator might avoid contact anyway!), and occult paraphernalia isn’t on the menu until the heroes locate a friendly sorcerer willing to sell charms and potions.

Ordinary Folks

To preserve this setting's historical feel, the PCs shouldn't be *too* unusual. They cannot wield occult powers, such as the ability to raise or control zombies, or curse people – that stuff is “impossible” at the beginning of the campaign. In fact, there's no element of overt weirdness of any kind; psychics, time-travelers, world-jumpers, and so on are also unsuitable. The strangest characters are likely to be social outsiders (e.g., foreigners, or perhaps slaves owned by other group members), and it's best to limit even this to just one or two players on a first-come, first-served basis.

Reinforcements

Given that the PCs are ordinary (if competent) people facing foes who have the advantages of surprise, wealth, and occult powers, some of them may end up zombified or dead. To prevent players from bringing in masters of occult lore, professional gunfighters, and other over-the-top replacements, the GM might require all alternates to be locals. It would be helpful to prepare some 50-point templates for farmers, preachers, shopkeepers, etc. and require investigators created in play to be built from these, with their remaining points going toward toughening up enough to give the original heroes cause to accept their help.

Character Types

The heroes need to be flexible and versatile. A well-balanced group will include some or all of the following:

Brains. A book-learned type – preferably a doctor, a dentist, or somebody else with valuable medical skills, but possibly a rich kid who went to school up in Charleston or Lexington and learned something about “strange native beliefs.”

Detective. At least one of the group ought to have proper mystery-solving skills like Criminology, Detect Lies, Interrogation, Observation, and Search. After 1850, a proper Pinkerton is just barely possible. More likely, though, this means a marshal or a sheriff, active or retired.

Dilettante. The social labyrinth will be much easier to navigate if someone's main contributions are Status, Wealth, and skills to match – particularly skills along the lines of Carousing, Dancing, Diplomacy, and Savoir-Faire (High Society).

Muscle. There will be blood. The group needs the likes of a doughty farm boy who's good with fists and hickory, a state militiaman trained with long guns and perhaps the cavalry saber, or just a good-for-nothing gambler or gunfighter with a pepperbox and a Bowie knife.

Sneak. There's plenty of stalking to do. An urban criminal with Shadowing and Streetwise would come in handy, and so would a swamp rat with Camouflage and Tracking. The whole group could use Stealth, but *especially* this type.

These needn't be exclusive categories, especially on 150 points. A dilettante can still be educated, a sneaky backwoods hunter is also useful muscle, and detective will want to be at least somewhat stealthy *and* comfortable with weapons.

Required Traits

Nothing is strictly mandatory. However, the GM might want to ensure that somebody has skill at Occultism, and possibly Pharmacy and Physician (to create a cure). A good way to do this is to require everyone to use templates and to include those skills on a few templates recommended as essential. Also, as *Starting Conditions* (p. 14) notes, the GM may opt to assign some level of resistance to Voodoo poisons or curses as a secret trait (**Zombies**, pp. 151-152).

Appropriate Traits

The PCs mainly need the skills noted in *Character Types* (above). Technological skills should be TL5. The heroes will also find Combat Reflexes, Fearlessness, and the Rule of 15 perk (**Zombies**, p. 31) valuable for passing Fright Checks.

KNOWING YOUR PLACE

Players need to respect two essential principles here. The first is cultural accuracy, to which the GM is advised to demand at least lip service before things get weird. Gamers are welcome to import modern thinking, but they ought to wrap it in period garb: those who want to oppose slavery can play abolitionists, ones who prefer higher-tech settings are welcome to create inventors, those who want female PCs to be something other than fragile belles shouldn't overlook self-sufficient widows and farmers, and so on. Another part of this requirement is operating *within* society – because as mentioned already, there are laws, and going around shooting people means swinging from a rope. The need for social finesse is one of the campaign's major challenges, and the GM may use **GURPS Social Engineering** to drive this home.

Second, when things finally do get weird, it's good role-playing – worthy of bonus character points – to *act* freaked-out. Even brave veterans of the Indian and Mexican-American Wars aren't expecting Voodoo and zombies! People in this era tend to be superstitious, too; there were witch trials in 1830s Tennessee, for instance. The players may suspect or *know* that the GM is consulting **GURPS Horror**, **GURPS Thaumatology**, and **GURPS Zombies**, but they should do their best to firewall this information.

Someone in this village is practicing witchcraft. That corpse wandering on the moors is an undead, a zombie.

– Sir James, in *The Plague of the Zombies*

CHAPTER THREE

SAVAGE STREETS

Big cities have big problems. You try to take them in stride.

Not this time.

Those stories of a new drug – “Grind” or “G” – that makes its users crazy, turns them into cannibals? All true. Talking heads on TV claim the situation is only a problem for addicts. If you live in the ‘burbs, you might actually believe that. But in those inner-city neighborhoods that were never very safe, it’s like a horror movie: daily disappearances and shootouts, fires the FD can’t get near, *people eating each other’s brains*. And it’s spreading.

So, what are you going to do about it?

DAY ONE

The campaign starts with the heroes – big-city cops or vigilantes – becoming aware that a frightening drug problem has boiled out of the shadows of the underworld and started to spread across and beyond the usual bad neighborhoods of their burg. They’re aware that this new drug is incredibly addictive, makes people violent, and is causing record crime. They’ve read reports that the troubles involve not just the occasional whack-job shouting

threats and smashing windows, or gangbangers fighting a turf war, but roving mobs of crazed addicts bent on destruction. And they’ve been assigned (or have taken it upon themselves) to deal with it.

What they *don’t* know is the whole truth . . .

AT A GLANCE: SAVAGE STREETS

Genre: Modern Action/Weirdness.

Tech Level: 8.

Power Level: Hardened Survivors (150 points) to Born
Zombie-Killers (250 points).

Supernatural Powers: None.

Scope: Local Incident (neighborhoods within a big city).

Zombies: One type of fast, drug-addled, *living* zombie, not
infectious.

Useful Supplements: *GURPS Action* series, *GURPS
Gun Fu*, *GURPS High-Tech*, *GURPS Martial Arts*,
and *GURPS Tactical Shooting*.

CITY ON FIRE

The GM should pick a large city known to have a high crime rate – possibly one the gaming group knows well, conceivably because they live there. Everything is *mostly* like it is today, except that there’s a new drug on the streets and things are breaking down.

THE WAR ZONE

The total number of addicts is unknown, but it appears that the producers of Grind targeted everyone who was already addicted to hard stuff – crack, heroin, meth, you name it. Maybe the addicts chose to use something even harder, but more likely they were tricked. However it went down, all but a few users are now behaving like savage pack animals, running in mobs, attacking anyone they see. If they get behind the wheel of a vehicle, they trash it. The few who still try to smoke G set a lot of fires.

The result is that large swaths of the city are a disaster area: the War Zone. Cops and vigilantes trying to deal with the problem find themselves targeted by demented addicts, well-armed dealers (and, many suspect, manufacturers), and dangerous holdouts who’ve decided that it’s TEOTWAWKI

(The End Of The World As We Know It), holed up with supplies and unloading on anything that moves. The official stance is containment. It’ll burn itself out, right?

BAD MEDICINE

Grind can be snorted, smoked, vaped, injected, swallowed . . . anything goes. It has surprisingly little addiction potential, except for users who are hooked on something else – they can’t resist it, and a new craving replaces their former addiction almost overnight. To those on the outside, the stuff appears to have only downsides; it turns a person into a savage psychopath who barely sleeps, doesn’t talk so much as growl and grind his teeth, and flips out at the drop of a hat. The experience supposedly feels like being immortal and powerful, but it sure doesn’t look that way.

Rumor has it that G is made by injecting people with a precursor substance – which nobody has managed to stabilize for analysis yet – and then extracting the active agent from the *brain*. This would be delicate work in a high-tech lab, but it’s doubtless done with a lot less finesse in practice.

Initially, the “living drug reactors” were desperate volunteers looking for crack money, but with the breakdown of law and order in the War Zone, abductees are more common. And while extraction doesn’t *have* to kill the subject, death doesn’t spoil the product.

Secret Labs

Nobody is sure who’s producing Grind. At first, it was assumed to be coming in via the usual channels, and the focus was more on dealing with isolated incidents than on trying to confront gangs and cartels on a stretched law-enforcement budget. When things started to get bad, a greater effort was made to track down the source, but detectives were thwarted by an uncharacteristic degree of secrecy and a cutthroat willingness to sacrifice anybody who talked – and to take down cops who got too close! Now it mostly doesn’t matter, because ordinary police work is impossible in areas where G is distributed and used. It’s generally accepted that the labs are somewhere in the heart of the War Zone.

Crazy theories abound about the origins of Grind. The most popular are:

Men in Black. Shadowy forces behind the government concocted G to win the war on drugs – that’s why it targets existing addicts, and why the authorities seem content to let the problem “burn itself out.” The resources of a spooky security agency make it easy to guarantee that law-enforcers run into dead ends. Before long, the gangs and users will have torn each other apart, and the crisis will be severe enough to justify a no-questions-asked mop-up. While this is an expensive strategy, cities can be rebuilt. The masterminds weren’t elected in the first place, so they don’t *care* if police chiefs, mayors, governors, and other public officials end up taking the fall.

Aliens. Invaders from space are behind it all! Some people think they’re probing our weaknesses, and that Grind is one weapon among many intended to soften us up for a quiet conquest. Others believe they’re using Earth and its inhabitants as a bio-tech lab to manufacture drugs for off-world sales, and that the local problems are incidental – a kind of industrial runoff. Either way, it’s easy for super-advanced aliens to create a substance that defies human understanding and to foil our investigation of its origins.

Demons. A few religious types believe this calamity is punishment for our sins. It’s only fitting that the immoral – addicts – are suffering the worst of it, and that a big, sinful

city is where it’s taking place. Demonic powers explain why the police caught wind of it only after it was too late, and why their efforts to solve the problem have failed. People who buy into this theory are especially likely to refer to raging addicts as “zombies.”

Bad Neighborhoods

The GM decides how widespread the chaos is, but since even Men in Black, aliens, or demons couldn’t prevent regional or national authorities from shutting down a *whole city* in disarray, it ought to be confined to areas small enough that life can go on around them (more or less). Police warn people away from these neighborhoods, and control travel into and out of them. The problem continues to spread, though, and it won’t be long before the city *does* need quarantine.

Going to the Source

Whatever the truth, the situation is deteriorating. At first, Grind was sold like any other street drug – perhaps under false pretenses, but money changed hands. However, its effects made life difficult even for hardened dealers, as users knew no fear and started to *take* what they wanted. And that might have ended the cycle, if it weren’t for two new wrinkles:

1. Word on how to “cook” Grind hit the streets. Paranoids claim that the Men in Black or aliens or demons leaked the secret, but nobody really knows. While addicts were too messed up to do the job, the worst kinds of gangs were happy to replace the original dealers and do the dirty work. The precursor substance they concoct is stable for mere minutes – but that’s more than enough time to inject someone and extract a few hundred hits of G from his brain. Of course, “gangs,” plural, is a synonym for “gang war”; the ensuing spate of abductions and shootouts has made things much, much scarier.

2. Somewhere along the line, addicts discovered that if they were already tripping, they could prolong their high by ingesting raw brain matter, even from someone who hadn’t been injected with the precursor. *That*, a drug-addled user can do, and groups of crazies running people down, cracking their skulls, and eating brains has added a whole new, horrific dimension to the problem – and invited comparisons with “real” zombies.

Freddy: I can finally see the one thing . . . the one thing that will relieve this horrible suffering.

Tina: What, Freddy?

Freddy: A live . . . braaaain!

– The Return of the Living Dead

RED EYES, GRINDING TEETH

The zombies here are ripped straight from modern sensationalistic reporting on “bath salts” and similar drugs. They’re a critique of – and considerably more than a metaphor for – substance abuse (*Zombies*, p. 9), inherently scary and embodying fears of cannibalism (*Zombies*, p. 8) and disease. More abstractly, they symbolize overpopulation and urban decay. While armchair observers might deem them “victims,” they behave like murderous thugs in the flesh, and law-and-order types – such as action heroes – are liable to see skull-cracking psychos in the same light as violent gang members and junkies who would stab you for a buck: as targets for righteous justice.

It’s a lot of overblown nonsense, a lot of drug nuts running wild.

*– Philip, in **Shaun of the Dead***

THE GORY DETAILS

These zombies are drug addicts, theoretically curable through medical rehabilitation. That puts an unusual spin on things relative to “classic” zombie folklore and fiction.

The Meat

While Grind can kill, that isn’t how it produces zombies. The monsters it creates are alive, if not well. Those who’ve been roaming the streets for a while are usually deficient in the looks department (reduce Appearance) and hygiene (add Bad Smell) – and may even end up with rotting flesh, like users of the notorious Russian street drug *krokodil* – but that has nothing to do with being dead.

The Motivation

Zombification is the direct result of mind-altering drugs; see *Zombies in the News: Zombie Drugs* (*Zombies*, p. 22).

There’s nothing remotely supernatural about it. The zombies are motivated by science – if bad, shaky, action-movie science.

Turning Points

All zombies in this setting start out as people with serious drug problems. If someone with an Addiction to a substance that includes -10 points or worse off the *Effects* list on p. B122 is exposed to Grind, make a withdrawal roll for the original disadvantage. Any failure means the victim *replaces* the Addiction with the face-eater template. This could in theory happen to a PC, though action heroes are rarely addicts.

The only certain cure is to withdraw from G, which is totally addictive and induces physiological dependency; see p. B440.

BY THE NUMBERS

Face-Eater (*Zombies*, pp. 101-102) is a good starting point, but the GM may want to make a few tweaks:

Brains: To make the template worse than the “mere” -40 points for the worst kinds of Addictions – so that becoming a zombie is a step down for everyone – make face-eaters brain-damaged, too. Remove one or two IQ levels, but offset this by adding equal levels of Will and Per, for a net -10 points per -1 to IQ alone. Such zombies are easily outwitted by even the bluntest of action heroes, but no easier to discourage or avoid, all of which seems fitting. Mob behavior is a side effect of Bestial, not a sign of Chummy; like real-world addicts, these ones tend to turn on each other if resources (drugs, brains, or just ordinary food) are scarce.

Sustenance: Face-eaters need drugs to survive and food for sustenance – not human flesh in either case. However, they can meet the needs of their Addiction (which is to a “Cheap” drug, after all) by taking a dose and then eating brains. Although this is a zero-point feature, rewording the Odious Racial Habit to “Eats Human *Brains*” is a useful reminder.

Mutatis Mutandis: Very far-gone zombies will decay to Appearance (Hideous) and/or gain Bad Smell. The GM might wish to add such traits to the template in the service of making it worse than any simple Addiction. To play up such foulness, add the Pestilent Wounds or Pestilent Presence perk. Heroes who plan to tangle with these guys had better have their shots!

Whatever the final template looks like, a significant proportion of those who sport it are relatively tough street denizens and gang members – anybody frailer would be torn apart by the competition!

MAKING THE STREETS SAFE AGAIN

This is an action-adventure campaign in which physically perilous situations provide thrills, urban decay offers disturbing scenes, and weirdness plays a major role, yet there’s relatively little true horror. The PCs are law-enforcers or vigilantes cleaning up their city, and spend their time battling gangs and lowlifes to accomplish this. While zombies are a

constant threat – and a grotesque one! – other adversaries are better-armed. Burning cars, roving gangs, and touchy hold-outs offer a taste of the apocalyptic, but civilization soldiers on outside, offering changes of mood, complex social subplots, or just bigger, nastier guns.

SETUP

The campaign is TL8 action that pits crime-fighters against scumbags, with the major twists of crazy, face-eating zombies and city blocks in post-apocalyptic ruin.

Starting Conditions

The PCs fall somewhere between competent-but-plausible people (150 points) and over-the-top action heroes (250 points). They're exceedingly unlikely to be zombified, and the GM can avoid that outcome altogether with a blanket and completely in-genre proclamation: "No addicts." Everybody knows that cannibalistic psychos have taken over the city's worst neighborhoods, that the problem is drug-related, and that the situation is spreading; none of that needs to be kept secret. The GM's toughest task might be to review *GURPS High-Tech* (and possibly *GURPS Gun Fu* and/or *GURPS Tactical Shooting*) and work out what hardware is available to starting characters!

Homework

The main piece of pre-campaign prep (aside from stocking the armory) is obtaining a good city map, outlining the affected area, and making a copy for the players – and then annotating a separate, secret copy with any additional information pertaining to the true source of the problem. As there will be constant fighting, it's also a good idea to have tactical maps and figures to hand.

Civil behavior is what distinguishes us from the lower forms. It's what enables us to communicate. To go about things in an orderly fashion, without attacking each other like beasts.

– Dr. Logan,
in Day of the Dead

RULES

Since face-eaters *do* attack barehanded and in mobs, and are often bitey, it's a good idea to be familiar with *Zombies in Combat* (*Zombies*, pp. 108-118). Especially important rules are *Biting 101* (*Zombies*, pp. 108-109), *Can't Stun This* and *I'll Sleep When I'm Dead* (*Zombies*, p. 111), and the various rules for hordes (*Zombies*, pp. 112-117). Urban warriors will probably exploit *Mobility* (*Zombies*, pp. 121-122) and might end up needing *Run for Your Life* (*Zombies*, p. 122).

On the other hand, none of the rules for infection are especially important. Long-term survival rules can be ignored, too, as the PCs will usually be able to leave the War Zone to resupply. And mobs just don't get big enough to need the game mechanics for tipping over cars and battering down barricades.

The GM might allow somebody who knows Chemistry, Pharmacy, and Physician to use *A Better Tomorrow* (*Zombies*, pp. 129-133) to develop a cure more effective than hope-for-the-best withdrawal. That isn't strongly in the action-movie idiom, however, but tweedy scientist stuff that's prone to failure. Still, an NPC set on this goal could provide the basis for a few adventures – especially if the PCs have to provide security!

Rules to Avoid

Rules for inventing new zombie types have no place in this campaign; maybe somebody is tinkering with G, but if so, that's "off screen." Above all else, avoid anything with a supernatural tinge. Face-eaters are the product of bad, mad, or weird science, but have no ties to the occult (despite occasional rumors of demonic drug dealers!).

MOOD AND PACING

Savage Streets works best as a mission-oriented campaign. The GM might want to kick it off with a "pilot episode" during which the heroes first discover the threat – an adventure with stronger horror and mystery elements than what will follow. To have an ongoing story, though, the PCs must *fail* to prevent the spread of Grind and the ensuing breakdown of law and order over a large area. Perhaps they start out on just 50 or 100 points, barely escape alive, and come back with a vengeance (and more points!).

As more than a few sessions of "enter the War Zone and fight zombies" would get boring, each adventure should present a specific problem to solve. Examples include shutting down a new drug lab, rescuing someone important who has inadvertently strayed into danger, extracting the G-addicted family member of a VIP, escorting scientists who plan to set up a field lab in the area to analyze the short-lived precursor drug, and closing a sewer or a subway tunnel being used by dealers or wandering mobs of zombies. Not all missions need to happen in the Zone, either. Sudden flare-ups of face-eaters outside the usual neighborhoods would need to be shut down with extreme prejudice – and investigating rumors of where Grind came from could lead the heroes to sterile pharmaceuticals labs or the halls of power.

A variety of adversaries is also essential to maintaining interest. Face-eaters should be a constant threat, and can differ without mutating; some might be armed as heavily as Bestial allows (*Zombies*, p. 58), or wearing body armor, or just unusually tough. The tactical environment can change the danger they represent; e.g., if they're in a former meth lab, an old refinery full of flammable chemicals, or service tunnels that contain gas mains, the heroes can't simply hurl flashbangs and blaze away. Just as important are the well-armed drug gangs capitalizing on the chaos, bent on keeping cops off their turf and bringing their product to new markets; they might even have tame zombies as "guard dogs." Other dangerous people may be drawn to lawlessness, too, from criminals who have no ties to the drug trade to heavily armed, government-hating survivalists. And if the whole scenario was engineered by someone, there could be minders in the mix!

The situation should evolve throughout the campaign. At least one hot-headed SWAT commander with a squad of trigger-happy wannabe-commandos – or a hawkish military officer with *real* firepower at his fingertips – is bound to decide that it's better to level the War Zone than to contain it, even if that means killing lots of innocent civilians. The original dealers might be secret agents, or *alien* agents, and take objection to the heroes' efforts. Things could get even weirder; e.g., a mutant pathogen spread by shared needles might offer a

*We have 12 of these
shotgun shells, 26 of these
pussy nine mils, and 16
of those .357 Magnums.*

*– Tucker, in Dawn of
the Dead (2004)*

new, *biological* threat, perhaps even plague ghouls (*Zombies*, pp. 90-91) or infected (*Zombies*, pp. 97-98).

It all ends when the GM and players have had enough. A satisfying conclusion would be to have the heroes' efforts at escorting scientists, raiding labs, recovering specimens, and peeling away the layers of conspiracy eventually reveal a reliable way to rehabilitate face-eaters and let the city rebuild. On the other hand, if the gaming group is itching for a *genuine* zombie apocalypse, that would be easy enough to arrange.

TOUGH CALLS

As befits an action-adventure story, truly difficult judgments aren't a big part of the picture. The idea is to keep the cameras rolling, not to agonize dramatically. Still, inside the War Zone, *Sacrifice* (*Zombies*, p. 121) by PCs – and *Betrayal!* (*Zombies*, p. 145) by NPCs – could arise.

A larger concern is that it might not be a SWAT team or the military who decides that leveling the whole place would be the most expedient fix. The *players* may arrive at that conclusion and have the heroes take action. The GM must be prepared either to have someone step in and prevent that outcome – potentially forcing the PCs to pursue their agenda on the sly, which should be harder and much riskier – or to permit it, but only after a lot of jumping through hoops.

IT'S A TOUGH JOB

The PCs are either genuine law-enforcers or vigilantes in the action mold. While they might be capable investigators – perhaps even detectives on paper – mystery-solving is a secondary objective. First and foremost, they'll be fighting bad guys.

CHARACTER CREATION

All the PCs should be tough enough to pass as action heroes and motivated to risk their lives to keep the city safe. They'll need combat abilities, the skills to operate TL8 gear, and a dose of luck (and maybe Luck). They needn't be locals, however. Vigilantes might come from all over, knowing that they're unlikely to be collared for their actions in the War Zone. A group of lawmen could be even more diverse – a task force made up of members of municipal, regional, and national services, perhaps bolstered by foreign consultants (“There's a similar problem in Johannesburg. Piet is here on exchange.”).

Power Level

Anything from 150-point hardened survivors (*Zombies*, p. 39) to 250-point *GURPS Action* heroes could work. A more horrific prequel adventure might start below this level (maybe even at 50 points!) and then see the PCs return considerably fortified.

Character Types

The PCs needn't fill any special set of roles, but if using *GURPS Action*, the assassin, big guy, demolition man, fast guy, ninja, shooter, and weapon master will fare best at fighting off bad guys; the tracer will be in his element in the city; and a good medic and wheel man would be welcome.

New Kids on the Block

While there's plenty of danger in this campaign, its general mode is over-the-top action, not grim horror. Still, PCs *could* perish in play. If so, the GM may want to be generous about allowing players to bring in someone optimized to face the War Zone's hazards. This is the world of jet travel, cell phones, and the Internet, and it's mostly still intact – if the heroes discover and publicize new truths about the situation, there's no reason to suppose that won't attract experts in the field.

Harsh Realism?

Though the campaign isn't overly realistic and the heroes may have *cinematic* traits, exotic and supernatural abilities are off-limits. Nobody can be a psi or a wizard or a superhero. In particular, no PC can have any power over the face-eaters. Weird science – or perhaps aliens or demons, if they actually exist – might control the zombies, but that's the realm of shadowy NPCs.

Legitimate lawmen will need the law enforcement lens, while vigilantes may well have the criminal one.

The GM decides whether to encourage more cerebral heroes. The campaign might involve not only fighting gangs and face-eaters, but also coming up with a cure for Grind addiction – and maybe even looking into rumors that the mayor is in cahoots with a creepy conspiracy to “clean up” slums and rebuild at a profit. If so, the GM should inform the players that their characters require a broader range of investigative and technical capabilities.

Gear Check

The PCs will have all manner of TL8 equipment from *GURPS High-Tech*. Guns and shooting accessories are especially important, and more can be found in *GURPS Gun Fu*, *GURPS Loadouts: Monster Hunters*, and *GURPS Tactical Shooting*. Still, remember that law-enforcers are generally *issued* their loadouts, while vigilantes are mostly limited to LC3+ gear, with some LC2 hardware if the GM agrees (game out its acquisition in play!) and no LC0-1 kit at all. The GM should also keep the little things in mind . . . notably, there will be places in the War Zone where cell phones don't work, and streets where fallen lampposts and crashed cars force the heroes to get out and walk.

Required Traits

It's essential that everybody have combat skills, preferably both the high-tech kind *and* solid martial arts – face-eaters are fast and strong, attack barehanded, and won't always be encountered at shooting distance. In a *GURPS Action* game, everyone will have Luck, and even if not using that series, the GM might make Luck a campaign advantage.

Appropriate Traits

A capacity for sneakiness and urban survival will make things more *fun*; see *Staying Out of Reach (Zombies)*, pp. 120-122) for relevant skills. No special zombie-related traits from pp. 26-32 of *Zombies* are particularly fitting, though action heroes are likely to have SOP (On Alert), and the GM may find Tastes Bad amusing if the tone is less-than-serious.

Be aware that while this campaign is “realistic” in the sense that there are no exotic or supernatural elements, it supports cinematic play. The GM might permit some or all of Gadgeteer, Gizmos, Gunslinger, Trained by a Master, and Weapon Master. Doing so means the heroes' capabilities will depart from reality to about the same extent as

the campaign's take on science (drugs that create mindless cannibals) and society (letting those cannibals wreck entire blocks of urban landscape). It's a good match.

CLEANING UP THE CITY

The most important thing for players to bear in mind is that the heroes are larger-than-life troubleshooters. They're here to contain the face-eater problem, crush the Grind gangs, give the War Zone back to the city's citizens, and – if something deeper than street-level crime lurks behind it all – solve the mystery. They must bear justice in mind at all times, although they're welcome to *bend* the law. It's fine to shoot first and ask questions later when there's no practical way to drag a punk or a crazed addict in front of a judge, but always in service to restoring order . . . never out of a desire to commit mass murder.

The other thing to remember is that the PCs are Big Damn Heroes. This isn't survival horror – there's no place for shooting your associate in the knee so that the face-eaters go after him instead of you. In that situation, the right thing to do is to turn around and slow down the zombies so *he* can escape. Sacrifice is cool; betrayal is not. This goes double when screaming victims in a burning tenement need rescuing from a mob, or when a Grind addict who manages to shake the habit crawls up and begs for asylum. Remember: Big Damn Heroes.

There's no need to extend the dramatic concessions to being surprised or frightened by face-eaters, though. Anybody going into the War Zone expects trouble, and packs for it. The PCs might not know the problem's root cause, much less its solution, but the facts on the ground are no mystery. Be prepared!



CHAPTER FOUR

ZETA FORCE

The first thing you learn is that we're built to become zombies. No thanks to a genetic foible, the human body has cellular vulnerabilities that enable mutant pathogens, strange chemicals, and bizarre energies to hijack it – even (especially!) after death. The brain is extra-susceptible; short-circuit it the right way and even the fittest body comes along for the ride. Eggheads who work on this stuff call it “the evolutionary price of intelligence,” whatever *that* means.

The second thing they teach you is that scary people keep trying. True, Nature did it first – but then, Nature offers all kinds of unpleasant stuff that humans strive to purify, “improve,” *weaponize*. The prospect of mindless soldiers, tireless slaves, and compliant citizen-drones is irresistible to totalitarians, crime lords, and psychopaths. Mad scientists, especially. Oh, and sorcerers.

That's the third thing, although they save it for last because it blows minds: Science isn't the be-all, end-all you might think it is. It's powerful and not wrong, but . . . well, you know about Franz Mesmer? Russian and CIA mind-control experiments during the Cold War? Controlling body functions using yoga? Almost everything that every culture ever believed about shamans and necromancy? It isn't *all* hoey, and way too many of the true parts can create zombies.

That's why Zeta Force exists. Yes, the “Z” in “Zeta” stands for “zombie” – we hunt them down. More often, we hunt people who *create* zombies. There may be good guys doing good things with good zombies, but we've never met them.

DAY ONE

After suitable commencement speeches, congratulations, and so on, the newly minted Zeta Force squad is

sent on its first zombie-containment mission. This involves a remote locale and NPC supervision, in case the newbies screw up. The *existence* of zombies is no mystery to them – this is what they've been trained for! – but they have no idea *what kind* of zombies they're up against. And most ordinary people don't believe in zombies, so the team must be discreet.

If the PCs start near the bottom of the suggested power range (100 points), they'll be ordinary people with extraordinary knowledge, tasked to deal with something like a lone zombie terrorizing an isolated village. If they're closer to **GURPS Monster Hunters** material (400 points), they'll wield magic and powers of their own, and may be dropped into a situation that would threaten apocalypse if it weren't so far from airports and big cities.

AT A GLANCE: ZETA FORCE

Genre: Modern Monster-Hunters/Conspiracy.
Tech Level: 8^.
Power Level: Heroic (100 points) to Born Zombie-Killers (400 points).
Supernatural Powers: Magic and psi for NPCs and potentially for PCs.
Scope: Local Incidents (very much *plural*).
Zombies: Almost all of them!
Useful Supplements: *GURPS High-Tech*, *GURPS Horror*, *GURPS Monster Hunters* series, and anything that covers the GM's preferred superhuman gifts (*GURPS Magic*, *GURPS Powers*, *GURPS Thaumatology*, and the like).

THE WORLD, UNREDACTED

The backdrop for this campaign is the here and now – all of it. Zombies could show up anywhere, at any time. That might mean downtown São Paulo, or a graveyard in rural Nebraska, or the Tanzanian wilderness, or the Australian Outback . . . *anywhere*. The PCs will be traveling a lot.

THE COMPANY

During the Cold War, defense scientists pursuing fringe research projects on behalf of the nuclear superpowers discovered that zombies exist, most often in the shape of poor

Third World villagers with improbable fungal infections, parasites, or environmental poisoning. They also learned that where there are zombies, the local wise-folk sometimes create them intentionally – most often by manipulating quantifiable natural phenomena, but occasionally via some sort of psychic influence. Interest in exploiting zombification and the occult as weapons was inevitable. The ensuing experiments were conducted in utmost secrecy.

In the 1970s, pop-culture zombie films spurred several governments to devote modest sums of research money to assessing the risk of a global zombie apocalypse.

The answer was a resounding “when, not if.” Such a doom could be a bacterial, viral, or *psychic* plague . . . or a consequence of residual radiation from nuclear testing . . . or even (as one particularly alarmist study claimed) a side effect of hastily approved food additives. All the white papers agreed that humans are *predisposed* to zombification, that many of the potential causes are infectious, and that terrorists could engineer an extinction-level catastrophe all too easily.

This scare was the genesis of Zeta Force: an armed United Nations organization, the likes of which previously existed only in secret-agent movies. Today, Zeta Force recruits and deploys globally despite the enormous barriers to such cooperation. It represents not so much a step toward world peace as a one-off effort to avoid a specific peril terrifying enough to inspire even bitter rivals to work together. Most impressively, it manages to accomplish all this *secretly*, often using the WHO as cover.

Zeta Force isn't a well-funded agency with intensive training and cutting-edge gear. It's a patchy compromise that draws its funding from leftfield research initiatives and its personnel from a witch's brew of aid groups, military services, LEOs, scientific bodies, and *actual witches*. Nobody can deny that mysticism and traditional beliefs sometimes appear to have real power – although there are endless arguments over which rituals are necessary and which are superstitious window-dressing. And with members of all the world's religions on the roster, friction is a way of life.

THE WORK

Most of Zeta Force's resources are channeled into researching potential threats and preventing them from developing into full-blown dangers. Such preemptive efforts have a so-so track record. The “fun” work is done by troubleshooters in the field, who shoot three main classes of trouble.

Natural Mysteries

Most of the local outbreaks that troubleshooters confront don't involve the deliberate efforts of troublemakers. They just happen. Causes run the gamut from obscure tropical diseases and parasites, through mutant cassava strains that poison people and leave them zombified, to meteorites that emit mysterious radiation that energizes the recently dead. Standard protocol is to contain the zombies, neutralize the source, conceal the weirdness, and finally tip off conventional agencies to handle cleanup and care.

Forgotten Projects

Given that traditional beliefs knew of zombies millennia before the Cold War, it isn't surprising that over the intervening years, other groups stumbled upon and attempted to exploit the idea. Scientists fascinated with galvanism, mesmerism, *élan vital*, orgone, and so on might have messed with it; the Nazis *definitely* did. Cold War superpowers were the worst; many frightening projects were destroyed, all records

burned and the evidence sealed in bunkers. Nobody at Zeta Force is surprised at reports of zombies near the ruins of an 18th- or 19th-century mansion or a WWII concentration camp – or when the job involves an underground complex several kilometers beyond a rusty wire fence adorned with faded 1950s-era Department of Defense signage. Such “bug hunts” inevitably start with hopelessly incomplete briefings and end in forgotten places that boast plenty of unstable materials and no lights.

Scheming Scum

Then there are the would-be zombie-masters – black magicians, mad scientists, and the like. Some are merely irresponsible, curiosity trumping safety and common sense. Others work for criminal or terror groups. A few serve rogue states that want nothing to do with the U.N. Going up against these enemies involves battling armed goons more often than zombies, and then releasing terrified prisoners and cleaning up hazardous materials.



THE ENEMY

Born of Cold War paranoia, Zeta Force is prepared for – some would say built around – the possibility that beyond left-over Nazi labs, crackpot scientists, and rogue republics with Ministries of Sorcery, it has a nemesis, which the think tank assigned to such things has imaginatively dubbed “Nemesis.” Like Zeta Force, this hypothetical organization employs subject-matter experts to investigate anything to do with zombies. Unlike Zeta Force, it *exploits* natural phenomena and *absorbs* lesser projects, forgotten and current. The think tank believes that Nemesis' theoretical goal would be either global zombie apocalypse (out of religious zeal or extreme political ideology) or world domination (by zombifying everyone, or at least enough of us to keep the rest in line).

But of course that's all conjecture by analysts who would share any *actual* proof with field agents.

ALL THE WORLD'S ZOMBIES

On the “meta” level, the fact that humans are always one monkey bite or radioactive meteorite away from zombification makes this setting’s dominant fear that of *becoming* a zombie. Even fearless monster-killers who see zombies as targets can neither deny the fact they’re hunting unfortunate victims nor escape the feeling they might be next. Still, zombies often *are* savage assailants, quite capable of conjuring fear in their own right. By mixing types, the GM can invoke fears of disease, decay, and death. If Nemesis is out to rule the world, add fear of conformity to the mix. And there’s plenty of room to use zombies as a critique of not only totalitarianism (whether in the guise of Nazis, nuclear superpowers, or Nemesis), but also faceless corporations with their toxic waste and dodgy lunchmeat.

THE GORY DETAILS

When it comes to zombies, almost anything goes – *almost*.

The Meat

Most zombies Zeta Force faces are living: people whose life functions or mental processes have been suborned by weird natural effects or mad science. A few are undead energized by an external source, almost all of them either intact corpses of the recently deceased or cadavers preserved by retro super-science. A subset of these walking dead are technically constructs – dead flesh stitched together with implants or mutant body parts.

Seriously rotten undead, mummies, skeletons, and solidified spirits don’t fit the background assumptions, however. Such zombies simply don’t exist.

The Motivation

Infection, infestation, and radioactive space dust are the commonest “natural” causes of zombies, although spontaneous mutation isn’t unknown. Most manmade zombies are manifestations of TL5⁺ to TL8⁺ weird science. Such creatures are typically products of premeditated experimentation, whether that involves mind-altering drugs, steampunk-esque galvanism, super-soldier serums, or *engineered* infection, mutation, or radiation. Occasionally, however, they’re accidents of toxic waste or nuclear testing.

Supernatural zombies are rarer. All draw power from the sorcerer’s mind. Gods, evil spirits, and cursed ground are often cited to explain such magic, but decades of Russian research point to the active influence being akin to “psychic phenomena.”

Turning Points

Nearly every zombification pattern described in *Spreading the Fun* (**Zombies**, pp. 124-129) is known, with the noteworthy exceptions of any process described as a “curse” and any modifier stemming from ritual desecration or purification. Zeta Force has encountered not just zombies that infect those they attack but also non-zombie carriers (including animals!), sites where fresh corpses won’t stay down, and protean

plagues (**Zombies**, p. 127). Some infections are sudden; others are slow, and treatable with drugs or by removing inoculated body parts.

Consequently, PCs *can* become zombies. Undead are a lost cause, but the living can sometimes be saved. Details depend on the zombie template – and the GM. Zeta Force spends a lot of time on the sort of research discussed in *A Better Tomorrow* (**Zombies**, pp. 129-133), and can treat several known forms of zombification. Pursuing the cure for a new variety is a common mission profile.

Haitian radio reported the discovery . . . of a peculiar group of individuals, found wandering aimlessly in what appeared to be a psychotic state. The local peasants identified them as zombis and reported the matter to the local authorities . . .

– Wade Davis, *The Serpent and the Rainbow*

BY THE NUMBERS

Drawing on the above advice, the following **Zombies** templates fit best:

- *B-Movie Ghoul* (**Zombies**, pp. 90-91), any subtype, but with the Rotting Corpse meta-trait replaced with Intact Corpse and “Won’t Become a Rotting Corpse.”
- *Galvanoid* (**Zombies**, p. 92).
- *Infected* (**Zombies**, p. 97) of any strain, especially the Returner.
- *Infested* (**Zombies**, pp. 98-99) of all kinds.
- *Neuroid* (**Zombies**, p. 103).
- *Reanimated Corpse* (**Zombies**, pp. 100-101), with the Rotting Corpse meta-trait replaced with Intact Corpse and “Won’t Become a Rotting Corpse” – and generally with Dependency on mana replaced with Dependency on a potion or some form of psychic Maintenance.
- *Shattered Minds* (**Zombies**, pp. 101-103) of all kinds.
- *Soldier X* (**Zombies**, p. 104).
- *Zombot* (**Zombies**, p. 93).

Endless new zombie types are possible – use the above for inspiration! Bosses are likely, too, and typically have the Smart (**Zombies**, pp. 105-106) and/or Zombie Zero (**Zombies**, p. 107) lens.

People from all walks of life can become zombies – although Nazi and Cold War experiments tended to favor superior specimens. Zombification is a uniquely human problem, however. Animals *carry* zombie plagues but don’t become zombies.

MISSION PROFILE

A Zeta Force campaign walks a difficult line between mindless splatter (when the troubleshooters are more than a match for the opposition, rolling their eyes at zombies and succeeding handily) and genuine horror (when the same heroes face terrifically bad odds in creepy places and are in constant danger of infection). Moreover, it roams the real world rather than a made-up fantasy land or a single town. Then there are all the different zombies. The GM has to be prepared for almost anything.

SETUP

The campaign is at its heart a TL8 technothriller where most of the “techno” comes from TL5^ to TL8^ weird science and the “thriller” is a consequence of zombies.

Starting Conditions

Power level is *highly* variable. At one end of the scale, the GM might have the players create moderately realistic 100-point agents that rely heavily on Zeta Force’s resources. Such troubleshooters probably lack superhuman abilities, depending instead on extreme preparedness enabled by the knowledge that zombies exist. Their organization certainly issues military-grade (LC1-2) hardware, and may well provide “special” weapons and even antidotes to known types of zombification. Emphasis is squarely on the “techno” side of the thriller.

At the other end is *GURPS Monsters Hunters* with zombies as the featured monsters. This pits 400-point heroes – some of whom might be stranger than the zombies – against the world. Abilities-wise, they’re prepared for almost anything. Zeta Force employs them specifically *because* its support is patchy and it *can’t* guarantee much assistance. These near-superheroes are the only thing standing between it and mission failure!

Either way, the GM needs to think about *Heroes, Resistance, and Immunity* (*Zombies*, p. 30) beforehand. What specific zombies exist? How do they infect people? Can the PCs be resistant or immune – and is there a blanket “Common” category for Resistant that affects *all* forms of zombification? The latter would be simplest in such a kitchen-sink campaign. Alternatively, the GM might determine individual resistance in secret as each new zombie plague is introduced; see *Knowledge of Immunity* (*Zombies*, pp. 151-152) for advice. And if using *Monster Hunters*, check out *Infection* (*GURPS Monster Hunters 3: The Enemy*, pp. 12-13) for yet another possible approach.

Homework

Beyond character-creation guidelines, the GM needs to have a decent grasp of world geography. The Internet can provide valuable assistance here. Ruling ahead of time that Wikipedia and Google Maps get the final say on what a place looks like might elicit grumbles from detail-oriented players – but really, such tools are more than adequate for a “go in, deal with the zombies, get out, and never return” mission.

One last thing the GM may wish to work out ahead of time are tables for weird and wonderful zombie mutations – and

perhaps even for what *kind* of zombies are actually out there this time. See *Dicing for Zombies* (*Zombies*, p. 143) for ideas.

RULES

Given the huge range of possible zombies, nearly any rule in *Zombies* could become important. Ever-changing threats make *Discovering Zombie Flaws* (*Zombies*, p. 35) a regular mission goal, *Know Your Zombies* (*Zombies*, pp. 111-112) sound advice, and the twists of *But It Didn’t Bite Me!* (*Zombies*, p. 127) appealing – and the canny GM will either bookmark or memorize *Wounding Modifiers and Zombies* (*Zombies*, p. 110) and *Zombie Toughness* (*Zombies*, p. 111). The specter of apocalypse renders *Biohazard!* (*Zombies*, pp. 119-120) and *Spreading the Fun* (*Zombies*, pp. 124-129) crucial, and the additional detail of *Splatter* (*Zombies*, p. 125) and *If Thine Eye Offends Thee* (*Zombies*, p. 128) worthwhile. And though zombies aren’t likely to spook stalwart troubleshooters, every assignment should involve an unexpected development that calls for *Fright Checks* (*Zombies*, p. 109).

A Better Tomorrow (*Zombies*, pp. 129-133) is important to organizational goals; the PCs are likely to be ordered to collect samples using some of the skills listed there. Pay particular attention to *The Disease Is the Cure* and *The Cure Is the Disease* (*Zombies*, p. 131), and *The Big Reboot* (*Zombies*, pp. 132-133). Applying those concepts to *some* zombie problems but not others can keep things fresh.

Finally, remember that bad guys will be using *Zombification* (*Zombies*, pp. 133-136)! Those rules can inspire new zombie types and offer an idea of how big, expensive, and obvious zombie-making projects should be. *Technological Zombification* (*Zombies*, pp. 135-136) is especially relevant.

Rules to Avoid

Otherworldly curses and entities (spirits, gods, etc.) do not suit this campaign. That mostly rules out *True Faith* (*Zombies*, p. 118) and any application of *Spreading the Fun* (*Zombies*, pp. 124-129), *Reverse the Curse* (*Zombies*, pp. 131-132), or *Supernatural Zombification* (*Zombies*, pp. 133-135) that can’t be explained in terms of mechanistic spellcasting, psionics, and strange potions.

MOOD AND PACING

The Zeta Force campaign is episodic and mission-based, but with overarching plots festering in the background, gelling over time. Early assignments might concern zombie incidents that are seemingly or *actually* unrelated to one another. Unless the heroes are high-powered, these should probably start small and focus on “accidental” or “natural” zombification: a handful of disease victims in a remote tropical destination, a radioactive meteor strike out back of nowhere, a minor-but-disturbing food-contamination problem that was barely caught in time, and so on.

They are us.

– Dr. Logan,
in Day of the Dead

Once the troubleshooters find their “Z legs,” their superiors will trust them with more deliberate threats. If the agents are matching wits with zombie-masters – be they Detroit drug dealers, Herbert Wests operating out of basement labs, or self-styled sorcerers using potions or telepathy – these incidents should remain small-scale. If the zombies are forgotten leftovers – like Ahnenerbe medical experiments, or 1950s-era CIA- or KGB-backed science projects – the danger might come from the problem’s sheer size *instead* of an active mastermind.

After that, things can get *really* interesting, with active and elusive enemies – ranging from terror groups to magic-using brotherhoods – pursuing large-scale projects. The GM might plant evidence of such rivals earlier on to foreshadow this development; e.g., survivors of a remote zombie outbreak speaking of *other* researchers who visited earlier, extremely new footprints in the old Nazi lab, or smalltime zombie-makers mysteriously vanishing before the PCs locate them. When the troubleshooters report on this, their superiors will open a file . . . after which it’s only a matter of time before the heroes are ordered to look into a villainous plan to infect a zombie walk (*Zombies*, p. 16) with genuine zombie pathogens, perhaps in a major city, conceivably during a G8 summit.

Once Zeta Force has engaged such an enemy, all bets are off! Investigation becomes a secret war, with the agency’s clandestine rivals hurling near-invincible super-soldiers at its operatives – super-soldiers whom records show to be commandos and spies who went MIA months or years ago. Global apocalypse looms. Nemesis starts to seem disturbingly real.

If *that* doesn’t shake up the campaign, the GM can have the agents’ superiors start to create zombie horrors of their own – strictly to understand or battle the enemy, of course. (“Director, we must not allow a zombie gap!”) Faced with the revelation that all those after-action reports and samples collected to help develop cures ultimately facilitated a zombie cold

war, will the heroes object or stand fast? And if they refuse to countenance zombie-making, where will they turn for support against their former employer. Who will even believe tales of zombies and sorcery?

TOUGH CALLS

A Zeta Force campaign can get complex and paranoid enough to leave the GM facing some seriously tough issues:

Playable zombies. With myriad forms of zombification out there, it’s conceivable that some might leave the victim functioning both physically and rationally. If such a process is designed to create powerful super-soldiers, a certain kind of player may even *seek* such transformation! The GM has the final call, but agents who “go zombie” are usually cured if they can be, “retired” otherwise – inform the players of this policy in advance, and use the rules in *Infected!* (*Zombies*, p. 151) to give other troubleshooters a chance to notice what’s going on. If the GM is willing to allow mentally stable, non-contagious zombie PCs, it’s fairest if any special abilities are paid for with offsetting drawbacks to keep Zeta Force from becoming Zombie Club.

Playable zombie-makers. High-powered Zeta Force campaigns might feature heroes with supernatural abilities, including the potential to create zombies. Troubleshooters may *possess* such gifts, but *using* them goes directly against the organization’s purpose. Agents who do so and are found out will be hunted down . . . well, right up until Zeta Force ends up in a zombie cold war with Nemesis, anyway.

Cross and double-cross. Possibly because they want to play or control zombies, some players may have their characters turn coat, perhaps even go as far as *Betrayal!* (*Zombies*, p. 145). That’s their right – but remember that regardless of whether the PCs have supernatural gifts, Zeta Force has staff who do. They have *ways* of finding traitors; that’s probably how they’ve lasted so long. Remind the players of this, too.

Really screwing up. The troubleshooters might simply botch a mission aimed at, oh, *preventing the zombie apocalypse*. If the GM isn’t ready to run that campaign, Zeta Force can step in and recover the fumble. The agents are likely to be demoted or lose privileges, and the *players* certainly shouldn’t earn character points for the adventure!

TROUBLESHOOTERS

Zeta Force agents are professionals specialized in all things zombie. Whatever their personal power level, they know the truth about zombies and are sworn to protect humanity from zombification – whether that means saving one person or foiling a global apocalypse.

CHARACTER CREATION

All troubleshooters are up-to-date (TL8) individuals with *some* skills of value in the war on zombies, whether that means investigative and combat abilities for hunting down zombies and zombie-makers, an understanding of epidemiology and

biohazards, esoteric knowledge of zombies in their own right, or supporting talents in such areas as vehicles and armory. Whatever their specialty, they’ve all been trained in a few mission-critical basics as well.

Power Level

A shadowy agency protecting humanity from zombie threats has room for everything from plausible 100-point detectives, scientists, and soldiers who untangle conspiracies to 400-pointers – inspired by *GURPS Monster Hunters* – on the front lines of a secret war.

Too Bad About Agent Smith

Troubleshooters hunt down trouble that's infectious, malicious, or both. Each mission brings the risk of death or zombification – and such fates could become routine occurrences at lower power levels. Thus, it's advisable to ask each player create several characters so that the fun doesn't dry up when the luck does. Any of the approaches pointed out in *Replacements (Zombies, p. 150)* should work, but Zeta Force's squad structure makes group play *especially* suitable. An interesting variant would be to have the players assemble an optimized team at the beginning of each assignment by picking one agent apiece, and then adding a few "extras" (initially NPCs) that *anyone* can play in the event of a PC's untimely demise.

Your God Won't Save You

The GM decides whether troubleshooters can acquire advantages, skills, and spells for zombie creation and control – Zeta Force doesn't approve, but in-world restrictions fit a conspiratorial campaign better than do meta-game ones. What truly doesn't exist is proof of the otherworldly. Magic and psi involve neither spirits nor other planes of existence; both channel mental force, the first using visualization aids, the second via internal discipline. If gods exist, they don't empower True Faith, Power Investiture, Blessed, divine powers, or holy spells. Zombies are live people in altered states or dead bodies rife with bizarre infections, psychic energies, or weird science; they aren't possessed. Painstaking investigation has found no evidence of angels, demons, ghosts, vampires, or werewolves.

Character Types

From *GURPS Monster Hunters*, suitable templates are the sage who's an expert on zombies, the sleuth who tracks them down, the commando and warrior who stomp them, and the techie who provides toys and medical assistance. There's also room for the witch and psi to manipulate powers of the mind – though the witch won't be using the Path of Crossroads to visit other planes of existence, Undead for spirits (strictly for zombies), or Spirit for anything, and the psi can't possess Spirit Channeling or Spirit Communication, so the GM may have to tweak templates. The experiment fits, too, if the GM decides

that Zeta Force exploits the super-soldier tech behind some zombies. However, the crusader is *inappropriate* (all known supernatural powers flow from the human psyche), and so is the inhuman (this isn't a "monster mash" featuring vampires, werewolves, and the like). The obvious motivational lens is operative, but law enforcement and soldier also fit.

Below that power level, the same roles are sliced more finely and distributed among more teammates, likely including a few NPCs. A "realistic" Zeta Force squad has members who specialize in *just* explosives or sniping (not all combat), *just* medicine or one science (not all science), *just* interviews or forensics (not all investigation), and so on. The supernaturally gifted, without the points to be powerhouses, provide theoretical knowledge. Crucial areas are:

Investigators. With sleuth skills like Criminology, Detect Lies, Intelligence Analysis, Interrogation, Observation, Research, Search, and Tracking. As discretion is essential, add Camouflage, Shadowing, Stealth, etc. Detectives and scouts may divvy up this role.

Scientists. Adept at several of Bioengineering, Biology, Chemistry, Diagnosis, Expert Skill (Epidemiology), Forensics, Hazardous Materials, Pharmacy, Physician, Physiology, Surgery, etc. The minimum safe complement is a medic and a life scientist.

Soldiers. Everyone should know how to shoot, but the squad needs operators with the Guns specialties for military weaponry. Incinerating "hot" targets with skills such as Artillery, Explosives, and Gunner is important, and a role in itself. A leader with Leadership and Tactics is always a good addition.

Specialists. Particular missions call for drivers, mechanics, pilots, surveillance techs, etc., and experts on specific regions, languages, and cultures. These make good NPC extras who can double as backup PCs.

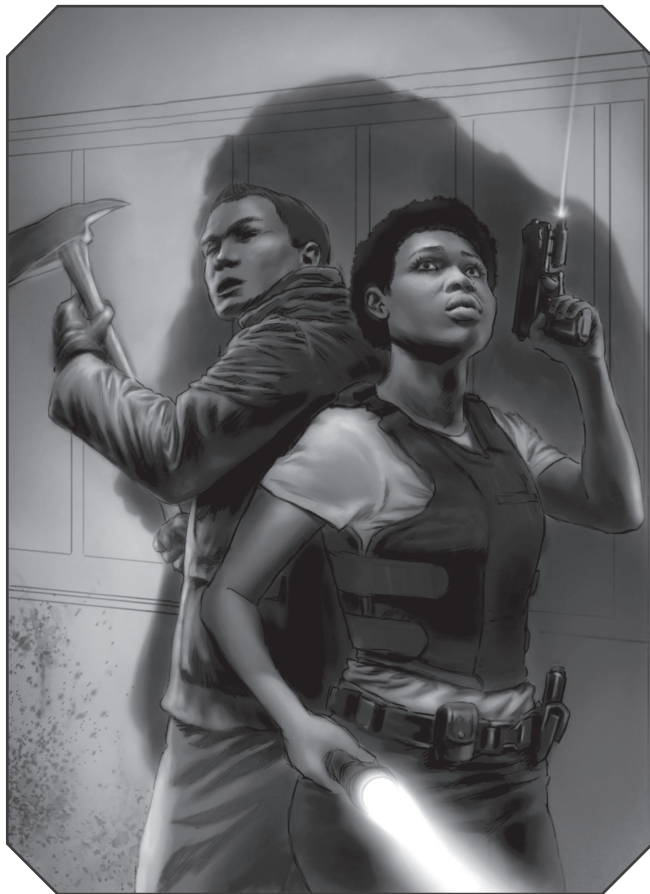
Weirdoes. Zombie threats call for experts in the obscure. Some study "folk magic" in the form of Esoteric Medicine, Occultism, Ritual Magic, and Thaumatology, and possess limited magical abilities. Others are conversant with psi, boasting Electronics Operation (Psychotronics), Expert Skill (Psionics), and working powers. "Mad scientists" who use Alchemy, Herb Lore, and Weird Science are common. A few have Hidden Lore skills pertinent to Nazi, KGB, or CIA experiments. And yes, these categories blur.

The SS secretly enlisted a group of scientists to create an invincible soldier. It is known that the bodies of soldiers killed in battle were returned to a secret laboratory near Koblenz, where they were used in a variety of scientific experiments.

– *Shock Waves*

Required Traits

Every agent must have at least a point in each of First Aid, Guns (Pistol), Hazardous Materials (Biological), Hidden Lore (Zombies), and NBC Suit – that’s basic Zeta Force training. The GM decides whether the agency counts as a Patron or offers meaningful Rank; if so, the PCs will have such advantages. A Duty is mandatory either way.



Appropriate Traits

In addition to the abilities discussed already, the GM might want to permit a number of specialized traits. Resistant to Zombification (+3) [5] and (+8) [7] – and Susceptible to Zombification [-2/level] – fit setting assumptions about all zombification exploiting the same weakness. So do the Enhanced Z-Factor and Won’t Rise perks. Other fitting perks are Hot-Zone Hero, NBC Suit Experience, and any zombie-related Standard Operating Procedure; see *Zombies*, pp. 31-32.

The Hidden Lore (Zombies) skill mentioned on p. 35 of *Zombies* exists and is known to all Zeta Force agents. While mundane technological skills are TL8, the GM may call skills for zombie-making and anti-zombie tech “TL8^” or even “TLz.” These are associated with the Weird Science skill,

which PCs may learn. Gadgeteer (Zombies, -50%) might also be available; see *Zombies*, p. 29.

Finally, the GM must spell out what forms psionics take (*GURPS Psionic Powers*, *GURPS Psis*, and *GURPS Psionic Campaigns* are useful here) and how magic works (anything from Magery and a few *GURPS Magic* spells up to *GURPS Thaumatology: Ritual Path Magic*) – and also whether PCs wield or merely know of these things.

BEING A TEAM PLAYER

Zeta Force troubleshooters know about zombies and the magic, psionics, and weird science behind them. They’re unfazed by such things and over the gee-whiz factor, and prioritize discretion. No agent would willingly reveal these realities to an outsider. Even if magic *can* create fireballs and psi *is* capable of high-speed levitation, operators with such gifts wouldn’t use them around witnesses unless that were the only way save the world. Giving criminals and terrorists dangerous new tools to lust after – tools that could trigger apocalypse – would be a strategic error.

Which isn’t to say that agents are emotionless paragons. Even high-powered ones are affected by the *circumstances* of their assignments. Viruses and telepathic mind control are no less worrisome when they’re your job, and hours crawling through an unmapped, unlit bunker littered with skeletons and shattered glassware is hard on the most seasoned soldier. The knowledge that there are enemies who want to turn humanity into mindless monsters rests lightly on no one. Grim professionalism is the order of the day.

What gets Zeta Force operators through the darkness is esprit de corps. It’s important to trust and rely on teammates, even if you dislike them. There’s no requirement to be friends, but leaving them for dead or quietly switching off the radio and pretending you didn’t hear their call for help invites harsh discipline – possibly *field* discipline.

Still, the setting is conspiratorial, and conspiracy brings betrayal. Ideally, the *whole team* would decide to run, disobey orders, or switch sides – and that’s fine, though it’s also fine for the GM to make Zeta Force a formidable Enemy. However, the world isn’t ideal and individuals can be coerced. The important thing is for this to make sense *in the game world*. A PC turning coat after Nemesis offers a medium-sized fortune is one thing; a bored player upsetting the campaign for kicks is quite another, and Not Cool.

Gear Check

Agents have access to TL8 hardware from *GURPS High-Tech*, plus anything the GM likes from *GURPS Gun Fu*, *GURPS Loadouts: Monster Hunters*, and *GURPS Tactical Shooting*. *Zombie-Fighting Gear* (*Zombies*, pp. 43-48) is relevant – especially biohazard kit such as decontamination showers and testing equipment for known zombie pathogens. Everyday gear is LC2+, but when a mission demands LC1 solutions, they’re issued. Serious assignments might involve LC0 weapons of mass destruction (zombie plagues qualify, as do tactical nukes for incinerating them), always under the strictest of controls. There’s also limited superscience: suppressants, vaccines, and antidotes to known forms of zombification, plus anything in *GURPS Psi-Tech* that has a nice Cold War feel.

CHAPTER FIVE

ULTIMATE ZOMBIE- FIGHTERS

The zombie apocalypse has arrived and the world is in chaos. For most survivors, that means holing up and hoping the people you've holed up with aren't hiding a zombie bite . . . because lots of humans in close quarters is Not Okay. In fact, things got really out of control only *after* the authorities started rounding up everyone to keep them "safe."

The naturally immune – the 1% – have other options. The bravest venture out and try to learn what happened, perhaps even find a surviving bio-tech lab that can decode their immunity and create a cure. Most don't last a day. Zeds (including Zombie Grandma) are Not Your Friends. They have to be *fought*. They aren't tough individually, but you never meet just one . . . and invulnerability to zombification doesn't help

against bites, gouges, and ordinary infection, or for that matter thirst, hunger, and exposure.

Those who *do* survive are the toughest men and women the world has ever seen.

DAY ONE

The campaign starts with the PCs – naturally immune and extremely competent – joining forces in the ruins. They know that a global zombie apocalypse has taken out all but a minute percentage (less than 1%) of humanity. They're aware that this involved a plague, though perhaps not that they're immune. They have no technical information on the infection's nature

or origins, and only sketchy details regarding the zombies' exact capabilities, gleaned from fighting a few before encountering the other heroes.

The first order of business is introductions. The GM might give each player just one or two facts; "I was bitten and didn't turn!" is a good start, along with observable aspects of the campaign's basic zombie template (e.g., "drawn to loud noises," "gather in mobs," "capable of bursts of speed," or "vulnerable to headshots"). It's up to them whether they share. Before they can work out much among themselves, zombies attack. And so it begins!

AT A GLANCE: ULTIMATE ZOMBIE-FIGHTERS

Genre: Modern Splatter.

Tech Level: 8 (and dropping . . .).

Power Level: Born Zombie-Killers (250-400 points).

Supernatural Powers: None.

Scope: Zombie Apocalypse!

Zombies: One infectious type of the GM's choice, plus mutants and bosses.

Useful Supplements: *GURPS Action* series, *GURPS Gun Fu*, *GURPS High-Tech*, *GURPS Martial Arts*, and *GURPS Power-Ups 5: Impulse Buys*.

TEOTWAWKI

The world – or what's left of it – is the modern one, minus several things:

People. Almost everyone is either a zombie or dead. Most of those who made it to safety – be they immune, prepared, or just lucky – are dug in and not coming out. Some are in survival shelters or barricaded buildings; more are in military-style

camp. Holdouts are few and far between, and it's possible to travel for days without seeing or hearing anyone but a zed. Vast stretches of cityscape and countryside stand utterly still, the silence broken only by wildlife. An aircraft sighting is *extremely* rare and a big deal, because it means someone has fuel, parts, and a clear area for takeoff and landing.

Working infrastructure. All but the most high-tech, automated generating stations are offline – and where there *is* electricity, it's doing little but causing downed lines to spark. People fleeing cities, drivers and pilots becoming zombies, weapons used in desperation (everything from Molotov cocktails to cluster bombs), and so on caused fires and devastation that collapsed the grid. That shut down pumping stations. Telecomm systems are likewise disrupted. What few networks were initially spared are now failing for lack of maintenance. Streets and highways are littered with obstacles: wrecked vehicles, toppled utility poles, ruptured water and gas mains, abandoned police and military barricades, piles of bodies . . .

Supplies. The initial survivors smashed, grabbed, and hoarded. Law-enforcement and military services commandeered, seized, and rationed. A lot of supplies perished without electricity for refrigeration . . . or were destroyed by the same fires and explosions that took out infrastructure . . . or were torn apart by locked-in zeds freaking out. What food, medicine, fuel, and so on remain are either controlled by people who don't want to share or – too often – deep in zombie territory.

Information. There are no news broadcasts – except for rare, disturbing squawks on the emergency frequencies – and you can forget about the Internet. Every neighborhood, suburb, town, and farmstead a traveler comes across is a mystery, as there's no reliable way to find out what's going on ahead of time.

There's one thing travelers can count on, though: *zombies*. There's no way to know how many will show up where. An isolated farm might have hundreds lurking nearby – all that's left of desperate folk who descended on the place in search of food and safety. Entire cities may be completely zombie-free thanks to early military sweeps, except for pockets of zombified survivalists barricaded inside their homes, and subway and sewer tunnels full of zombie homeless. A car-strewn highway could seem utterly abandoned, yet have a zombie army shambling around in the adjacent woods. That refugee camp in the distance may have been contaminated and become a zed-filled hive.

But there are important exceptions, and then there are the rumors.

RESPIRE

There *are* places to escape from the zombies. Most of the survivors – including the immune – stay there. Brave heroes in search of the truth merely stop by.

Safe Houses

The apocalypse was sudden, but not so sudden that quick-thinking folk couldn't dig in. Most hiding places are makeshift: buildings with boarded-up entrances, barricaded lengths of service tunnel, repurposed shipping containers, and so on. Some are miniature fortresses – underground shelters, isolated cabins with generators, and the like – built by survivalists to withstand disaster (though few preppers planned for *zombies*). Watercraft offshore often escaped untouched. There are even genuine military supply caches scattered about – sandbagged, camouflaged, and occasionally booby-trapped. Zombie-fighters dub these and similar hideouts “safe houses.”

Most such sites are unoccupied. People who weren't true survivalists felt they would be better off in emergency camps, and moved there if given the opportunity. Those who holed up with inadequate supplies eventually ventured out to forage; the majority never returned. The same happened to those who left to search for loved ones. And military caches weren't staffed in the first place. An abandoned safe house is a treasure trove for travelers; while it rarely contains *all* the necessities, it offers at least a few of them, plus shelter for the night.

The few safe houses that are still occupied are “safe” only in that there are no zeds on the premises. Diminishing supplies, the “me against the world” attitude of preppers, and plain old cabin fever mean bolted doors at best, a gunfight at worst. Zombie-fighters who find such places have to ask themselves whether it's worth the trouble.

*Report unusual behavior.
Barricade your homes.
Avoid all contact with
infected individuals.
Wait for official
instructions.*

*– CEDA Notice,
in Left 4 Dead 2*

Camps

The authorities didn't know enough about the zombie plague to do an effective job of containing it or dealing with its aftermath. Consequently, nearly all of their aid facilities either fell to infection from within or to zombies or desperate survivors from without. Almost none of the “disaster-relief outposts,” “emergency camps,” or “refugee centers” lasted more than a few days. Still, biohazard-savvy organizations (e.g., the WHO) and smart commandants managed to make it work in a tiny percentage of cases. A traveler might come across such a place – or more likely, track it down by following clues.

Camps are more welcoming than occupied safe houses because “helping people” is their mission. On the other hand, supplies *are* running low and there *is* constant fear of infection. A stranger would, at a minimum, have to submit to unpleasant medical tests and decontamination – and rumor among travelers is that some camps intern the immune for experimentation. Beyond all that, many survivors are envious and resentful of the immune, while administrators are often disinclined to offer much aid to those who can clearly help themselves.

However, camps have needs that capable, *immune* people are well-suited to meet: shoring up external fortifications, running into the nearest town to scrounge supplies, or fighting off an especially big wave of zeds. Doing such a favor might score a little fuel, ammo, or useful information.

Enclaves

Not all camps are operated by the authorities. Survivalist groups, criminal gangs, and impromptu militias have had slightly *more* success, because they aren't bound to respect human rights. They aggressively horde supplies – even steal from other survivors – and tend to shoot anything that looks like a zombie or anyone who might be infected. At the heart of things is often a charismatic leader who's only too happy to play dictator amidst the anarchy. Travelers can try their luck at these places, too . . . but unless they hold their hands high and offer considerably more than they ask for, they're unlikely to find anything but a fight.

RUMOR

Then there's what most traveling zombie-fighters are actually looking for: usually a cure, occasionally some answers.

Lies, Damned Lies, and Statistics

The GM decides what parts of *Rumor* are true. Perhaps *all* of it is! This doesn't change the heroes' initial motivations – what they're seeking at the start of the campaign is their choice, motivated by hope, not fact. Still, concrete clues should emerge over time, leading to a denouement and an eventual endgame. That means the GM needs to decide on several matters from the outset: whether the zombie plague was a natural disaster, a manmade accident, or a deliberate act (and in that case, *why*); whether there are secret havens for VIPs; whether anyone is working on a cure; and if so, whether researchers regard the immune as irrelevant, potential volunteers, or subjects to be detained and experimented on.

Labs

Most survivors take heart in the fact that somebody out there is researching a cure. In the U.S.A., the usual suspects are the CDC; some people remember the 2011 campaign to increase disaster preparedness, which focused on a zombie apocalypse, supposedly in jest. Other nations have similar organizations. Worldwide, the WHO and the military are inevitably on the radar, while locally, any university or bio-tech business might be on the short list.

Thanks to the global communications breakdown and the dangers of travel, reliable details are scarce. If there's a lab

researching a cure, then it's certainly well-hidden – and doubtless well-*guarded* against both zombies and raiders. A facility like this might admit visitors whom its scientists can confirm are immune, but whether the researchers would collect samples and let their guests go is anybody's guess. Paranoid travelers who claim to have located such places warn that nobody who enters ever leaves, whether because the lab can't risk word of its location getting out or because its staff butcher the immune and dissect their brains. Then again, a lot of people would stay *willingly* if they felt safe and thought they could help save humanity.

The fearful rumors never seem to lead to *actual* labs – sinister or otherwise – but the tough, the brave, and the foolhardy keep searching.

Site Zero

The other major rumor is that the zombie plague was a bioweapon that got out of control. Blame tends to fall on the groups posited to be developing a cure – especially private bio-tech companies and the military. The facility where things went wrong, Site Zero, is purportedly out there somewhere, with valuable research results and conceivably a ready-made vaccine sitting in a smashed-up lab overrun by zombies. Given that zeds would have appeared there first and were undoubtedly experimented on, any weird mutations would have had a long time to occur, making the zombies particularly scary. And who knows what *other* Bad Stuff is floating around . . . weaponized Ebola, anyone?

Havens

The most bitterly paranoid maintain that people in high places knew damned well the zombie apocalypse was a possibility and maybe even inevitable. A few claim it was deliberate, though the reasons given for *why* (population control, rebuilding society with the Right People, etc.) are a little crazy. Among those who believe such tales – and many ordinary folks with vague memories of the Cheyenne Mountain nuclear bunker – it's often accepted that there must be hidden high-tech shelters, usually underground, for government officials, generals, top scientists, and the very wealthy.

The truth is unknown. The biggest reason why the military, WHO, and so on failed to contain the outbreak was that early victims were often asymptomatic, and became biting, infectious fiends *inside* camps, shelters, and command centers – behind the lines. Chaos within foiled a cohesive response, and it's hard to see how impressive titles or high net worth would have granted immunity. Nevertheless, the crazies feel otherwise and some go out looking for secret havens, whether to demand entry, get answers, or take revenge.

ZEDS

As “Ultimate Zombie-Fighters” suggests, zombies exist to give the heroes targets to pummel, behead, shoot, burn, and explode in fine splatter-film tradition. The zeds come right out of apocalyptic fiction – anything from *Night of the Living Dead* to *Zombieland*, as the GM prefers – and have nothing to do

with traditional beliefs. The PCs are immune and essentially fearless, but inasmuch as fear matters, it's the fear of zombies as a direct physical threat: they're diseased cannibals. In such a gore-fest, what social criticism there is picks easy targets: dishonesty among officials and selfishness among survivors.

THE GORY DETAILS

While technically victims, zombies are too far gone to be anything but monsters now. Still, *what kind* of monsters is important – know your enemy, and all that.



The Meat

The GM might afflict humanity with something that turns people into living zombies or that kills them and brings them back as undead – maybe both! However, all zombies were once ordinary Janes and Joes (so constructs don't fit), and thus are entities of meat and blood (spirits don't work, either). Whatever they are, they're *disturbing* to behold. A zombie-fighter who meets one shouldn't hesitate to blow its nasty head off.

The Motivation

The zombies are most likely products of *infection*: bacterial, viral, or prionic, or just conceivably nanotechnological or memetic. However, it can work for the true cause to be some chemical, radiation, or space dust so prevalent in the environment that the dead – or severely injured living – become zombies. Individual weird-science treatments don't fit a widespread apocalypse, though, and supernatural forces simply don't exist, ruling out those causes.

Turning Points

While the PCs are immune, NPCs can certainly turn. The GM chooses one of the models on pp. 124-129 of *Zombies* – probably biological infection of the living by zombie bite or splatter, with a HT roll to resist and any failure leading to either direct zombification while alive or death followed by

undeath. The resistance roll ought to be difficult; if the dead (killed by zombies or not) return, perhaps there's *no* roll. Transformation should be quick, with zombification rapidly following infection or death, as the case may be. Conditions like these make it easier for the players to suspend disbelief and accept global catastrophe.

BY THE NUMBERS

Some *Zombies* templates are better than others for a fast-spreading zombie apocalypse, but even these may require adjustment:

B-Movie Ghoul (*Zombies*, pp. 90-91). Start here if zed is undead. The plague ghoul is best: those it kills rise at once, while those it injures tend to die of mundane infection and *then* return. For added fun, swap Fast Reanimation [6] for Dominance (Horde, -80%; No Onset Time, +50%) [14], so that even less-than-fatal attacks can trigger instant undeath. Whatever the ghoul type, recently turned ones have the Fresh lens; They're Learning and maybe Brains GOOD can keep a long campaign challenging; and of course The Zombies Won.

Infected (*Zombies*, p. 97). This is the best model if the zombies are alive. Again, the GM can tinker with infection speed, perhaps adding Dominance (Horde, -80%; No Onset Time, +50%) [14] if victims turn instantly rather than upon awakening. Another suitable variation is no cure to have a Weakness toward, which adds 15 points to template cost. To better challenge tough zombie-fighters, tack on Enraged, Fast, or *both* – and consider Returner, leading to the ghoul options discussed above. Here, too, The Zombies Won.

Whisperer (*Zombies*, p. 103). A genuinely *creepy* alternative for living zombies, this would explain why the apocalypse collapsed society almost overnight and why standard biohazard precautions didn't help – especially if early specimens somehow spread the meme via mass media. However, such zombies aren't *menacing* to the immune; they're all talk and no action. To up the ante, have them turn violent and bitey toward those who don't submit at first exposure; this adds a -15-point Zombie Motivation.

Crazy (*Zombies*, p. 101). This is the “subtle” option for living zombies. The plague spreads like an ordinary disease – and the GM might lengthen the incubation period and increase the HT penalties to infect *lots* of people before the first madness outbreaks. The zombies won't be a biting hazard, but that doesn't matter much if the heroes are immune and the crazies use weapons! Be sure to add some Unnatural Features to mark them out.

To keep things interesting for the players, the zombies should change (“mutate”) over time – say, developing Infravision or exhibiting emergent abilities like those in *Brains of the Mob* (*Zombies*, p. 88). They needn't end up all the same! There might be robust strains with additional ST, HT, and HP, and perhaps some natural DR; stalkers with extra DX, Per, Basic Speed, or Basic Move, and traits such as Discriminatory Smell and *Monstrous Movement* (*Zombies*, pp. 87-88); and a wide range of bizarre others with unlikely offensive capabilities (*Aberrant Attacks*, *Zombies*, pp. 86-87).

Just as important are bosses (*Zombies*, pp. 104-107). All but the Summoner fit – and even that might work, if the GM figures out some way to square conjured zombies with the setting's lack of supernatural powers.

FIGHT ZOMBIES, TAKE BACK THE WORLD

An Ultimate Zombie-Fighters campaign is extremely straightforward: The heroes are the toughest survivors of this or *any* apocalypse, battling their way through thousands of zombies per adventure! The challenge is to keep this engaging for any length of time.

SETUP

Almost all the preparations this campaign needs concern the zombie-fighting angle: keeping it fun for the players, making sure their *characters* are up to the challenge, and having the tools on hand to run battles smoothly.

Starting Conditions

Zombie-fighters should start with at least 250 points. **GURPS Action** templates work – particularly combat-capable ones like the assassin, big guy, demolition man, fast guy, ninja, shooter, and weapon master – as does the hardened survivor template with the BZK *and* combat monster lenses (**Zombies**, pp. 39-40). If the PCs are to battle thousands of zombies *at a time*, the GM might prefer to start at 300-400 points, perhaps tacking the BZK and combat monster lenses onto **Action** heroes, or letting players build from the ground up. In the last case, it's crucial to provide character-creation guidelines: cinematic traits are fine (notably Enhanced Defenses, Extra Attack, Gunslinger, Trained by a Master, and Weapon Master), but stats should stay within human limits (see pp. B14-18) and nobody can have exotic or supernatural abilities.

Whatever the PCs' power level or other abilities, Immunity to Zombie Plague [5] is mandatory. It's a campaign premise!

Also spell out what hardware zombie-fighters can enter play with. The game will remain challenging and interesting for longer if the heroes *don't* start with much, but must punch and kick their way to baseball bats and handguns, whack and plink their way to katanas and shotguns, and slash and blast their way to military hardware . . . which only ever has limited ammo. Similarly, while the PCs are immune to *zombification*, they shouldn't be invulnerable to physical harm, so it's best to

keep body armor minimal or to use house rules that keep it from lasting forever ("number of attacks equal to current DR reduce DR by 1" is simple).

Homework

The three most important pieces of prep remaining are:

1. Design some initial mutant and boss zombie templates for key battles.
2. Create encounter tables that lead to generic battles (**Zombies**, p. 143).
3. Lay in lots of figures if planning to use *The Cloud* (**Zombies**, pp. 114-115).

Plotting and mapping far in advance isn't *that* important. It's fine to leave deciding what will show up to the start of each night's gaming. Still, it wouldn't hurt to sketch out a rough arc that features, say, one major event per session – a chance to upgrade gear, an encounter with other survivors, a run-in with a new zombie type, evidence of a lab, etc. – and to steer this toward some kind of grand reveal (e.g., Site Zero, or a haven where people who know the truth are preparing to nuke the world).

RULES

The focus is on fighting lots of zombies that *can't* infect the PCs, so the game will run most smoothly if the GM is conversant with *Wounding Modifiers and Zombies* (**Zombies**, p. 110) and uses the time-savers presented in *Faster Fights* (**Zombies**, p. 110-114), *Zombie Toughness* (**Zombies**, p. 111), *Horde Action* (**Zombies**, pp. 114-117), and *Hordes and Large-Area Attacks* (**Zombies**, p. 116).

The heroes should pay attention to *Knowledge and Equipment* (**Zombies**, pp. 118-119) – and especially *Weapons* (**Zombies**, pp. 43-45) and *Survival Gear* (**Zombies**, pp. 47-48). They might want to employ the tactics in *Staying Out of Reach* (**Zombies**, pp. 120-122), too, unless they're *extraordinarily* tough.

*My mama always told me someday I'd be good
at something. Who'd a guessed that something'd be
zombie-killing?*

– Tallahassee, in **Zombieland**

Rules to Avoid

The heroes are immune, so the GM can ignore the mechanics of biohazards, splatter, hacking off infected body parts, and so on, beyond thinking about how such concerns vex unfortunate NPCs. The zombie-fighters are also hardened, so Fright Checks are rarely suitable. The research tasks described in *A Better Tomorrow* (*Zombies*, pp. 129-133) – and, if scarier rumors are true, *Zombification* (*Zombies*, pp. 133-136) – matter to geeks in hidden sanctuaries, but not to the PCs. Finally, rules for supernatural effects like curses and turning the undead have no place in this campaign.

MOOD AND PACING

Ultimate Zombie-Fighters is an action serial about heroes fighting their way across town and country on a never-ending quest for answers. Each game session should have a strong start: the PCs round the corner and encounter a horde, their vehicle runs out of gas or blows a tire in zombie territory, they hear gunfire in the distance, they witness a plane zoom overhead and crash, they enter an area where the trees are dead and the air smells of blood, and so on. “Day 217: Nothing happens” might be more realistic, but this isn’t a realistic campaign!

Once the zombie-fighters react, the GM must bear in mind that *the fight is the thing*. Every session has to offer new tactical challenges to keep the campaign fresh. Battlefields should vary, from dark buildings, through city streets and car-strewn highways, to open wilderness. Add diversity with the occasional extraordinary set piece – be that a close encounter below decks on a ship or being swarmed while negotiating a minefield around an abandoned Army camp. The opposition ought to be variable, too, ranging from a few stray zombies to huge hordes, with new mutations and bosses turning up unexpectedly. Each situation should demand different weapons and tactics.

Still, the fight can’t be the *only* thing or the campaign will grow repetitive. Weave a “quest” into each adventure as a context for the fighting. Examples include the heroes battling their way into a police station or an armory to grab better weapons, doing a favor for a camp in return for resources, rescuing less-capable survivors, coming to blows with brutal raiders or paranoid preppers, investigating a

mysterious radio signal, finding out where that plane went down, or (if they meet someone who’s working on a cure) gathering specimens.

To knit the adventures into a campaign, at least some scenarios should offer clues regarding the overall situation. That radio signal or plane might hint at a cure effort. Evacuation routes could be marked with promising signs, while deserted outposts and vehicles yield maps annotated with intriguing symbols. Rescued survivors might relate tales of labs, havens, or bioweapons facilities. These things pull the adventurers from quest to quest and help to explain *why* they’re battling zombies on that abandoned oil tanker anchored offshore (“Rumors say there’s a lab on board, and we *did* hear noises.”).

Finally, each episode – whether that’s one game night or a multi-session adventure – needs a clear ending. Concluding with action is always good; that quest to get guns from the armory might terminate in a run for an escape vehicle (which inevitably breaks down in time for the *next* episode). But not always! Something like the search for a lab works better if it pauses on a worrisome cliffhanger.

TOUGH CALLS

The heroes are immune, so the GM will never face situations like *Infected!* (*Zombies*, p. 151) or questions about zombie PCs. As they lack magical powers and mad-science resources, the question of creating zombies isn’t likely to arise, either. It’s best to state this outright: “No special snowflakes who aren’t immune or who make zombies.”

The GM also has to make clear that while no practical barrier to *Betrayal!* (*Zombies*, p. 145) exists, such behavior doesn’t suit the campaign. Likewise, although the heroes aren’t likely to lose battles – they should benefit from every bit of slack that cinematic supplements like *GURPS Action*, *GURPS Gun Fu*, and *GURPS Power-Ups 5: Impulse Buys* cuts them – they might engage in willing *Sacrifice* (*Zombies*, p. 121) for each other or hapless NPCs. This makes it important to set clear guidelines for replacement PCs: they can be no better equipped or informed than the rest of the group is currently.

On a meta-game level, some players might prefer greater realism and object to the glorification of kung fu-using, machine gun-toting action heroes while sensibly prepared survivalists are depicted as paranoid. That’s best handled by knowing your gamers ahead of time. A group that isn’t into *Action*, *Gun Fu*, and the crazier parts of *GURPS Martial Arts* should pick a different campaign.

ZOMBIE-FIGHTERS

Zombie-fighters are larger-than-life survivors. Nobody they meet is as capable as they are, as able to discover what happened, or as likely to find the people working on the cure (if anybody is!) and help save humanity. The meta-game reality is that the *players* should have fun defeating zombies – but in the game world, their *characters* are big-H Heroes, and everything they do ought to be altruistic, or at least not selfish.

CHARACTER CREATION

All PCs should be combat-capable residents of modern-day (TL8) Earth. Each needs a clear niche: the karate master, the explosives guy, the scary woman with a katana, the Special Forces sniper, and so on. Thus, the GM might want to encourage freeform design and use templates only for inspiration – or at least allow templates from a wide variety of sources, including *GURPS Action*, *GURPS Martial Arts*, and *Zombies*.

Power Level

The GM will set this at between 250 and 400 points.

Character Types

All zombie-fighters need *some* melee-combat and small-arms skills, but each should also specialize in a particular kind of violence. This breaks down into three broad areas:

Hand-to-hand fighters, be they barehanded or armed, and whether they rely on over-the-top abilities like Trained by a Master and Weapon Master or just massive amounts of ST, HT, and HP. If there's more than one person like this, these differences can give each hero a distinct role. A ST 20 jock with a baseball bat is very different from a two-time Olympic taekwondo champ. Such warriors help the group survive close combat without exhausting their limited ammo.

Light-weapons experts, who use small arms with high Guns (Pistol, Shotgun, SMG, or Rifle) skills, Gunslinger, and the crazier stuff in *GURPS Gun Fu*. Again, significant diversity is possible; the two-pistol trick shooter, best cop in the world with a shotgun, and elite sniper are nothing alike. These warriors handle the bulk of the fighting before it gets too close.

They use up ammo, but their amazing abilities allow one-shot, one-kill efficiency.

Heavy-weapons specialists, who favor Guns specialties such as Grenade Launcher and Light Machine Gun, Gunner skills of all sorts, Explosives (Demolition), Throwing for hand grenades, and possibly even Artillery specialties. The group needs only one or two such people. They can turn an impossible battle with thousands of zeds into a winnable one with hundreds . . . at the cost of hard-to-come-by ordnance.

Required Traits

The only strictly mandatory trait is Immunity to *Zombie Plague* [5]. However, the GM may want to enforce *Quirky Good Luck* (*GURPS Action 1: Heroes*, p. 8) and require 15 points in Daredevil, Luck, or Serendipity as well.

Appropriate Traits

Everything in *Survival Traits* (*Zombies*, p. 27) fits, along with whatever cinematic advantages the GM allows – particularly Gunslinger, Trained by a Master, and Weapon Master. While immunity and the absence of supernatural powers mean that most perks from pp. 31-32 of *Zombies* aren't applicable, Good with Zombies, Horde-Walker, and Tastes Bad are all fun. And despite their impressive “plot armor,” the heroes *do* live in the apocalypse, so the group needs members with First Aid, Forced Entry, Navigation, Scrounging, Survival, Urban Survival, repair skills (Armoury, Mechanic, and so on), and vehicle skills.

Let's Join Forces!

Although 250- to 400-point heroes who can't become zombies are unlikely to perish – especially when they enjoy the “plot armor” of cinematic rules – luck *does* run out. When that happens during the apocalypse, people die. Given the campaign's larger-than-life feel, it's acceptable for replacements to just happen to fill niches that need filling. The only restriction is that they cannot advance the plot merely by showing up. If the GM hasn't introduced heavy military weapons or Site Zero yet, a new PC can't stroll onto the scene with a rucksack full of rockets or a background as a zombie researcher.

Gritty Unrealism

Though the heroes of an Ultimate Zombie-Fighters campaign aren't realistic, they cannot have exotic or supernatural gifts such as super-powers or magic spells. Abilities that would let them create or command zombies, even quasi-scientific aptitudes such as Gadgeteer (*Zombies*), are also off-limits. Finally, with civilization in ruins, there isn't any *point* to social traits like Wealth and Status.

Gear Check

Anything that exists at TL8 is out there, somewhere, waiting to be claimed. There isn't enough of society left to force people to pay, much less to enforce Legality Class and Control Rating! Passive measures like locks, vault doors, and thick walls remain, though – and as *Starting Conditions* (p. 34) recommends, it's *more dramatic* if zombie-fighters have to work their way up to heavy weapons. The GM determines the details, but initial loadouts might consist of a fixed value (\$4,000 is good) of portable kit, including survival equipment (canteens, MREs, clothing, tents, first-aid kits, etc.) and whatever qualifies as “light civilian combat gear” – probably melee weapons, and perhaps handguns and limited ammo.

BEING LARGER THAN LIFE – AND DEATH!

Zombie-fighters are defined by their immunity – and by their suitability to venture into the zed-infested world to save humankind before the remaining survivors become flesh-eating fiends. They have to be brave and willing to take swift, decisive action. They're acutely aware that *the clock is ticking* – every day brings humanity closer to extinction – so there's no time for overcautious hoarding, planning, and taking the scenic route. With enough guts, kung fu, and explosions, no problem is too big!

Thus, the vibe is that of an action movie or – at its ickiest – a splatter story. *Zombies* are an affront to humanity, not an unfortunate, redeemable part of it. Dispatching them does *everybody* a favor. A stinging quip is the only eulogy a zed can expect. Remorse isn't an option.

Ultimate Zombie-Fighters is also a survival tale, though. People need to be saved and supplies can run out. Human enemies – be they scummy raiders, fanatical survivalists, or calculating scientists capturing the immune for sinister experiments – present serious moral challenges. Perpetrating axe-swinging, dynamite-chucking mayhem against those who are *already* lost is one thing. Survivors need to live, even the ones you don't like.

CHAPTER SIX

ALPHA AND OMEGA

Superhuman powers – what’s not to like? Years of comic books, television, and films gave ordinary Janes and Joes *dreams*. Some wanted to slip into colorful outfits and use super-strength and energy blasts to defeat bad guys. More than a few secretly desired abilities that would make them wealthy or powerful, or just let them become the ultimate voyeur. Fans of the dark and gritty weren’t into capes, masks, and the binary morality of Heroes and Villains, but loved the idea of championing some edgy cause and looking cool while doing it (preferably in black leather).

There was nothing to like about how it actually happened, though. The real “super serum” empowered *microbes* instead of people. It’s unclear whether the formula mutated pathogens in the test subjects or turned their immune systems into germ-warfare factories – or whether the program involved volunteers who returned to civilian life or captives who were ultimately cremated, spewing virus particles into the air. “Alpha Project” was a secret, funded by a military or intelligence budget and burned when the plug was pulled. The end result wasn’t superheroes from the comics but a zombie plague from the horror movies.

Some of the original scientists stepped up to fix the damage. On their own dime, they analyzed the outbreak and realized they couldn’t cure (the victims were *dead*) but could immunize. Immunity had amazing side effects: strength, speed, . . . super-powers. But the immune *looked* just like zombies. And working off the record on something that black-bag spooks wanted covered up – with test subjects who resembled the walking dead – proved unhealthy for the

researchers, who were silenced with extreme prejudice before they could explain themselves.

All that remains is the so-called “Omega Team”: the enhanced humans who survived the strike. They’ve vowed to finish the job of dragging the world back from the brink of apocalypse. Of course, that isn’t easy when you don’t officially exist and every soldier, cop, and frightened citizen with a gun sees you as a monster.

AT A GLANCE: ALPHA AND OMEGA

Genre: Dark Supers.

Tech Level: 8 (with background superscience).

Power Level: Zombies, What Zombies? (500+ points).

Supernatural Powers: *Superhuman*, yes, but not magic or psi.

Scope: Widespread Outbreak (the world on the brink of apocalypse).

Zombies: Slow, infectious undead with occasional mutations.

Useful Supplements: *GURPS Powers* and *GURPS Supers*.

DAY ONE

Omega Team is well aware of the grim state of global affairs – they’re the only living associates of the people who caused and later tried to stop the zombie apocalypse. They might enter play emerging from the ruins of the facility where they were altered, which was just leveled by an airstrike. They may have to fight their way past the armed covert operators

sent to secure the place. For a real challenge, they could awaken in a high-tech prison – moments from being dissected – and have to break out.

The PCs *aren’t* aware of their abilities, beyond immunity to the zombie plague. The *players* should be, but it’s fun to game out bullets bouncing off bare skin or punching a zombie’s head off for the first time! The heroes definitely don’t know they resemble the walking dead. The GM can keep that a secret until the first time somebody walks past a mirror or meets another test subject.

Then the heroes must decide how to save the world, which will depend on its exact state and their particular gifts. Read on . . .

*It contains a recombinant virus.
It takes your DNA and deconstructs
it and reshapes it. The results can be
phenomenal, superhuman like . . .
or hellish.*

– Jerry, in *Day of the Dead 2:
Contagium*

A WORLD IN NEED OF SAVING

As in most zombie-apocalypse stories, the world is ours but overrun by the walking dead. The GM can choose almost any model, from raging chaos in the streets and people battling for scant resources to empty streets and survivors huddled together in defensible shelters. Pick a favorite zombie movie, video game, or comic book and steal liberally.

Unlike many of the other campaigns in *Day One*, the focus isn't on scheming enemies (such as necromancers or mad scientists), sinister places (hidden labs, dark towers, etc.), or elusive MacGuffins (e.g., the cure). Neither is there an overarching mystery to solve – the heroes *start* knowing what happened. Instead, Omega Team plays the classic role of superheroes: helping people, fighting bad guys, and making the world a better place. The twist? The opposition consists of zombies . . . and ordinary survivors can't tell the supers who want to help them from the monsters who want to eat them.

Still, there are a few “stock” situations.

BESIEGED COMMUNITIES

Plenty of places are cut off from aid efforts and the rest of the world's survivors, and running low on almost everything. Without adequate fuel or transportation, escape isn't an option – and with so many zombies around, even groups *with* the means to run might be unwilling to risk it. Dangers include hordes of riled-up walking dead on the verge of breaking through whatever obstacles are holding them at bay, ordinary folks freaking out at the sight of zombies (and the heroes, at first!), and lots of people facing the dangers of thirst, exposure, hunger, and mundane disease. While these complications are unlikely to *harm* the super-tough Omega Team, they'll pose serious social, logistical, and strategic challenges.

The physical situation could range from a few trapped people (whether barricaded on the top floor of an urban skyscraper or holed up on a farm), through a mid-sized band of survivors (living in anything from an isolated trailer park to a military base), to a whole town or even city. The

barriers keeping the walking dead out and the living from fleeing might be natural (like a steep canyon or a swift river) or manmade (up to and including a minefield). And safety may lie across the zombie-clogged street or several hundred miles of wilderness.

DANGER ZONES

Even survivors in relatively safe places can be low on essentials: food, medicine, fuel, batteries, building materials, and so on. Plenty was left behind when they fled – but now that territory belongs to the zombies. Going back would be suicidal for most people. The mighty Omega Team, on the other hand, can just punch their way in and out again.

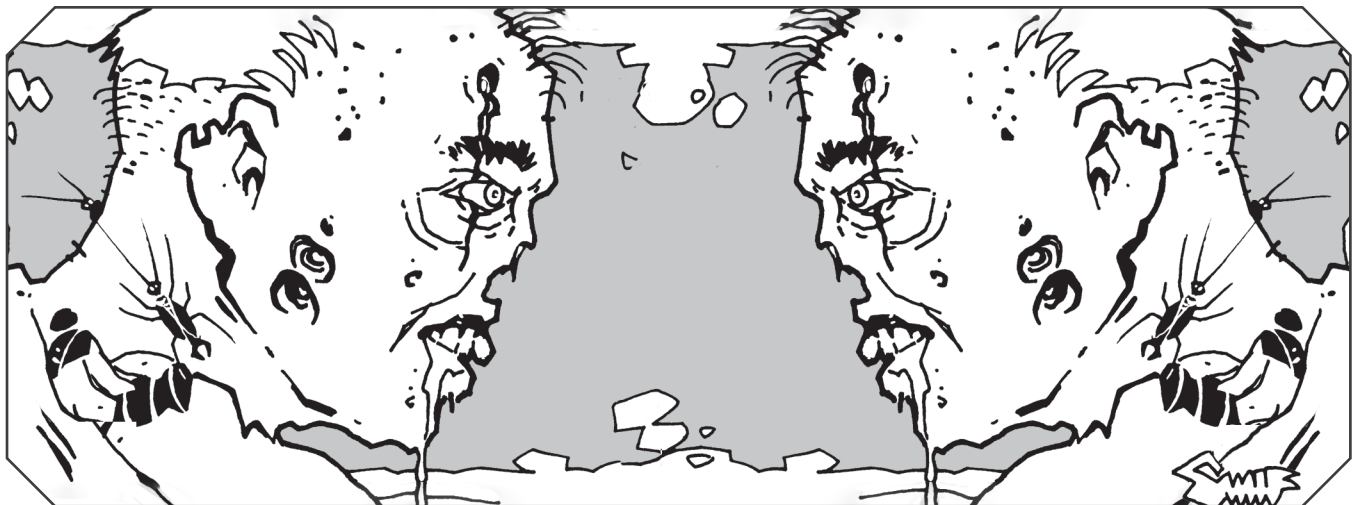
Or maybe it isn't that easy.

One zombie isn't a threat, but hordes are something else. Then there's the fact that the goods the heroes need to fetch might be locked up or under rubble . . . or specialized enough that there's no choice but to bring along, and protect, an ordinary human expert who can identify what's needed . . . or guarded by well-armed survivors who don't want to share. Even supers have to worry about heavy weapons!

This sort of situation will almost always involve an urban setting – anything from a small town to a metropolis. The place may be in ruins, many areas inaccessible without creative thinking or special abilities. And if the search for what's needed takes too long, enough zombies might gather to put a fragile objective at risk or a weakened structure in danger of collapse.

DISASTER AREAS

Zombies might not even be in the picture – not directly. Plenty of modern technology depends on regular maintenance, including power plants, gas mains, refineries, and factories. Without that attention, *most* systems fail safe. But not all. And then dams burst, cities go up in flames, poison gas is released, and meltdowns happen. Secondary disasters may prove to be the deadliest aspect of the apocalypse.



In their journeys, Omega Team could come across wildfires laying waste to hundreds of square miles, brimming reservoirs about to rupture and drown survivor communities, barren wastelands contaminated with all manner of hazardous runoff, and so on. Saving the world includes acting before this stuff harms people and – depending on the saviors’ outlook – the environment. They may be the only ones who can reach the last operational rescue vehicle or shutoff valve, or perhaps things are well past that stage and their super-powers will have to do.

NEW SETTLEMENTS

After enough good deeds, Omega Team will come to be tolerated if not accepted, and will save enough people and places

that it becomes feasible to claw back territory from the walking dead. This can be the most challenging task of all, however! There’s no way to be sure that *all* the zombies are gone, so the supers will have to defend the survivors, sometimes in close quarters. It’s one thing to toss a car at a distant horde when no friendlies are in the way; it’s another for a few supers to prevent dozens, hundreds, or *thousands* of zombies from getting to within biting distance of their mundane allies.

Adventures in rebuilding might happen in former settlements or on virgin land. Each has its challenges. Existing buildings and infrastructure can be cleaned up quickly but can also conceal more threats. In the wilderness, it’s often easier to see the walking dead coming, but breaking new ground takes a long time even with super-assistance, and the noise is liable to attract a *mega*-horde.

THE WALKING DEAD

Ordinary survivors will fear zombies – and initially the *heroes* – as both monsters and their own possible fate; see *Fear of Zombies* and *Fear of Becoming a Zombie* (**Zombies**, p. 7). Though the tough, immune Omega Team won’t share these fears, they’ll be on the receiving end! Thus, instead of taking the forms on pp. 9-10 of **Zombies**, social criticism will be a commentary on skin-deep morality and “racial purity” – because even the most liberal and tolerant individual is going to think twice before trusting somebody who looks like one of the monsters that destroyed the world. The *real* zombies are too far gone ever to be seen as anything but targets, so they effectively fill the role of fodder (**Zombies**, p. 11), even if technically “unfortunate.”

THE GORY DETAILS

Zombies are dead people reanimated by a super-science virus. They are so distorted and rotten that it’s impossible to identify them beyond height, weight, and (former) sex without forensic tech and records that are by-and-large unavailable in the apocalypse.

The Meat

Physically, zombies are undead and deformed – the virus that creates them kills the host and rapidly transforms the corpse into an unrecognizable ambulatory germ factory. The GM should pick some B-movie visuals: green flesh falling off the bones, bugged-out red eyes, exposed jawbones and chattering teeth, and so forth. Even newly animated ones have the Rotting Corpse meta-trait (**Zombies**, p. 69). Omega Team fits the same description, of course.

The Motivation

The dead are walking because of a virus – a clear case of *Infection* (**Zombies**, p. 21). What’s unknown to everyone but the heroes is that this extinction-level pathogen is an unintended consequence of a serum (**Zombies**, p. 23) developed by *The Corporation* (**Zombies**, p. 23) and administered to a small number of test subjects. Related research explains Omega Team’s immunity and abilities.

Turning Points

Zombification starts when a living person is infected by a zombie attack, dies of either injuries or the disease, and is reanimated as undead. People merely wounded by a zombie can fight off this infection, but it remains dormant and can turn them if they die of other causes later. Still, the plague *is* a pathogen and Resistant to Disease *does* affect dice rolls for it. As victims die before becoming undead, however, nobody comes back from being a zombie – you can’t cure death. The heroes are immune, so all this is largely irrelevant to them.

God didn’t do this. We did!

– Robert Neville,
in I Am Legend

BY THE NUMBERS

The walking dead use the stats under *Plague Ghoul* (**Zombies**, pp. 90-91) with the The Zombies Won [30] lens and some modifications:

Brains: Modify the IQ penalty with Mitigator, Horde, -60% [24]. Lots of zombies are always more dangerous than just one.

Contagion: Replace Fast Reanimation (**Zombies**, p. 52) [6] with this slightly faster version: Dominance (Horde, -80%; No Onset Time, +50%) [14]. After a fight with zombies, victims must roll 3d vs. HP of injury; adjust injury downward by any Resistant to Disease bonus. A roll under this target means that over the next (HT - 10) minutes, the victim joins the walking dead unless the injured body parts are removed; see *If Thine Eye Offends Thee* (**Zombies**, p. 128). As usual for plague ghouls, anybody killed by zombies transforms in a second or two, and those who die of other causes after being exposed rise as zombies (HT - 10) minutes later.

Mutatis Mutandis: The walking dead are attracted by loud noises and the scent of the living: Acute Hearing 4 [8] and Discriminatory Smell [15]. Given their Uncontrollable Appetite for live flesh, if they make a Hearing or Smell roll (average of 14 in both cases, and up to 16 in a horde), odds are excellent that they'll shamble over for lunch.

Zombie Bosses (**Zombies**, pp. 104-107) are unlikely. However, rare specimens have minor versions of the gifts suitable

for Omega Team (see pp. 41-42). Sometimes these aren't so minor! Such monsters possess no extraordinary ability to control, lead, or summon other zombies, but they're tougher in a fight and often called "bosses."

The resulting template(s) can be applied to anybody – HT affects *how fast* someone turns, but injury determines *whether* they turn, so there's no special bias toward or away from healthier victims.

SAVING THE WORLD

This campaign is about superheroic deeds. The zombies aren't *really* the centerpiece – they're present to give the Omega Team fodder to battle, to create dangerous situations that let the heroes save the day, and as part of the superscience background that explains the existence of superheroes. The PCs' ultimate goal is to gain acceptance through their deeds and make the world safe again.

SETUP

The bulk of the GM's workload resides in defining the PCs' capabilities, though there are a few bits of necessary preparation that aren't entirely about the heroes.

Starting Conditions

Omega Team members should be worth *at least* 500 points – more, if the GM is up to the challenge. See *Omega Team* (pp. 41-42) for suitable abilities. The heroes have Immunity to Zombie Plague [5] and know it, as well as how they ended up that way. Their *material* preparedness, by contrast, is minimal; they'll be escaping the rubble of the laboratory where they were undergoing voluntary experiments or the prison where were subject to involuntary ones, and have only what gear they grab off anyone standing between them and freedom. Thus, it's crucial to be very clear on what that equipment is.

Homework

If the GM intends to map out combat using one of the systems on pp. 114-117 of **Zombies**, the most important thing to have on hand is *lots* of figures to represent the zombies. Beyond that, it would be useful to have a quick set of tables for rolling up walking dead that possess additional super-abilities.

Rules to Avoid

The rules surrounding contagion won't matter to Omega Team (though the GM ought to bear them in mind for NPCs who have to be kept safe). Likewise, mighty supers shouldn't worry about Fright Checks. And since the only zombies in this setting are Unfazeable and not supernatural, it won't be possible to turn or intimidate them, either. Finally, as the zombie plague is *defined* as an incurable consequence of lost research, simply ignore the systems for curing and creating zombies.

RULES

The rules of greatest importance here appear under *Horde Action* (**Zombies**, pp. 114-117) and *Unnatural Causes* (**Zombies**, p. 111): plague ghouls attack in hordes and go down relatively easily. While they're Unliving, they also take quadruple injury from headshots, which should be easy for supers. As *Wounding Modifiers and Zombies* (**Zombies**, p. 110) shows, if the heroes can't hit the head, the crushing damage of super-strong fists is more effective than the piercing damage of guns!

Moving away from zombies, members of Omega Team will want to use their superior physical capabilities creatively. *Mobility* (**Zombies**, pp. 121-122) is likely to be especially important.

MOOD AND PACING

This is a supers campaign – if a gritty one – which means the GM has to ensure that each adventure features opportunities to showcase the heroes' super-abilities and, more important, to be *heroic* as well as powerful. Thus, its storytelling challenges differ from those of traditional modern-day zombie apocalypse games, where the *players'* planning outweighs their characters' innate capabilities, and in which betrayal (**Zombies**, p. 145), involuntary sacrifices (**Zombies**, p. 121), and other cowardly acts are expected. Omega Team doesn't have to worry about survival, given its members' toughness, and the GM needs to help the group grasp this and rise above petty self-interest. The short-term reward is the thrill of taking down lots of zombies; the long-term one, nothing less than the satisfaction of saving the world (or at least lots and lots of ordinary folks).

To this end, each game session should see Omega Team stumble upon one or more situations similar to the ones under *A World in Need of Saving* (pp. 38-39). The stakes – the number of lives to be saved or lost – ought to be explicit. And while the setting is gritty, that doesn't mean hopeless; the problems the GM presents need to be solvable, though the solution may require the creative use of the entire team's abilities. At the end, the people who benefit from these actions should come to overlook the supers' frightening appearance . . . the goal is to make the job challenging, not thankless.

It's also important to change things up, because grinding through hordes of zombies, while fun at first, gets boring if it's all that ever happens.

Some of the zombies should be almost as powerful as the heroes – perhaps *more* powerful – but still mindless, which is the key to defeating them. Not all of the living will want the supers’ help; a few might even actively oppose any effort to “re-civilize” the world, because they enjoy being local dictators, boasting a monopoly of force, and dominating fellow survivors through fear. At least some threats should be impersonal disasters that can’t be defeated in a battle; e.g., a collapsing bridge to a safe haven.

TOUGH CALLS

As noted already, this is *not* a survival-horror story from Omega Team’s perspective, so matters such as hiding festering zombie bites, throwing slower associates to the horde, and deciding whether to hack off limbs shouldn’t arise. That

can be difficult to sell to zombie fans, so the GM must take every opportunity to send an important message: “You really are that resilient. Get on with being heroes!” To answer some other questions:

Can I play a zombie? The heroes *are* a special kind of zombie. The regular kind are mindless, and unsuitable as PCs.

Can I play a super-gadgeteer who can raise or cure zombies? No. The necessary knowledge and technology were deliberately blown to bits. All supers in the setting are “mutants” of sorts, so gadgeteers don’t fit – and anyway, the original zombie-makers did their work with far more resources than the PCs have . . . and essentially failed.

Can I replace my super? This is the trickiest question of all. The heroes should be tough enough not to need replacing. If that proves untrue, see *Are There More Like Me?* (below).

OMEGA TEAM

“Omega Team” isn’t a formal organization but merely a whimsical name given to the successful test subjects of the immunity serum by the people who developed it . . . right before those researchers were wiped out to keep the secret that a *previous* serum, bought and paid for by the government, caused the apocalypse. Members of Omega Team enjoy not only immunity but also “super-powers” in the form of astounding durability, speed, strength, and more.

CHARACTER CREATION

Omega Team members were formerly ordinary citizens of modern (TL8) society. The scientists who altered them put out a call for volunteers to help find a cure *after* it became clear that the zombie apocalypse was coming (a fatal error – their request led the authorities to their doorstep). They picked test subjects entirely on the basis of genetic markers. The resulting cohort came from all age groups and walks of life. Thus, Omega Team has no definitive training or skill set.

Power Level

The minimum recommended start is 500 points, but anything up to the high end of what **GURPS Supers** terms “moderate power” – 1,600 points – could work. At higher power levels, the GM may want to set limits on how many points can go into any one trait.

Character Types

As Omega Team members came from the general population and experienced almost random mutations, there’s no “recipe” for an ideal squad. Each hero ought to be able to survive alone – that’s part of what all the points are for! However, the campaign is about *saving the world*, not merely surviving in it. That takes diverse abilities used creatively and in concert; thus, the players should discuss among themselves who can do what, with the aim of complementing rather than duplicating one another.

Required Traits

Every PC has the following meta-trait:

Omega Team: Appearance (Monstrous; Universal, +25%) [-25]; Horde-Walker [1]; Immunity to Zombie Plague [5]; Resistant to Metabolic Hazards (+3) [10]; Reduced Consumption 4 (Cast-Iron Stomach, -50%) [4]; and Temperature Tolerance 5 [5]. *Notes:* You are immune to becoming a zombie but *look* like one – even the walking dead think you’re one of them – and are remarkably tolerant to heat, cold, and disease and poison (+3 to resist, +7 vs. the food-borne kind). *0 points.*

The GM should make the meta-trait mandatory but keep all components besides the Immunity a secret initially. Appearance will become obvious first! Heroes who purchase higher levels of constituent traits should be told that they’ll get a discount, however; e.g., Doesn’t Eat or Drink costs 6 points, not 10, because it upgrades Reduced Consumption.

Are There More Like Me?

Being immune and extremely tough, it’s unlikely that Omega Team members will die – especially since, despite its grittiness, the campaign is a superheroic one where “death” is customarily temporary (perhaps literally so, for some PCs!). Still, noble self-sacrifice can happen, and so can bad dice rolls. As supers are clearly *possible*, perhaps one time in a million, a zombie bite turns someone into a super-tough “boss” that isn’t mindless undead – or maybe some other group of researchers managed a one-off success. Such origin stories should be unique, developed in private consultation with the affected player.

Appropriate Traits

The heroes’ super-abilities consist of superhuman *amounts* of mundane traits mixed with truly exotic capabilities that can be explained as “mutations” (compare *Unknown to Science*, p. 42). Below are many examples. For those that come in levels, the GM may wish to set a maximum.

- Attributes and secondary characteristics above the human norm.

- Mundane advantages and perks – particularly Absolute Direction, Acute Senses, Combat Reflexes, Danger Sense, Fit, Hard to Kill, Hard to Subdue, High Pain Threshold, Luck, Night Vision, Perfect Balance, Rapid Healing, and Unfazeable.

- Close-range natural weaponry: Acidic Blood*, Acidic Vomit†, Blinding Spray*, Claws, Deadly Skin*, Deadly Spines*, Irritating Spines*, Plague Bite†, Poison Spit*, Spines, Stinging Skin*, Striker, Teeth, Vampiric Bite, Venom* (Weak, Average, Strong, or Paralytic), and anything similar the GM is willing to approve.

- Exotic advantages giving extreme strength: Arm ST, Lifting ST, Striking ST, and (in high-powered games) Super-Strength‡.

Gear Check

Omega Team doesn't start with much of anything. They'll be climbing out of rubble or escaping a containment facility, clad in hospital gowns at most. As the campaign progresses, they can grab whatever they find – all of it ordinary stuff from the real (TL8) world. They're welcome to use guns, body armor, vehicles, and so on, depending on their abilities; a bulletproof man who can run at 60 mph may prefer to travel light, while a former accountant without military training ought to think twice about shooting that grenade launcher near friends.

- Exotic advantages granting inhuman speed: Altered Time Rate, Enhanced Dodge, Enhanced Move, Enhanced Time Sense, and Extra Attack.

- Exotic advantages reflecting unusual healing or body-control capabilities, notably Doesn't Breathe, Doesn't Eat or Drink, Doesn't Sleep, Metabolism Control, Recovery, Regeneration, and Regrowth.

- Exotic advantages representing durability or resistance: Damage Resistance, Injury Tolerance (Damage Reduction* or Unliving), Pressure Support, Radiation Tolerance, Resistant, Supernatural Durability, Temperature Tolerance, Unkillable 1, and Vacuum Support. Extra Life, while borderline-supernatural, also fits.

- Exotic mobility or sensory abilities found among real-world creatures, subject to GM approval. Examples are Amphibious, Brachiator, Catfall, Chameleon, Clinging, Discriminatory Smell, Infravision, Nictitating Membrane, Parabolic Hearing, Silence, Slippery, Sonar, Super Climbing, Super Jump, Telescopic Vision, Terrain Adaptation, and Vibration Sense.

- Exotic perks such as Burrower§, Fur, Good with Zombies†, Long Fingers/Thumbs§, Pestilent†, Rinse§, Scales§, Striking Surface§, and Tastes Bad†.

* From *GURPS Powers*.

† From *Zombies*.

‡ From *GURPS Supers*.

§ From *GURPS Power-Ups 2: Perks*.

BEING A HERO

Omega Team is humanity's last, best hope. Obviously, they can't protect every single survivor (though hopefully other Omega Teams in faraway places are doing their best, too!), but the idea is to try. Players who want to use their characters' powers for personal gain – setting themselves up as local dictators – are missing the point. There are *already* people doing that, and they're gun-waving opportunists; that is, NPC bad guys.

The PCs should be capital-H Heroes, using their amazing gifts for good just as comic-book supers do. The differences emerge in the dangers: The criminals they fight are the opportunistic would-be tyrants mentioned earlier, not bank robbers. The "super-villains" are zombie hordes, not masked bad guys.

The disasters from which they rescue people have a breakdown-of-civilization flavor – the dam is going to burst because the control room is full of zombies, not because Doktor Destruktion blasted it, and radiation from the out-of-control nuclear plant will sicken people, not produce giant ants.

Well, most of the differences are in the dangers.

The *other* twist is that the supers don't look like models in snappy outfits, or rugged soldiers in military chic, or even edgy punks, Goths, and metal-heads in mesh, chains, and tight leather. They resemble rotting zombies.

The players need to remember this and make

sure their plans factor in the necessary social engineering to earn the acceptance of those they wish to save. Of course, they can also use their appearance to freak out their enemies!

UNKNOWN TO SCIENCE

Although this is a supers campaign, it isn't a *four-color* one with energy blasts, psi, and kitchen-sink abilities ranging from gadgeteering to black magic. Several classes of things *don't* fit:

- Rapid bodily transformations like Growth, Healing, Shapeshifting, Shrinking, and Stretching.

- Energy projection, especially Obscure (except possibly for squid-like ink), Scanning Sense (other than Sonar), Telecommunication (any), Temperature Control, and long-ranged or high-powered applications of Affliction, Binding, or Innate Attack.

- Gifts customarily defined as magical (particularly Magery, Magic Resistance, Mana Damper, and Mana Enhancer), psionic (Clairsentience, Mind Control, Mind Probe, Mind Reading, Possession, Precognition, Psychometry, Telekinesis, and so on), or otherwise supernatural (e.g., Blessed, Channeling, Medium, Oracle, Power Investiture, Spirit Empathy, Terror, and True Faith).

- Anything else that the GM feels defies not merely biology but the very laws of physics, particularly Dark Vision, Flight, Insubstantiality, Invisibility, Jumper, Penetrating Vision, Permeation, Shadow Form, Snatcher, Walk on Air, Walk on Liquid, and Warp.

- Advantages that reflect cinematic training, such as Gadgeteer, Gunslinger, Trained by a Master, and Weapon Master.

- Superscience tech and super-gadgets.

CHAPTER SEVEN

TIME OF THE ZOMBIES

Big stuff like giant meteors, nuclear war, and global warming dominated humanity's fears, but something microscopic – in this case a prion – was its undoing. Consensus is that it had been slowly but steadily *infecting* everything with a brain but *doing* nothing. Then a freak solar event somehow altered or triggered it. While most creatures weren't obviously affected, humans got crazy and started raging.

Just about everyone was infected before the symptoms appeared, so containment was a nonstarter. Drugs proved worthless – nobody understood prions well enough. Soon the world was a burning mess of crazies murdering one another. These “zombies” were so savage – and the natural immunity or radiation shielding required to avoid joining them, so rare – that by the time the slaughter ended, we were well below the population level needed to sustain a technological base.

Not that there was much tech left to sustain. The solar event *also* scrambled digital storage and electronics; only the rare few devices sitting in fallout shelters or deep mines were safe. Power grids were fried, too. Almost all the labor-saving devices that could've let a few do the work of many were wiped out, and it wasn't as if people who could fix them were selectively spared.

We were kicked back to the Dark Ages.

Still, some people *did* survive, find each other, and start to rebuild. But the going has been slow – and not just because nearly everything was trashed, crashed, or burned. The activated prion is still out there and highly infectious. Some of the original infected went dormant and are waiting in the ruins. And although animals didn't go nuts, they did get smarter and scarier.

These dangers make searching for scraps of useful tech or simply hunting for food a risky proposition . . .

DAY ONE

The PCs are youths born into a bleak world. They're too young to remember a planet made smaller and less mysterious by cell phones, the Internet, jet planes, and other tech that relies on high-maintenance infrastructure, though they've heard stories about these things and would recognize the trappings. They *might* have seen a working motorcycle, car, or gun. But they're aware of the dangers out there – both real (zombies, “changed” animals, and warlike rival communities) and rumored (mutants).

As “seekers” selected by their community to venture forth and bring back anything useful, from food to tech to information, it's their job to brave the threats lurking beyond their settlement. Their story starts with their people wishing them well on their mission to collect whatever they can find. They've honed their skills on runs with older, more-experienced seekers, but this time they're on their own!

AT A GLANCE: TIME OF THE ZOMBIES

Genre: Post-Apocalypse.

Tech Level: 0-4 (with isolated 5-8).

Power Level: Hardened Survivors (100-200 points).

Supernatural Powers: None.

Scope: (Post-) Global Apocalypse.

Zombies: Many types of infected, including mutants and animals.

Useful Supplements: *GURPS Low-Tech* and *GURPS High-Tech*, and possibly *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 16: Wilderness Adventures* for mapping advice.

TREASURES AND TERRORS

The world is now two generations removed from a complete technological and social meltdown. Seekers venturing out into it are looking for several kinds of things, each with its own hazards. They're also hoping to avoid places that hold nothing *but* danger.

RUINS

In former towns, farms, industrial parks, military bases, and so on, many brick, stone, and concrete structures are crumbling, while most wooden ones have rotted or collapsed.

Roads are cracked and overgrown. Anything that can corrode, has – though metals other than iron often survive, as does anything chromed or galvanized. Pipes have long since clogged and burst, and even the most autonomous machines stopped running years ago. Anywhere there’s a crack, plants and animals have pushed in, accelerating the decay.

Still, ruins provide shelter for useful artifacts – especially those packaged in plastic or foil, sealed in tight jars, or locked away in vaults. The largest and most robust structures sometimes stand mostly intact, concealing untold treasures. Underground construction is often surprisingly unharmed. These sorts of sites are the primary goals of seekers.

The major perils of such places are threefold:

- Zombies that should have starved and turned to dust years ago occasionally remain dormant somehow. Some spring into action if they so much as smell or hear prey. Others awaken only if jostled or accidentally rehydrated by letting water in. Once set off, they’re no less dangerous than they were in your grandparents’ time.
- Rival seekers from crazy towns (below) are after the same loot and rarely friendly. Expect a fight.
- The *ruins themselves* are a hazard. Creaky buildings collapse, tunnels cave in. In a world without antibiotics and sterile dressings, even broken glass can be lethal.

WILDERNESS WEALTH

Just as important is the wilderness, which thrives without billions of humans to beat it down and pollute it. Vegetation has reclaimed formerly cleared areas. Land kept dry by dikes, dams, or pumps is once again under swamp, lake, or sea. Beasts have returned to their old homes. A good source of food, lumber, or ore is as valuable as anything found in the ruins, but often more dangerous:

- The animals have *changed*, becoming more intelligent or aggressive, and sometimes carrying the zombie prion for good measure.
- Rival seekers can be found here, too, stalking the same herds and cutting the same forests. Again, expect a fight.
- Natural hazards – from twisting an ankle on rocks to falling into a ravine – are *far* more serious when you’re relying on TL4 medicine (at best) to get better.

CRAZY TOWNS

“Crazy town” is a popular term for a settlement with different values from one’s own. Simple tribalism and greed are often all it takes, but things can be more complex. Maybe your people are collectivists and your rivals are individualists, or you’re rebuilders while they’re nihilists who’ve accepted humanity’s downfall, or they’re religious in a way that involves

killing heathens or sacrificing for good weather. Perhaps they *are* crazy – the prion occasionally seems to turn victims into cannibals but not zombies. Then there are rational minds given to reckless schemes like clapping zombies in irons and using them to turn mills and pumps.

Most seekers avoid crazy towns. There’s no way for a small team to prevail against an entire hostile community – although the bravest (or *craziest*) sometimes steal from such places. The location of dangerous rivals is valuable information, however, and seekers who bring it are occasionally conscripted into raids on such settlements.

VAULTS

In addition to supplies that must be scrounged from ruins or the wilderness at great personal risk, or taken from rivals by stealth or force, there are hidden caches *deliberately* stockpiled against the possibility of disaster and just waiting to be claimed. These range from fallout shelters dating to early TL7, through TL7-8 missile silos, to the rare mature TL8 facility hastily assembled as the world went mad. These are collectively known as “vaults” because they’re solidly built, locked, and full of loot.

Vaults are difficult to find, fiendishly hard to crack without high explosives or heavy machinery, and likely to bring rivals from every crazy town for miles around if word gets out. And word *will* get out if seekers hammer on doors, cart out mountains of supplies, or fetch their community to come live there. Dormant zombies are another possibility – not every vault was sealed properly or in time. Scarier threats are high-tech defenses ranging from massive bulkheads that drop, trapping people forever, to automated weaponry with hardened power supplies.

Not every vault is unclaimed, either. A crazy town with access to a vault – or *in* one – is a force to be reckoned with. Tales abound of survivors sealed inside shielded vaults, with access to limitless nuclear power, water filtration and hydroponic facilities, vast stockpiles of ammunition, and little interest in sharing. Seekers who pick a fight won’t stand a chance. Those with a gift for diplomacy might fare better.

FORBIDDEN ZONES

As should be obvious by now, the end of the world was *chaotic*. The prion turned some humans into zombies and others into cannibals, and rendered animals smarter and scarier. There are rumors that the solar event that activated it created mutants, too. Surviving science isn’t up to providing details, but empirical evidence is that vast swaths of the planet are overrun by *things* best avoided. Seekers steer clear of these “forbidden zones” except when the prize within or beyond is so rich that the risk is worth taking.

THE INFECTED

The only true “zombies” here are living, infectious cannibals similar to those found in modern horror fiction like *Resident Evil* and *28 Days Later*. They’re feared as a physical danger *and* as a fate, bundling fears of disease and cannibalism into one

untidy package and standing as reminders of Earth’s polluted, exploited state before the apocalypse. Most are nameless targets, all records of their identity long gone . . . but if your friends turn, things get more personal.

EVERYTHING ELSE

Zombies are the primary monsters of the post-apocalyptic world but not the only ones or necessarily the scariest ones.

Cannibals

People who eat infected brains (human or animal) are affected differently from those who have the prion injected into their bloodstream. The universal symptom is Odious Personal Habit (Eats Humans) [-15], which often manifests alongside other mental traits from the infected template (below) – especially Bad Temper, Berserk, Bestial, and Low Empathy. Food-sharing has created “tribes” of such cannibals.

Changed Animals

Animals infected by the prion become dangerously cunning and fearless. A given specimen might have an IQ one or even two levels above racial average – which also increases Will and Per – and may lack any of Bestial,

Cannot Learn, or Hidebound its species normally has. It can also gain Indomitable or any level of Fearlessness (up to Unfazeable). This is especially scary in predators, which learn to identify human traps and weapons, and sometimes develop disturbingly high Tactics skills.

Some beasts acquire the Infectious feature – becoming carriers of the prion – instead or as well. There’s no way to detect this. Fortunately for hunters, cooking kills the pathogen.

Mutants

There are persistent rumors that a few animals and humans were mutated by the solar radiation that activated the prion, and that their descendents now walk the Earth with strange physical changes ranging from features, perks, and minor upgrades (e.g., furry humans and unusually deadly rattlesnakes) to implausible advantages (e.g., *gilled* and *venomous* humans). Only the GM knows the truth!

The setting holds other threats, too – see *Everything Else* (above).

THE GORY DETAILS

Zombies are humans whose brains are irreversibly warped by a sci-fi prion. They can’t be cured, but they can be killed and won’t come back from the dead.

The Meat

Zombies are living beings that *look* just like ordinary people. Their savage behavior immediately marks them out as infected, however.

The Motivation

The zombies of the apocalypse were created when a silent, slow-spreading prion was transformed by a burst of strange radiation from the sun. This genesis combines elements of the classic infection and “space dust” origins in a way that could be seen as a riff on mutation; see *Zombies*, pp. 21-22. The activated prion is much faster-acting and a clear-cut example of straightforward infection.

Turning Points

The original cohort of zombies and all later generations have the same infectious bite. If zombification occurs, it’s during the victim’s next sleep; the prion rewires the sleeping brain. The odds of this happening increase with bite severity, with more and deeper bites delivering a larger pathogen load. Keeping the subject awake merely delays the process, but chopping off bitten body parts before he sleeps *will* prevent the prion from reaching his brain. Needless to say, it’s a gamble either way! Once someone turns, there’s no way to get him back – not with the knowhow and resources remaining after the apocalypse.

BY THE NUMBERS

The Infected (Zombies, pp. 97-98) affords a good starting point: the zombies bite and eat people, they shriek and swarm upon sighting prey, and their bite transforms the victim in his sleep on a roll of 3d against HP of biting injury, modified for Resistant to Disease. However, many changes are needed, too: the infected lack the Plague Bite advantage and rely solely on biting injury; they can last a long time if they don’t starve, and “hibernate” when food is scarce, so they replace Terminally Ill with Extended Lifespan and Metabolism Control; all changes are internal, so Unnatural Features doesn’t apply; there’s no cure and thus no Weakness; and the Enraged, Fast, and The Zombies Won lenses apply. To save time, use the following replacement template, which could be applied to anyone.



Infected

-60 points

Attribute Modifiers: ST-1 [-10]; DX+1 [20]; IQ-2 [-40]; HT-1 [-10].

Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: Basic Speed+1.00 [20].

Advantages: Acute Hearing 2 [4]; Enhanced Move 0.5 (Ground) [10]; Extended Lifespan 2 [4]; Hard to Kill 3 [6]; Hard to Subdue 3 [6]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Indomitable [15]; Metabolism Control 10 (Hibernation, -60%) [20]; Striking ST 6 [30]; Unfazeable [15].

Perks: Penetrating Voice [1].

Disadvantages: Bad Smell [-10]; Bad Temper (9) [-15]; Berserk (Vicious, +0%) (9) [-15]; Cannot Learn [-30]; Disturbing Voice [-10]; Inhuman (*Zombies*, p. 70) [-45]; Restricted Diet (Human Flesh) [-20]; Social Stigma (Monster) [-15].

Quirks: Glimpses of Clarity [-1].

Features: Affected as Living; Infectious; Sterile.

TALES SET IN THE RUINS

A campaign set in the time of the zombies tells the story of a rugged band of seekers who journey ever farther afield in search of resources and knowledge their community can use to survive, thrive, and perhaps slowly rebuild civilization. Each run is longer and more dangerous than the last, but the rewards make the isolation and peril worth braving. Their ultimate goal might be clearing their lands of zombies and hostile rivals, finding a legendary vault to raid or call home, or even advancing the nominal TL – perhaps all of these things.

SETUP

This is a game of low-tech (on average, TL4) exploration, combat, and looting set in a post-apocalyptic future rather than a fantasy world. Much of the GM's pre-game thinking will concern the seekers' abilities and technology – both their baseline and how quickly they improve.

Starting Conditions

The 150-point hardened survivor template (*Zombies*, pp. 39-40) is ideal for seekers capable of working without supervision. The GM might give out another 50 points if the PCs are the supervisors, or trim the template back to 100 points if they're in training. As zombie plague and ordinary sickness pose *serious* threats, the GM owes it to the players to point out that Resistant to Disease helps against both. Alternatively, make Resistant to Disease (+3) [3] or even (+8) [5] a campaign advantage – that which didn't kill humanity made the survivors stronger.

The question of starting *technology* is as important as that of character points. *Gear Check* (p. 48) outlines the economic model, but that isn't the entire picture. The GM has to decide what equipment is available to starting characters, perhaps capping it at TL4-7 instead of TL8, and forbidding unlikely items of *any* TL (e.g., while rapiers are TL4, they're suited to urban gentlemen, not post-apocalyptic explorers). It's also crucial to enforce *Logistics* (*Zombies*, p. 152) for both low-tech arrows and bandages and high-tech bullets and batteries. The quest for more and better resources is what drives seekers, after all!

This doesn't limit the heroes' skills, however. Grandparents survive from the TL8 era, as do books. Seekers can start with technological skills ranging from TL0 to TL8, unless they have the Low TL disadvantage. That isn't suitable as a personal trait, however – *settlements* can be limited to TL0-7 knowhow, giving everyone in them one level of Low TL per TL below TL8, but *individuals* grow up with their community's TL. The GM is welcome to set this below TL8, of course.

Homework

Beyond decisions on seeker power, gear, and knowledge, the GM has two big chunks of preparation to do. First, it's important to map out the wilderness, dot it with landmarks (ruins, crazy towns, vaults, forbidden zones, etc.), and decide what's out there, waiting to be found. The GM may find the

guidelines in *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 16: Wilderness Adventures* helpful, replacing supernatural hazards with high-tech ones (e.g., minefields and radiation), and limiting monsters to zombies, animals, and mutants. In a campaign of exploration, these details shouldn't be left vague.

Second, the monsters themselves require thought. Zombies are a given. *Everything Else* (p. 45) outlines other options in general terms, but the game will run more smoothly if the GM has at least a couple of specific bad guys on tap – including ordinary human enemies with skills and equipment similar to the seekers'.

RULES

Seekers gearing up for their job should follow the advice in *Zombie-Fighting Gear* (*Zombies*, pp. 43-48), with an emphasis on good armor, melee weapons (those never run out of ammo), and survival gear. To avoid unnecessary fighting – a drain on resources – use *Staying Out of Reach* (*Zombies*, pp. 120-122).

Combat *will* happen, though, and then many special rules from Chapter 4 of *Zombies* are worth using. Familiarity with *Biting 101* (*Zombies*, pp. 108-109), *Zombie Toughness* (*Zombies*, p. 111), and *Know Your Zombies!* (*Zombies*, pp. 111-112) can speed things up. The same tips are easily adapted to cannibals, animals, and mutants, too.

Once the battle is over, *Cleaning Wounds* (*Zombies*, p. 120) is somewhat effective – washing with soap or anything stronger gives a flat -1 to effective HP inflicted when rolling for infection. Hacking off injured body parts definitely works; see *If Thine Eye Offends Thee* (*Zombies*, p. 128).

Not every important rule is in *Zombies*. This campaign needs the grittiness of *Fright Checks* (pp. B360-361), *Bleeding* (p. B420), and *Illness* (pp. B442-444). Seekers might have regular brushes with *Starvation* (p. B426) and *Cold* (p. B430), too. And the limits of low-tech medicine are also important; see *Recovery* (pp. B423-425).

Rules to Avoid

These zombies are sick humans who can transmit their illness only by biting, so there's no need to read up on wounding modifiers for the unliving, mechanics for splatter and biohazards, or defenses besides armor. They form small "hunting parties," making horde rules largely unimportant as well. As they're Indomitable and Unfazeable, forget about guile and intimidation, too. Anything tied to curing or creating new types of zombies is also irrelevant; that possibility died with the rest of the TL8 world. And supernatural concerns – curses, necromancy, turning, etc. – are right out.

MOOD AND PACING

It would be fair to treat this campaign as a gonzo post-apocalypse tale on its surface – full of violence, mutants, and belligerent nomads sporting spiky hair and spikier armor, albeit with (more) zombies – and to pull inspiration from such fiction, movies especially.

Encounters might alternate between tough guys who can be tricked or bargained with, zombies and cannibals who can't be, and static hazards that just *are*. Smart animals offer a wildcard that could occupy any of these niches: some may respond well to food or even gestures, while others are implacable and a few are impersonal forces of nature ("10,000 head of mutant cattle stand between us and that vault!"). The GM must bear a few things in mind throughout, however.

First is the return on investment for the seekers: What resources do they stand to gain (a little meat, a cache of TL8 first-aid supplies, knowledge of entirely new ruins, a vault . . .) and what do they have to spend to claim these (easily replaced arrows or precious high-tech bullets, a few HP of blood loss or a few friends lost to infection)? The trade needn't be fair, but there should be *some* chance of a payoff if the players are canny – most of the time, anyway.

Second, the campaign is one of exploration. All the fighting and sacrifices are in aid of discovery. Discovery isn't always a positive thing – that vault might secure temporary vaccines, developed in a last-ditch effort to save humanity . . . or seal in dormant mutant zombies (especially if the vaccine failed or the researchers used test subjects). Mixed blessings are fine, too. Challenges shouldn't be *pointless*, though.

Finally, while the feel is closer to "*The Road Warrior* with zombies" than a realistic look at post-apocalyptic survival, rebuilding society should seem like an attainable goal or the game *will* descend into nihilism as the players grow bored and the seekers either give up or become selfish brutes. Each game session needs to give the heroes chances to show off not just their combat and survival skills, but also their compassion and

altruism. Each successful adventure ought to nudge humankind back toward civilization, if only by a hair.

TOUGH CALLS

Hard times call for hard decisions. In particular:

Must all starting group members come from the same settlement? Probably. The world is unkind to loners and the GM who wants to encourage exploration is advised to forbid well-traveled visitors. If the GM doesn't mind the extra work of defining a large known region, however, the "great unknown" might start farther out, permitting seekers from multiple communities. Nobody can hail from a vault or a forbidden zone, though – not without Amnesia (p. B123), anyway!

Do I have to play an ordinary human? Playing a zombie is right out – the infected are berserk, inhuman monsters who eat people and never get better. Nobody can start as one, and those who turn become NPCs that other seekers have little choice but to put down. Cannibals are no more fitting outside of novelty campaigns about crazy towns. Mutants are fine, though the GM who allows them adds "make lists of permitted mutant abilities" to campaign prep. The same goes for changed animals – a smart or even talking beast wouldn't be disruptive but would create the need for a minimum IQ requirement and suitable creature templates.

Can I replace my seeker? Yes. While the world is depopulated, any community large enough to send people on exploration missions can spare another pair of hands, and any settlement discovered by seekers might hold a few brave or foolish recruits.

SEEKERS

Seekers aren't necessarily more able than homebodies, overall, but they're optimized for exploration and facing the dangers of the unknown, not for the challenges of building and sustaining a community. Thus, they're more likely to be inquisitive, self-reliant types than cautious conservatives. People back home may regard them as reckless, and secretly be happy not to have them underfoot.

CHARACTER CREATION

Seekers are nominally TL8 individuals (unless the GM sets a lower *community* TL) in an economy that's effectively TL4, with access to TL0-8 knowledge but largely TL0-4 gear – making TL0-4 skills most useful. They're also rugged survivors and able combatants.

Power Level

The GM will set this at between 100 and 200 points.

Character Types

Everybody should be capable of combat and overland travel, but a few archetypes are essential:

Fighters improve ST, DX, HT, HP, and Basic Speed; favor advantages like Combat Reflexes and High Pain Threshold;

and focus on combat skills, both melee and ranged, low-tech and high-tech (e.g., Axe/Mace, Bow, and Guns). Knowledge of Camouflage and Tactics is advisable, and First Aid and even Surgery generally fall to such seekers as well. A fighter's job is to keep the team alive in the face of zombies, beasts, cannibals, and hostile nomads.

Replacing Losses

Seekers *will* fall to zombie bites, mundane disease, injuries untreatable with low-tech medicine, and altruistic sacrifices. The players should make an effort to identify with their characters but also be prepared to lose them – and when that happens, a replacement is fine. Such an individual might come from any non-cannibal, non-zombie group encountered so far; e.g., if mutants are discovered in play, a new seeker could be a mutant even if a starting one could not be. The only restrictions are that the newcomer cannot have a background that would short-circuit the adventure (typically by providing a specialty of a skill like Area Knowledge or Current Affairs, even at default) or possess technology the GM hasn't introduced yet.

Different World, Same Reality

Seekers are mostly restricted to real-world traits: Resistant to Disease exists but Immunity to Zombie Plague does not. The setting is weird enough to support the occasional mutant human or intelligent animal, but psi and super-powers are unknown. It's cinematic enough to include Gadgeteer, but not *Quick Gadgeteer* or *Gunslinger*, Trained by a Master, or *Weapon Master*. It's technologically fluid between TL0 and TL8, but features no TL9+ or superscience. Finally, nobody can have infected Allies; abilities for controlling, creating, or curing zombies; or supernatural gifts of any kind (divine favor, magic, etc.).

Gear Check

This setting uses the post-apocalyptic assumptions described in *Survivalists* (*Zombies*, p. 152): The economy is nominally TL4; everyone starts with \$2,000 worth of equipment, adjusted for personal Wealth; and TL0-4 gear (like anything in *GURPS Low-Tech*) has its usual price, while the cost of TL5-8 items (such as those in *GURPS High-Tech*) doubles for each TL after TL4. Neither money nor a universal standard of barter exists, so any unallocated "equipment allowance" is *lost*. There are no laws, either, making Legality Class is irrelevant – the only other limit is what the GM decides is available to seekers, which will change as they go on adventures and discover new things.

Scouts want high Per and Basic Move; advantages in the vein of Absolute Direction, Acute Senses, Danger Sense, and Outdoorsman; and skills like Area Knowledge, Cartography, Navigation, Observation, Survival, and Tracking. A ranged combat skill – preferably a fairly silent one, such as Bow – is also smart. Scouts blaze and map trails, keep the group warm and fed, and spy on the enemy. In a large party, these might be distinct niches.

Scroungers need superior IQ and Per, and possibly equipment-related Talents such as Artificer. Scrounging skill is essential, but they should also be adept at repair (using Armoury, Electronics Repair, and Mechanic) and operating some of what they fix (Guns, Driving, Electronics Operation, and so on). Forced Entry, Lockpicking, and even Explosives are valuable for getting at stuff. Scroungers perform the key tasks of looking for valuables and making found technology useable.

The hardened survivor template (*Zombies*, pp. 39-40) can accommodate all three character types but is best treated as loose guidelines. A fighter needs more points in combat skills, a scout may choose to treat Tracking as a primary skill, and a scrounger will invest more heavily in technological skills. To make each PC stand out, it's also fun to add trademark knowledge and gear; e.g., maybe the big fighter wields a medieval-looking morningstar with the Flail skill and has Guns (Shotgun) and two shells, the scout learned Piloting (Glider) from an old manual, and the scrounger uses homemade black powder with Explosives/TL4.



Required Traits

Beyond the archetype abilities suggested above, nothing is absolutely mandatory. As noted in *Starting Conditions* (p. 46), however, Resistant to Disease (+3) [3] or (+8) [5] may be a campaign advantage, while seekers from a primitive settlement might start with Low TL. The GM may also require everyone to know Climbing, Hiking, and Stealth so that nobody drags down the rest of the group.

Appropriate Traits

Just about everything in *Survival Traits* (*Zombies*, p. 27) is a good bet. The GM might also allow the basic version of Gadgeteer to enable seekers to rig gear from scrounged items. Appropriate perks from *Zombies*, pp. 31-32 are Enhanced Z-Factor, Rule of 15, SOP (On Alert), and Tastes Bad. Some people are Susceptible to the prion (-1 point per level), but that falls into the realm of "dramatic flaws," not "good ideas."

Technological skills require extra planning. Seekers should balance TL0-4 skills that work with commonly available equipment against TL5-8 skills for rare high-tech artifacts. Think of the former as staple foods, the latter as spice. Pay attention to *Tech-Level Modifiers* (p. B168) and remember that TL5+ skills need TL5+ gear; e.g., for anything beyond bandaging, a TL4 first-aid kit turns First Aid/TL8 into First Aid/TL4 at -7, and the IQ-4 default would probably be better.

DOING YOUR BIT

Players should do their best to portray the heroes as valuable members of their home settlement. They're explorers first – and to some extent risk-takers. Seekers go on many runs with seasoned veterans before being trusted to work autonomously, and anyone not tough or reliable enough for the job would've been weeded out. Thus, turning down a request from a community leader to procure some vital item, or passing up the chance to scout a crazy town or track down rumors of ruins or a vault, is missing the point of the campaign.

Seekers are expected to be efficient, too. It might be *combat-effective* to use guns in a fight, but the adventurers should avoid this if spears and blades would suffice. It may be *fun* to use gasoline to immolate some zombies, but refined fuel is almost priceless and better carted back home. Heroes who want to play with gadgets should build their own from scraps – a chainsaw driven by springs and flywheels is the stuff of legends.

Finally, seekers need to be heroic. They aren't saints, of course, and acts of betrayal (*Zombies*, p. 145) – including sacrificing other people (*Zombies*, p. 121) and concealing zombie bites (*Zombies*, p. 151) – might happen. Such treachery should be rare, however. It's reasonable to stoop to selfish behavior on a failed self-control roll or Fright Check, but important to build and roleplay adventurers who don't routinely fail in the first place. Again, the weak have been weeded out.

CHAPTER EIGHT

DEPRAVITY WELL

When faint radio signals arrived from a planet in the habitable zone of a nearby star, Earth's scientists were ecstatic. Nobody could decipher the message, but it was the sign they'd been waiting for. When estimates put the surface gravity at just shy of 1.2G and surface temperature at around 300K (only a little warm), giving an ESI above 0.8, there was the predictable talk of visiting. But covering 22 light-years would take forever.

Then Dr. Catherine Bellemare came up with the negative-mass drive ("NEMAD"), which could make the trip in a little under 45 years . . . using exotic matter nobody had observed and more energy than humanity could generate. Nevertheless, the promise of meeting aliens spurred an international effort to solve these problems. In 2050 – after 35 years of painstaking effort to accumulate "quantum fuel" – the task force had a working engine.

And lots of caveats.

First, the trip would be one-way – when the drive's "bubble" collapsed on arrival, so would the engine. Second, even with predicted efficiency increases, a follow-up mission would take another 15 to 20 years of all-out effort. Finally, there was no guarantee the crew wouldn't be broiled, irradiated, or otherwise killed; the scientists had only theories and the engineers and physicians had no test bed.

Astronauts are pioneers at heart, though, and medical hibernation had been invented in the interim; there were plenty of volunteers. The vessel, inevitably christened *Nomad*, would carry 20 people and everything needed to be self-sufficient. Their journey would take around 39 years of subjective time. In stasis, the travelers' bodies would age at 1/10 the usual rate. A crew with an average age of 34 would arrive feeling as if they were around 40 years old. *Nomad II* would follow as soon as it could.

We got there. Only two of us were broiled – or more like disintegrated. Three others died of hibernation sickness. The 15 survivors were in good shape.

Then the planetary defenses pounded us. They were in disrepair; the satellites croaked after the first salvo. But we were forced to crash-land, and two of us died in the process, leaving an unlucky 13 to make first contact.

Bones will mend, wounds will heal, diseases cured. Isn't that worth everything? Anything!

– Dr. Spires, in Silent Rage

Which was when we discovered the place was *dead* – or as one wise-ass put it, *undead*. Some sort of nanotech, not so different from that in our hibernation pods, had run amok and turned the locals into "meat robots." Once creepily similar to us, they had become beasts who went around eating anything organic. And they made it clear we were on the menu by trimming our numbers to an even dozen.

The nanomachines seem to be geared to one particular species, which is good news – though we're worried about the similarity to our hibernation tech. The nanobots replicate and repair. What if they can *adapt*?

Fortunately, we brought guns and survival gear. Unfortunately, *Nomad* is wrecked, so we have no transmitter. We can't leave, or even send a message. All we can do is wait 15 to 20 years, avoiding "zombies" as we salvage technology we barely understand and try to decipher an alien language.

AT A GLANCE: DEPRAVITY WELL

Genre: Science-Fiction Horror.

Tech Level: 9-10 (with background TL[^]).

Power Level: Hardened Survivors (150 points) to Born Zombie-Killers (250 points).

Supernatural Powers: None.

Scope: Global Apocalypse.

Zombies: One type, living but not infectious (yet . . .).

Useful Supplements: *GURPS Ultra-Tech*, plus *GURPS Space* if the GM wants to detail the alien solar system and *GURPS Spaceships* if visitors show up.

DAY ONE

Nomad crashed mere days ago. The initial scouting party discovered that the planet's residents were technologically advanced (mature TL10 vs. Earth's TL9) and quite extinct – and then encountered a pack of hungry zombies. They defeated these at the cost of a crewman's life. The crew salvaged everything they could, established a defensible base, and started piecing together the puzzle. One of the surviving medical scanners, capable of detecting hibernation nano, found the reanimation nanomachines on an alien corpse recovered by the scouts.

And that's where things stand. What the heroes do next is up to them!

HOT, HEAVY, HAZY HELL

The *Nomad* crew promptly dubbed the alien world “Hell” because it’s hot and full of dead people. It’s up to the GM whether its formal designation corresponds to anything known today (e.g., Gliese 667 Cc). It differs from Earth in a few important respects:

Temperature. Hell is roughly 40°F warmer than Earth. *Nomad* crashed in a relatively cool temperate region where temperatures range between 50°F and 120°F, averaging in the mid 80s. Winter is pleasant enough (50°F to 70°F). Summer weather is oppressive (100°F to 120°F); humans without Temperature Tolerance or an environment suit will lose extra FP when active (*Heat*, p. B434) and require 1.5 to 2.5 times the usual amount of water (*Dehydration*, p. B426). This is due to atmospheric composition combined with insolation peaked in the near infrared. Insufficient ultraviolet reaches the surface for *Sunburn* (p. B434) to matter.

Gravity. Surface gravity is 1.17G, increasing encumbrance and terminal velocity, and reducing jumping and throwing distances. Work out the affected quantities *instead of* 1G values, which won’t come up in this campaign. As gravity is less than one full human G-Increment (0.2G) away from Earth-normal, there are no attribute penalties and there’s no special value to G-Experience or Improved G-Tolerance. For details, review *Different Gravity* (p. B350).

Light Level. By Earth standards, the sun seems dim and distant. Nights are no darker, but daytime Vision and attack rolls that rely solely on natural light have an extra -2. The Night Vision advantage (or equivalent technology) offsets this as usual.

The atmosphere is breathable – oxygenated, and denser than Earth’s but not so dense as to cause humans problems. Its most pronounced effects are factored into the notes on temperature and light level. However, it *smells* weird, giving

They kill for one reason: they kill for food. They eat their victims, you understand that, Mr. Berman? That’s what keeps them going!

– Dr. Foster, in *Dawn of the Dead* (1978)



humans -1 to rolls for scent-based tasks (breathing bottled or filtered air avoids the odor but makes such rolls impossible!). The GM can waive the penalty after one (Earth) month.

Day and year length are left to the GM not out of laziness but because a lot of gamers find constantly converting into the timekeeping units used by many *GURPS* rules to be *annoying*. Most important is that short years mean fewer consecutive days of stifling summer weather more often, while long years expose travelers to the heat for extended periods but also offer longer respites.

FLORA, FAUNA, AND ALL THE REST

The alien civilization that dominated Hell was even less environmentally conscious than present-day humanity – that’s how runaway nanomachines destroyed their species. Other nano and plain old chemical and radiological waste remain active and harmful. As a result, few wilderness expanses and almost no large animal life survive. Which isn’t to say that Hell is a dead planet.

Plenty of small plants – and some large ones – are slowly reclaiming the wasted land. These tend to be reddish in color but otherwise not unlike Earth’s jungle vegetation in damp areas or its desert flora in dry ones. Most aren’t poisonous to humans, just inedible without *extensive* processing, and there are no exotic dangers such as animated or flesh-eating plants. However, *many* species feature urticating hairs, and contact requires a

HT roll at up to -5 (roll 1d-1 for penalty size) to avoid results ranging from moderate pain to agony; see p. B428. Alien pollens and spores may trigger new allergies; roll as above for coughing or sneezing (also p. B428). Eating a stinging plant – or critical failure to resist allergens – can cause toxic damage. On Earth, all this would be easy to avoid; on Hell, nobody has a handy catalog of plant life.

Surviving animal life is generally small, a mixture of invertebrate and tiny vertebrate species that aren’t much like anything on Earth. They don’t find human food interesting – too different, too alien – so the *Nomad* crew doesn’t have to worry about vermin. Other than the zombies, nothing is large or interested enough to count as a predator. Plenty of flying and crawling insect-like things sting and bite, though, with effects similar to those noted for unpleasant plants.

Whether any of Hell’s natural microbes are hazardous to humans is anyone’s guess. The *Nomad* crew’s weapons and environment suits are more than enough to cope with plant and animal nuisances, but everybody is worried about bizarre alien pathogens . . . *especially* nano-disease.

SETTLEMENTS

Hell's sapient inhabitants had a mature TL10 civilization with a penchant for urban sprawl and skyscraping towers. There were tens of billions of them, relying on vat-grown food, fusion power (sometimes antimatter-boosted), and brute-force nanotech to survive, ignoring the effects on the world outside their cities. Their megalopolises covered many times the area of Earth's largest metropolises and were linked by extensive smart-road, maglev, and evacuated-tube networks.

While the lights are out and the large machinery no longer runs, advanced materials and borderline-TL11 self-repair nanotech have preserved much of the basic skeleton. Plenty of structures still stand, preserving potentially useful knowledge

and technology. As the aliens were surprisingly human-like (SM 0, four limbs, and an upright posture), passages, stairs, doors, and workspaces are quite navigable by humans.

The cities also shelter roving packs of zombies, who are capable of consuming almost anything organic that shares the urban space: mold, sludge from algal pools, small plants and animals, and now *humans*. They might be incapable of tool-use and complex social interaction, but they're also on home ground. They know where to hide and when to flee, and are cunning enough to lead well-armed prey into dead ends or onto unstable ground. They don't mind swimming a toxic slime puddle or scraping up someone who has fallen 20 stories if that means *eating*.

MEET THE LOCALS

The bizarre fate of Hell's residents is above all a stinging criticism of pollution (*Zombies*, p. 9). The nanotech angle is fresh paint on an old concept – Hell's zombies are updates of the toxic-waste monsters of 20th-century film, which themselves owe much to 19th-century mad science. The *Nomad* crew is afraid of zombie *attacks*, and regards the transformed aliens as a local hazard – as fodder (*Zombies*, p. 11) – but their tune will change if the nano adapts and affects the last humans they'll ever see. Then fears of the lack of an afterlife and of cannibalism (*Zombies*, p. 8) will kick in as the survivors face eternal life as ghouls.

their brains are more complex than those of surviving local life. If the nano adapts, the effects could be unpredictable: illness, sterility, zombification on death, transformation while still alive . . .

It's easy to eliminate the nanomachines if you're willing to kill the subject. A "cure" that leaves the patient alive is theoretically possible but would require a lot of research with Engineer/TL10 (Nanotechnology) and Physician/TL10. A cured zombie would be a *tabula rasa* with no memory of previous lives, and would have to be kept in isolation to avoid immediate re-infection unless a vaccine were developed alongside the antidote.

THE GORY DETAILS

Hell's zombies are dead alien bodies restored to genuine biological life by ultra-tech nanomachines.

The Meat

The zombies are living, *not* undead. The nanomachines responsible for them rebuild and rejuvenate reasonably intact dead bodies – however old or sick – and then jolt them back to vigorous, youthful life. Repeatedly. This process totally reconstructs the body, including the brain. Thus, each "rebirth" creates an almost entirely new being, familiar with its stomping grounds by dint of exploration rather than memory.

The Motivation

Hell's residents have been zombified by a self-replicating nanotech "infection." As this has spread planet-wide, it's more sensibly regarded as an environmental factor – a kind of toxic waste (*Zombies*, p. 23) – than as a disease.

Turning Points

The nanotech resuscitates any dead *alien* body – regardless of how often it has died in the past or whether it has been exposed to other zombies – provided that it hasn't been utterly destroyed (reduced to -10xHP). The process takes 1d days. Other indigenous species seem to be unaffected but this may be tied to brain complexity. Humans have just arrived and

What Happened Here?

The *Nomad* crew will doubtless want to learn Hell's story. Approaches include scientific investigation with skills like Diagnosis, Electronics Operation (Medical), Engineer (Nanotechnology), and Expert Skill (Epidemiology), and reading local records by deciphering data protocols, encryption, and language with Computer Programming, Cryptography, and Linguistics, and then using Research. Either will point to the conclusion that medical nanomachines intended to grant clinical immortality got out of control. The nano resuscitated the recently deceased, but not as their old selves . . . and it proved 100% fatal to fetuses, including clones. The race died out and was replaced by near-immortal zombies.

BY THE NUMBERS

ReViv™-ified (*Zombies*, pp. 103-104) can be used almost as written, with a couple of changes to suit the circumstances:

- Remove Legally Dead [-45], since there's no meaningful social framework on Hell.
- Change Odious Racial Habit (Eats Humans) [-15] to Odious Racial Habit (Eats Sapient Beings) [-15] – the zombies aren't choosy!

This results in a -57-point template. The 12-point racial template of the local aliens – see *Hellions* – stacks with this to give a net -45-point zombie. There’s relatively little physical or intellectual variation between specimens; the nano appears to rewrite everyone to a uniform standard.

Zombies that have lived their current life for decades may have spectacularly high levels at survival-oriented skills, however! In the abandoned megalopolises, these include not only Area Knowledge but also “parkour” skills such as Acrobatics, Climbing, Jumping, and Urban Survival. Though it’s rare because the risk isn’t worth it, a few zombies hunt *each other*, leading to impressive ability at Brawling, Stealth, Tracking, and Wrestling.

HELLIONS

The locals, dubbed “hellions” or “demons” by the *Nomad* crew, are externally quite similar to humans, with roughly our size and morphology, though with six digits per extremity. Before their disaster, they even had two sexes and bore live young. Their native biochemistry and organ structure are unknown – the nano overwrote those things.

The template below gives the meaningful *physical* differences from humanity: a sturdier frame and better adaptation to heat and dim light. Back in the day, they’d also have qualified for High TL 1 [5] or even High TL 2 [10], and probably a few psychological perks and quirks.

Hellion

12 points

Attribute Modifiers: ST+1 [10].

Advantages: Night Vision 2 [2]; Temperature Tolerance 1 [1].

Quirks: Photosensitivity (*GURPS Power-Ups 6: Quirks*, p. 24) [-1].

Features: Native Gravity 1.17G; Temperature Comfort Zone 55°F to 120°F.

EXPLORING HELL

The saga of the *Nomad* crew is a mixture of survival, violence, and exploration. The heroes have to keep track of resources – ammo, food, medical supplies, power cells, and so on – while coping with a trying physical environment. They must also evade and often fight hungry zombies who outnumber them overwhelmingly and *won’t stay dead*. If they hope to send a message home and perhaps live to see *Nomad II*, they’ll want to unravel the mysteries and technology of Hell’s zombified inhabitants. And over it all hangs a pall of horror: “What if what happened to them happens to us?”

SETUP

The hard work needed for this campaign concerns not the zombies but the explorers (who are they and what did they bring?) and the world they’re exploring (what’s there and what are its secrets?).

Starting Conditions

The *Nomad* crew are highly qualified astronauts. Reviewing *Power Level* (p. B487), “at the realistic pinnacle of physical, mental, or social achievement” sounds right – that’s 100 to 200 points. Given that they were chosen from among the world’s best *and* have reached that pinnacle in several areas apiece, going to the high end (200 points) or even a bit beyond (250 points) seems reasonable.

Despite the visitors’ fears, there’s little chance of becoming a zombie before death. The odds that Hell’s runaway nano can cause illness or other unpredictable results are considerably higher. Intrinsic resistance to that specific threat isn’t a plausible starting ability, but astronauts are *extremely* likely to be in top physical shape and thus difficult to affect – the GM may want to impose a minimum effective HT of 12, with

Fit or Very Fit adding +1 or +2, respectively, for the purpose. Nobody can have any attribute *below* human average, and physical disadvantages are right out.

The big deal here is starting equipment. Though a satisfyingly high TL9, it isn’t what the astronauts chose to bring – it’s what the world saw fit to outfit them with. Moreover, only a small subset of it survived the crash. The GM must pore over *GURPS Ultra-Tech* and make a list of everything that suits the mission and wasn’t destroyed, which can be a *lot* of work. See *Gear Check* (p. 55) for some important practical details.

Homework

Beyond that list of gear and any training requirements the GM elects to impose on the crew, it would be useful to define *Nomad* in *GURPS Spaceships* terms to make it easier to judge what general kinds of salvage are available. *GURPS Spaceships 5: Exploration and Colony Spacecraft* is especially useful for this. Assume *Nomad* is TL9 and SM +8 or at most +9, with one habitat system consisting almost entirely of hibernation chambers and one system dedicated to the (collapsed, worthless) negative-mass drive. If *Nomad II* puts in an appearance, it can be TL10, larger, and possibly boast *two* NEMAD systems – one for the return trip.

As for Hell, detailing it using *GURPS Space* is always an option. However, with no working land transportation – at first, anyway – the explorers are going to be roaming a relatively small area on foot. Mapping the *planet* is therefore less useful than sketching out the nearest metropolitan area. Exploring this could easily be the focus of the entire campaign, but the GM doesn’t have to generate it all at once. If the astronauts wisely remain near the crash site to salvage gear, it’s fine to think in terms of a modest radius around that. If they opt to start hiking, focus on their path.

Just as important is deciding what Hell's former civilization achieved. This could be almost any non-superscience innovation up to TL10. They were especially advanced in the area of nanotechnology, so there may be some TL11 surprises.

RULES

Physically fit, scientifically minded explorers will use *Discovering Zombie Flaws* (**Zombies**, p. 35) to deduce the locals' disadvantages; think in terms of *Survival Gear* (**Zombies**, pp. 47-48) when prioritizing salvage; eventually learn that *Intimidation (and Other Skills)* (**Zombies**, pp. 117-118) works; and treat *Staying Out of Reach* (**Zombies**, pp. 120-122) as standard operating procedure. Initially, they're likely to be convinced that *Biohazard!* (**Zombies**, pp. 119-120), *Splatter* (**Zombies**, p. 125), and *If Thine Eye Offends Thee* (**Zombies**, p. 128) are relevant. Eventually, *A Better Tomorrow* (**Zombies**, pp. 129-133) may yield not a cure, but a weapon that targets the zombies' Vulnerability.

On the zombies' part, *Biting 101* (**Zombies**, pp. 108-109) summarizes important rules for any hungry predator and *Can't Stun This* (**Zombies**, p. 111) is applicable. They, too, will make use of *Mobility* (**Zombies**, pp. 121-122), to the heroes' chagrin.

Rules to Avoid

Rules linked to the supernatural or to cinematic superscience are irrelevant. So are those for curing or creating zombies (although they might be adapted to developing countermeasures). And so are those for direct infection through bites, bodily fluids, and so on – an infectious agent of sorts *is* at work and *might* affect humans, but it's a ubiquitous environmental factor.

MOOD AND PACING

The GM must keep things scary *despite* the protagonists being rational women and men of science, outfitted with TL9 gadgetry, facing only primitive, bestial zombies. The key to doing so is playing up several angles that have relatively little to do with zombies: isolation from the rest of humanity for a period ranging from “years” to “forever,” Hell's dimly lit oppressiveness, deciphering the local technology before supplies run out, and the looming specter of runaway nanotech.

NASA once asked me to consider the possible application of psychoactive drugs in the space program . . . This zombi poison could provide a fascinating model for experiments in artificial hibernation.

– Nathan S. Kline to Wade Davis,
The Serpent and the Rainbow

These things should intertwine and twist in ways that lead to frayed nerves and Fright Checks. Here are a few suggestions:

Salvage. Stripping the *Nomad* wreckage of useful resources could be the objective of several adventures. It might be tempting to camp out there, but that's ill-advised; neutron activation in the cracked casings of TL9 fusion reactors and thrusters has left the debris slightly radioactive. Touchdown was noisy and obvious enough to attract zombies, too, and demolished anything that would obstruct their line of sight. These complications plus the fact the hulk is mangled and unstable offer claustrophobic horror as the heroes squeeze through tight, dark quarters, their dosimeters clicking, never knowing whether there's a zombie just ahead. If that becomes repetitive, remember that of the eight dead crewmen, three died in hibernation and two in the crash, so the bodies of five *friends* may turn up zombified once the nano adapts – and that's Fright Check territory! Once *that* grows old, don't forget that nobody here understands NEMAD (those two mission specialists died on the trip) . . . the spent systems might have enough of a superscience spark to bring new weirdness, for which a viewing of *Event Horizon* is encouraged.

Exploration. Exploring an alien megalopolis is tense enough when a zombie ambush could lurk *anywhere* – behind a door, around a corner or overhead, even rappelling down a dark shaft on tentacular cables. If the explorers find a transmitter, communications will take 22 years each way; if they locate a spaceship, it will lack NEMAD. Deducing how to use the local equipment to produce food and power is therefore a priority, but that's a matter of figuring out alien technology (at -5 to -10 from *Tech-Level Penalties*, p. B168) and language (rolls that *rely* on manuals have an extra -5, dropping to -3, -1, and finally 0 once somebody learns the language; see *Comprehension Levels*, p. B24). Each failure ought to fray nerves: -1 to any Fright Checks. And the tech itself – in the form of lethal security systems, homicidal AIs, and weird near-TL11 experiments – may lead to quite few Fright Checks indeed.

Nano. While the possibility of weaponized nano (see *Metabolic Nanoweapons*, **GURPS Ultra-Tech**, pp. 161-162) sitting in abandoned labs is worrisome, knowledge that Hell harbors nanotech gone wild is terrifying. In addition to adapting to and zombifying dead crewmen, runaway nano could have . . . *effects* on the living. Mysterious sickness is the kindest option. If the stuff starts rewriting cells, people might “mutate” slowly over time, with injured or even severed body parts growing back in grotesque ways. And the zombie nano's apparent optimization for complex brains suggests that it may have equally noxious effects on sanity.

Beyond. The signal that summoned *Nomad* was automated, and came decades or even centuries too late to help Hell (assuming it was a call for help – maybe it was a warning to stay away!). Other worlds might have received it during that time. Alien visitors from nearby systems may show up to investigate. If they're shot down as well, there's no guarantee that any survivors would be friendly . . . or not turn into far worse zombies. If they *aren't* shot down, they may survey the planet, deem it a hazard, and do anything from putting advanced defenses in orbit that will pulverize *Nomad II*, through landing extermination parties who see humans as “just other zombies,” to nuking the site from orbit. This adds a whole new dimension to the need to act quickly and find a way to communicate.

All this should be part of a general arc leading toward establishing a long-term base, calling home, and possibly neutralizing the nano. However, *horror* is the watchword, so regular success and progress aren't half as important as barely surviving until the next Bad Thing comes along!

TOUGH CALLS

Hell is tough on the *Nomad* crew but relatively easy on the GM: None of the heroes possess the borderline-TL11 knowhow to create zombies (at best, they'll discover how to kill zombies more efficiently) and they're unlikely to acquire it in play. Even if they do, the zombies aren't controllable. Most important, death ends careers – a dead explorer might come back, but with a wiped mind and no interest in humans beyond eating them, and there's no cure for that. Thus, nobody can *play* a zombie. The answer to almost any question about interactions with zombies is, “You can either avoid them or kill them.”

The elephant in the room is that there are just 12 humans on the planet. Dead PCs can be replaced only by whichever of the other 11 survive – and each dead NPC means one fewer replacement. Thus, these NPCs are *really* PCs-in-waiting, and the GM must take good care of them, not use them as fodder. See *And Then There Were None* (below).

OUR STALWART CREW

Every single member of the *Nomad* complement was hand-picked from among many hundreds of qualified candidates, themselves chosen from among tens of thousands of hopefuls. Each has been thoroughly tested for mental and physical

fitness, and given the coveted mission of representing Earth to an alien civilization.

CHARACTER CREATION

Crewmembers should have average or better attributes (notably IQ and HT), no major physical disadvantages, no mental problems that would affect mission performance, and a wide range of TL9 scientific and technical skills. As they are the select few, it's better to craft each one by hand than to rely on templates.

Power Level

The GM will set this at between 150 and 250 points.

Character Types

A spaceship crew includes many people whose roles aren't essential to the planetary side of the mission. It's best to assume that *those* astronauts didn't make it: the two who disintegrated and three who perished in hibernation died en route, victims of a botched early revival to correct a navigational error. The two who died in the crash were in the cockpit. The poor guy who got eaten by zombies was ill-equipped to be on the ground. That accounts for all the pilots, navigators, and drive engineers.

The 12 who survived fill three essential roles, in more-or-less equal proportions:

First-contact specialists are trained to handle alien behavior, language, and customs. They'll have Language Talent; Gesture, Linguistics, and Psychology skills; and social skills that may prove useful even on Hell (e.g., Intimidation for scaring off zombies and Leadership for organizing crewmates). They'll understand communications *technology*, too, notably Computer Programming, Cryptography, and Electronics Operation (Comm and Media).

And Then There Were None

Death is quite likely on Hell, but there are just 12 humans on the planet! The default assumption is that each player creates an equal share of the surviving crew, roleplaying one as a starting PC and calling out the actions of the others. Thus, each person has a backup in the event they lose their first choice. If someone runs out of characters, it's fairest to call a group meeting and reassign somebody else's alternate; the GM ought to reward the player who gives up a replacement with a few bonus points for heroism. The GM might also reserve a few crewmen; e.g., five players could create one PC and one stand-in apiece, leaving the GM with two spares for anybody who needs one.

Not Regulation

Nobody can have below-average attributes or any disadvantage the GM feels would prevent selection. Simply ignore social traits like Rank and Wealth; people have them, but they won't matter much on Hell. Until crewmen are “mutated” by alien nano, no exotic abilities are available – and even then, nobody can have *supernatural* gifts or the capacity to create or influence zombies. As written, this campaign doesn't include cinematic capabilities, either, but the GM might relent and allow Cultural Adaptability to first-contact experts or Gadgeteer to science and support personnel.

And they'll be trained in fields valuable for investigating abandoned cities and records, like Anthropology, Archaeology, Architecture, Research, and Sociology.

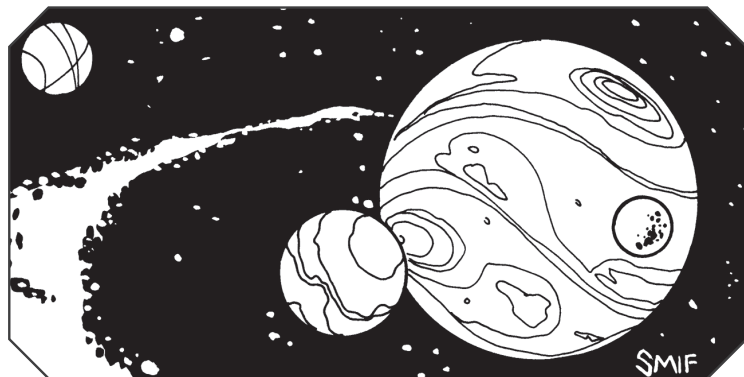
Science personnel have multiple doctorates in quantitative fields. Each should have many skills from among Astronomy, Bioengineering, Biology, Cartography, Chemistry, Computer Programming, Engineer, Geography, Geology, Mathematics, Meteorology, Physics, and Prospecting. Duplication between scientists is a good thing – there are lots of specialties and backup is essential. Ancillary technical skills are likely: Electronics Operation (Scientific and Sensors) for physical sciences, Explosives (Demolition) to go with Engineer (Mining) or Prospecting, and so on. Research is essential, too.

Support crew are trained to keep the equipment running and the others alive. They'll have combinations of repair skills (Armoury, Electrician, Electronics Repair, Machinist, and Mechanic) and medical skills (Diagnosis, Electronics Operation (Medical), First Aid, Physician, and Surgery), plus odds and ends such as Driving (Tracked), Freight Handling, Hazardous Materials, Navigation (Land), and Scrounging. The crew includes no true marines, but if *anybody* has Soldier, Tactics, or combat skills, it's these people.

All skills should be TL9 and relevant; e.g., Engineer/TL9 (Nanotechnology) makes sense for an ultra-tech space mission involving nanotech hibernation, but Engineer/TL9 (Clockwork) would be silly. The GM should show the players the equipment manifest *before* they choose skills for operating gear. Given the rigorous selection process, skills should be backed by the highest DX and IQ possible, allowing many at good levels for few points. Gamers with **GURPS Power-Ups 3: Talents** can exploit the Talents there for *further* optimization.

Required Traits

As *Starting Conditions* (p. 52) notes, HT 12+ after any bonus from Fit or Very Fit might be a campaign requirement. Beyond that, it's hard to imagine a group of astronauts who lack at least a point in each of a few basic space skills (Free Fall, Spacer, and Vacc Suit) or who can't operate basic technology (Computer Operation) – and on a mission of exploration, it would be reasonable to require Observation and Photography, and maybe Electronics Operation (Sensors). Finally, it's *highly recommended* that the GM make Sense of Duty (Crew) [-5] a campaign disadvantage.



Appropriate Traits

Everything noted in *Survival Traits* (**Zombies**, p. 27) makes sense for a gang of astronauts being sent on one-way trip – in effect, a survival mission. No “special” abilities really suit a quasi-realistic campaign about planetary exploration, but the GM might want to allow a version of NBC Suit Experience (**Zombies**, p. 31) that works with the crew's environment suits.

Gear Check

For a proper “crash landing” feel, the GM needs to browse the various tech compendia, especially **GURPS Ultra-Tech**, and catalog everything that survived the wreck. One environment suit per crewmember plus a *total* of \$300,000 to \$400,000 worth of other stuff ought to do. Much of this allowance should consist of food, medical supplies, and power cells – but portable communicators, scientific equipment, sensors, and toolkits are also logical, as are a few light weapons. Anything semi-portable or larger was abandoned in the hot, unstable wreckage; it might be recoverable, repairable, and useable once the debris is safe to approach, but that's a later adventure. The players should distribute the gear *in play*; aside from their suits, nothing “belongs” to anyone! Remember, there are 12 survivors . . . if the PCs get a disproportionate share of the goodies, the whole team will be weaker and potential replacement characters may die.

THE BEST OF THE BEST

The *Nomad* astronauts are the team Earth chose to represent it to the stars. They've lived and trained together, and are prepared for the possibility of being the only humans they'll ever see again. *Betrayal!* (**Zombies**, p. 145) isn't an option. The GM may seal the contract by giving everyone five extra points balanced by Sense of Duty (Crew) [-5].

This has profound ramifications for roleplaying. Players may portray their characters as individuals but must strive to avoid arguments and to act like rational individuals who do the logical thing even when that goes against personal preferences. This complicates the matter of *Sacrifice* (**Zombies**, p. 121), especially, because beyond never sacrificing a teammate, sacrificing *oneself* is risky – the crew can't afford to lose anyone, so dying when there's any other solution isn't heroic but selfish.

The group's rational outlook will also color how they view Hell's fate. They already know that nanotech got loose and transformed the locals. As further truths emerge – the aliens died and came back as flesh-eating ghouls – the parallels to fictional zombies will be obvious. Our heroes won't cave in to superstition, though, because there's a scientific explanation. Isolation and physical danger make the situation scary, but not *spooky*.

Finally, remember that even stranded, down to 60% strength, and beset by zombies, the *Nomad* gang are *explorers*. They'll be conservative where resources or lives are at stake but not when human knowledge is in the balance. Unraveling superior technology, rigging a transmitter, and beaming the data home could spur a golden age on Earth and perhaps even spare it from ecological disaster. *That* would be worth a sacrifice!

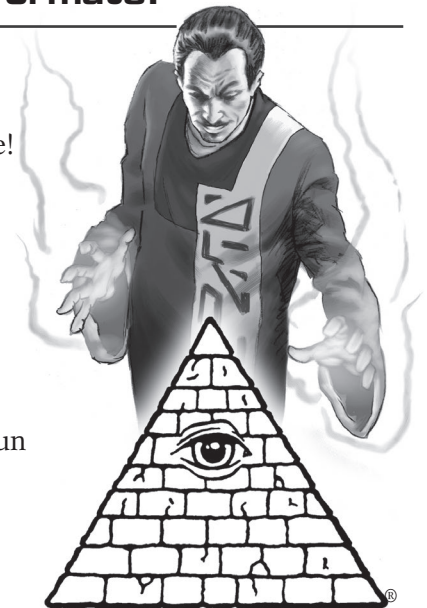
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