

RIPZ



A UNIVERSAL ZOMBIE RPG ADD-ON
BARAK BLACKBURN

ZOMBIES!

Thanks to George Romero, Zombies are part of geek-canon these days, but the definition of “zombie” is very much up for debate. Are they fast? Are they slow? Do they subsist on brains? What made them zombies? There are novels, movies, TV shows, comicbooks, and numerous roleplaying games and supplements dealing with zombies, and it seems like everyone has their own opinion of what qualifies as an acceptable zombie.

As with anything, your mileage may vary, and this supplement is not designed to force you to incorporate any type of specific zombies into your game. There is no Zombie Agenda within the text of this supplement.

Instead, this supplement is designed to bring some of the narrative elements of a zombie film to your tabletop game, and make the players and their characters feel as if they were in a zombie film (or comic, TV show, novel, etc).

Stripping out the specifics of your zombie of choice, there are two elements that make a zombie film a zombie film, in this author’s opinion:

The Jump Scare: The protagonists think they are safe, and BAM! There is a zombie in the kitchen cabinet!

Paranoia: What causes people to get infected? What makes them turn on one another? When do people lose their morality so much that they are willing to take a human life?

And this micro-supplement is designed to give GMs a tool to help increase the dramatic tension at their table utilizing these two elements.

And thus, Spectrum Games is proud to present to you the **Zombie Die!**

Assuming you are playing a game that uses dice for task resolution, the Zombie Die can be seamlessly integrated into your game.

Games That Don’t Use Dice

If you are using a game that doesn’t use dice, or maybe a game that doesn’t use a randomizer at all, be creative. If it is a card-based mechanic, have players draw a card after they play a card, and check the result. If you are using one of the games that has no randomizer, consider bring a deck of cards to the table, or asking players to sully their narrative hands using dice, perhaps, rolling two dice of different colors, with one being the Zombie Die. The dice do not have to be the same size even: so, a GM could ask a player to roll a d10 and a d8, with the d8 acting as the Zombie Die.

WHAT IS THE ZOMBIE DIE?

Any time a character is rolling dice for any sort of task resolution, they have to roll a Zombie Die with their roll.

The GM determines the size of the Zombie Die (d4, d6, d8, and so on), depending on the tension for the particular scene.

If the natural roll of the Zombie Die is higher than the natural roll of the Task Resolution Die, *Something Bad Happens*. (Note: GMs will likely want to keep a piece of paper happy with the names of all significant PCs and NPCs on it, and record every Zombie Success!)

Something Bad Happens

What does it mean when Something Bad Happens?

I will offer up two possible (and common) narrative elements that should have your players, and their characters feeling the tension. But *Something Bad* doesn't have to be a noticeable effect, the GM can simply make a notation on their paper, and smile at the players. The players know that Something Bad has Happened, but Something Bad might be Happening off-camera.

More Zombies: This one is easy. More Zombies! Although the characters thought they were thorough, although they thought they burned all the zombies, although they thought they had secured their ramshackle farm house/ impenetrable keep, they were wrong. More Zombies show up. It could be just one Zombie who gets in a free attack, and is easily disposed of, or it could be that the Zombies have broken down the door, or found a way in! It could be that the Zombie arm not connected to any body, grabs a player character. Some games require encounters to be carefully crafted to be enjoyable, others do not. And just because Something Bad Happens doesn't mean that it has to be a difficult encounter. But, the GM should record it, because likely, there are also More Zombies somewhere else.

And maybe it isn't an encounter at all, maybe it is simply that the PCs know that their impenetrable fortress is going to be breached sometime, and that sometime is sometime soon!

Infection: What makes a Zombie? This is a difficult, almost existential question to ask, and is very much dependent on each specific GM. But one thing is almost always certain, within the Zombie genre there is a chance that characters will get

infected, and risk becoming Zombies. Some GMs might want a very granular system for this, but I offer up that such systems take all the drama and paranoia away from the genre. Recall, the *Zombie Die* is a narrative tool designed to spice things up!

So, each time Something Bad Happens, the GM just nods, and makes a notation next to the character(s) who had Something Bad Happen. That's all. How many times must Something Bad Happen before Infection? Well, my advice would simply be to not stick to a specific number, and vary the number from character to character, but in the end, once is enough.

- Read that again.
- Once is enough.

Should an infected player become a Zombie and thus an NPC? Maybe. But maybe, or more interestingly, the fellow characters know they are infected, and maybe being a Zombie isn't all bad? So consider giving an infected player some benefits, known or unbeknownst to them, for example, heightened strength, a greater ability to take damage, or Zombie senses. Go crazy depending on what the Zombies are like in your game.

Oh, the Players, they Doth Protest: "No, the Zombie totally didn't break my skin, I was wearing a hermetically sealed suit, and the Zombie never even hit me!" Your Zombie game should not have to deal with such things. After all, isn't it really all about Something Bad Happening?

Flashback Storytelling: So, the dice have determined that Something Bad Happens, and as GM you have notated this, but Something Bad doesn't necessarily need to happen right away, nor does it need to be something that

you tell the players about right away. Make a mental note of when and how Something Bad Happened to a specific player, and then later on, when they question you about Something Bad, feel free to expand upon a Scene that already happened. Explain to them, how when they were locking the door, some water trickled into that small cut on their face, or how that hangnail they were dealing with earlier might have come in contact with the Zombies in melee.

Paranoia: If a Player has had Something Bad happen to them, or maybe Something Bad has happened several times, this gives the GM the authority to describe possible effects. Alert the other players to how maybe that one character got Zombie goo splattered on them, and maybe some ended up in their mouth, explain how their complexion is becoming greyer in nature, explain to them how one character is sweating profusely, how their eyes are glazing over. Breed paranoia. Because, it isn't about letting players become Zombies, it is about making the other players think they might become Zombies.

Optional Third Element: Split the party up. This one is difficult, as many players will be resistant to being told what they do, but if in fact there is a certain type of GM/Player trust at the table, you can strongly encourage players to split up. After all, their fellow party-member looks a little shady, and maybe they really just need a good night's sleep, in a bed, by themselves, or maybe they have to take a squirt, or maybe they need to go examine their wounds in private to ensure that they are not infected, and don't want the other characters to know how severe their wounds really are.

What Sized Die: So, what sized die should you ask players to roll? For a moment that is relatively calm and peaceful, you might ask the players to only roll a d4, when they are rolling a d20 for task resolution. The chances of the d20 rolling lower than the d4 are slim, but there is always that chance. Have a handful of dice ready, that is d4, d6, d8, d10, d12, d20, d30, d100, maybe even d1000! And when that d4 rolls a 3 and the d20 rolls a 2, it brings in that wonderful random element that only dice can provide! And if the players are knee-deep in a very dangerous area, they may well be rolling d100 versus their d20 for task resolution.

Every Roll? Yes. Every time a player is rolling dice, they should be rolling a Zombie Die. This brings the wonderful element of chance and danger to every action. In a combat, characters may well be rolling many, many times, and frankly, fighting Zombies greatly increases the chances of Something Bad Happening. Maybe it's more Zombies, or maybe it is just all that Zombie goo splattering all over them and all the scratches and bites infecting a character. Don't let up. Let the dice drive some of the action of your game, even, and especially with games that require a GM to carefully allocate resources when designing an encounter. When that second and/or third wave of Zombies shows up, or when the Zombies the character thought they had dealt with show signs of not being dead yet (sadly, they probably won't say "I'm not dead yet," but YMMV and what happens at your table is the stuff *your* stories are made of.

EXPANDING THE DEFINITION OF "ZOMBIE"

Or...

WHY DOES IT ALWAYS HAVE TO BE ZOMBIES?

It is the opinion of this author that there *are* Zombie movies, and there are movies that are essentially Zombie movies. Maybe your characters are dealing with xenomorphs aboard a derelict mining spaceship, and the xenomorphs impregnate characters, and they show up en masse to kill everyone. Seems an awful lot like a Zombie movie to me! Please, feel free to use the Zombie Die in any game where you want to engender paranoia, and impart to the players that they are never safe. And

maybe when one of the characters has a result of Something Bad Happens, you inform that player that they do not want the xenomorphs eliminated. Rather, they need to get an impregnated character back to earth, because The Corporation is very interested in these xenomorphs. Allow that character to work against the others, and offer input when Something Bad Happens to other characters.

Be creative. Embrace this narrative mechanic in your game no matter how crunchy the system is as written.

And In the End: What will the Zombie Die do for you game? Characters will fight and kill Zombies, characters may end up killing one another, and they will never feel truly safe. And isn't that a Zombie-rific gaming experience?

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