

## **The Walking Dead**

Ok so any zombie game in my view must be a walking dead universe game. But to play in that world the game system needs to be defined with strict rules. The one thing PCs have is that the zombies are predictable. They have nothing else so I can't take that away.

I think walking dead is also a George A Romero type universe, in other words a classic zombie universe. In this world everyone is infected and any death is followed by their rise as a zombie. If the top of the brain stem is destroyed, head removed above the neck or shot in the head. The condition ends. In the TV series they described the cause as an infection which is animating only the brain's cortex. The primordial core beneath the modern brain, aka the brain's BIOS. I quite like that as it fits the comic and most other zombie fiction too.

I have noticed that in the Walking Dead there appear to be two types, walkers and lurkers. Walkers seem to wander, and they herd with other walkers in the process. Lurkers just sit down and only reveal themselves when a food source comes by.

Zombies only eat living flesh, though they do not gain anything from the act of doing so. No zombie is comprised of a person who was eaten by zombies, so presumably they eat the living cortex as well as any other part too. The majority appear to have survived a bite, some quite severe bites. Then became zombies after experiencing a fever followed by death.

I have also noticed that zombies in the walking dead do not see particularly well, and they need a fair amount of noise before they move towards it. Ie. players could talk in a low voice and not awaken a lurker. And they could fail a sneak roll and not alert a zombie.

Other things I have noticed is that corpses do not rise from the grave in this universe. In the winter it seems that those zombies that are walkers become lurkers until the thaw. Any dead person revives after about 20 minutes as a zombie, and a zombie bite causes fever then death after a couple of days. Depending on stamina checks.

### **Where?**

I have imagined a game set in the far north of central USA, perhaps in the state of Minnesota. I think it would be a nice twist to create a parallel story within the Walking Dead universe in this region, primarily because of the isolated locale and its harsh winters.

In the small remote town where the game begins, it was a thing that effected other people. They saw it on the news and heard it on the radio, but they did not encounter any zombies themselves. Then just as the harsh winter came in they lost communications from the outside world entirely. As the news reported just some sort of disease. They fear the worst, though can not imagine just how bad things really are.

The town is comprised of all sorts of stereotypical characters. A corrupt mayor, a bible thumping preacher, a mean sheriff, the nice old lady who runs the café, etc. Then there are the PCs. Ordinary folk really, but they are about to be thrown into the meat grinder of the walking dead universe the hard way.

### **Doing What?**

There is no fresh produce, only what the town's crofters have in their stores. The old folk are also well prepared. Simply knowing they may not get to the shops very often in the cold winter in their remote town means they have all stocked up. The town is also remote enough that private generators are reasonably common.

Before the game starts fresh produce, mains electric, and mains gas have all stopped. So people have already started to be concerned, the game may even open in a scene at the town hall where the townsfolk are discussing the issue.

While the meeting is going on some bad guys turn up and occupy the place by force. They have tales of horror from the towns, but are small minded enough themselves (it's the first year of the walking dead rising) that they think they can ride out the winter, pillage this town for food. Then return to a normal zombie free world in the summer. The bad guys are basically all strangers to the region, a lot of them are city folk, they do not know how to survive. They suffer several problems/ limitations because of this. Not least, they underestimate the PCs.

When/ if the bad guys are defeated/ allied with. Winter is at its harshest. Each building becomes a potential Zombie den, with food, gas and ammo the prize for the brave who take them on. There are other places outside of town too, a mall, several farms, other smaller towns. Plus bigger city type areas, like a prison, an army barracks, a research centre, a hospital, etc. One thing the Story Teller could do is to pick a real town and buy a map of the area.

Each type of area needs to have a set of tables pre-created so we can do random encounters and find rewards. Numbers of zombies, based on the population, counted by dice a roll. Then there is the question pf how many drugs, tins of food and guns people can carry? How do they acquire fuel and do they keep losing vehicles and back packs? Those elements are not resolved in this first draft.

### **Arms and Skills**

I have noticed that the cool characters in the series have more than just combat skills. Rick learns to farm and survive in the world by finding tins of food and other gear. He already knew how to shoot. Michone started as a completely ordinary young woman, she learned everything long before she met Rick, but it was after her character met the new zombie filled world. I think these characters have more than just 'wilderness survival', the hero's of the walking dead have a number of skills which make them each useful as a survivor beyond just fighting. And of course the determination to live.

Foraging in a walker infested supermarket, is not the same skill as foraging for nuts and berries in the wild. But both are needed. Stealth and the combat skills seem vital of course, but what other skills would you ascribe to the walking dead characters who show survival traits? And how can the GM accommodate a player who is not using ingenuity but, is just copying what they have seen or read?

I want players to be ingenious, but I also want to curb the copy cats, and I want to make the game .. a game. The main problem seems to be the brutality of the world, as the WoD rules stand there is no system which allows luck to be something that an experienced character develops.

For example should Michone become lost and separated from the group and surrounded by zombies, everyone would be pretty certain she would survive. If Tyrese gets locked in a gymnasium full of zombies, it is surprising that he survives without a scratch on him, it is definitely against the odds. But it must be possible for a player to achieve that feat too. Some players have lucky dice rolls some of the time, but nobody's luck lasts forever. So what we need is a game system which turns that around.

I think that the scene in the gymnasium is what gave Tyrese the hammer as an affectation. Almost like it was a magic weapon infused with supernatural zombie killing power. Though it is not actually a 'magic' item, maybe Tyrese could be given bonus as if it were? Maybe if a young person grew up and inherited the hammer he could also gain a bonus too, half as much as Tyrese, but something from knowing the legend. I would explain this as the character being inspired by the artefact. Even though it is just a normal hammer really.

I also think morals play a large part of the walking dead. For example killing for convenience repays later. The bad guys always receive their just desserts eventually. Of course several of the heroes have their moments skirting with the dark side, but they always seem to turn it around somehow by making penance. So perhaps we need a luck stat which somehow drops when evil deeds are committed and which can be regained with penance.

### **Magic?**

Other than the inspiration bonuses, there is no magic and no electricity. But there is still the potential for a character to be a scientist or inventor and to create things which us non-scientist GMs need to be able to rule on somehow.

### **Squishy heads?**

For some reason in zombie movies the skull becomes squishy. It is splatted with almost anything. It sounds silly but I think that is important. If a single bite causes PC death zombies need to be easy to kill.

### **Automatic weapons?**

Ok, so you need to hit them in the head. So why do automatic weapons work? I am thinking that they knock zombies over, and hits to the leg cause them to slow down. There are already rules in the WoD series of RPGs which cover this sort of thing.

### **Running, lots and lots of running.**

Traditionally zombie encounters require the party to run away. It is always going to be the best option. Which means that running away is going to feature a lot in this game. The system must be able to deal with this without it being repetitive. Clear maps are a must, players need to be able to see where they are going and should be allowed to guess which is the safest path, if they have not pre-scouted, it by appearance. There is a danger this could be; Run. Dice roll. New character. Repeat. Simply because a random door they did not know about conceals a dozen zombies. Against this is a small town there will be a limit to the number of possible zombies.

### **The Greatest Threat.**

The theme is important, this is a horror survival story whatever zombie universe you have seen. The story will continue until the spring when the snows thaw. A vast number of zombies will then start moving. The city will thaw first, and the zombies will wander in a random direction. For dramatic effect that direction is directly towards the struggling town. The town should think itself safe, and even be planning to grow new crops. The perfect idea. Simply go back to a pre civilisation culture.

I expect the town is going to be low on food and that means it will be scouting further afield. The PCs will be in the group which spies the superherd first. A large thing topples over and makes a loud noise. The front members of the superherd hear it and turn, directly at the town. A thousand zombies stomp slowly without sleep at 1 mph. They will pass the noise and keep going. It is all by chance (although predetermined by the story). The townsfolk are divided in opinion. Some think the defences will hold out. The PCs have less than a week before it is too late. The width of the herd mean they can possibly be circumvented, but how far do you go to be sure? Directly away is the most likely choice, but the herd will overtake them eventually. It is slow but it never sleeps. The prize of the city is also a possibility, could the townsfolk make it far enough away to allow them access to a much bigger town? What will the walkers do, they might just stop at some point, or they might change direction. Maybe the direction can be controlled?

## **Playability**

The game also needs to be fun to play. It's all very well scaring your friends with a ghost story, but after a few weeks of the Story Teller throwing zombie pack after zombie pack, and those packs increasing in difficulty each time. The players are going to notice that they are actually doomed, most people do not like that.

So how to ensure the game is fun?

I think that players need to achieve, and they need to make traction on their own odds for survival and have a future. The second two are easily supplied with a pragmatic storyline which keeps their hope alive.

A little light hearted comedy always helps. The chance to gain, or the chance to control may also entertain some players. Some players want their character to own cool stuff, who wouldn't want a tricked out, zombie killing pickup? Some players are happy to get to increase things and powers on their character sheet.

With all of that in mind I have hacked a rough system together using the white wolf game mechanics. Mostly this is all just notes to myself so apologies for the rough nature of them.

In this world there are only zombies, they have various stat levels. They are effectively immortal except for head shots. Luckily they can be crippled (-5 dice to movement actions, no penalty to grapple or bite) must grapple(8) then bite(7) - the extra difficulty from other WoD systems is for game balance. They can be Lurkers or Walkers, ie. they sometimes go dormant even if there is nothing trapping them.

In this universe there are no powers, no magic, nothing ..

Replacing that is:

Players are considered 'survivors' this is a rank above 'norm'. A survivor has at least 1 special power (see below), PCs gain 1 power at character creation at level 1. They may purchase more with freebie points at character creation or XP during the game. Powers are never taught, they gained. No more than one increase to any Attribute, Ability or Power can be made each week of in-game time. Backgrounds are awarded by the GM, and can be gained or lost at any rate that the GM chooses.

**Attributes** - Strength, Dexterity, Stamina, Charisma, Manipulation, Appearance, Perception, Intelligence, Wits  
Willpower (tick boxes, max 10, tick to gain a bonus success to any roll, must be used before rolling, refreshes each story)

**Abilities**

Talents (9) - Alertness  
Athletics  
Brawl  
Dodge  
Empathy  
Foraging  
Intimidation  
Leadership  
Subterfuge

Skills (9) - Animal Ken  
Camping  
Drive  
Firearms (incl. xbows)  
Mechanic: Car  
Melee  
Scavenging  
Stealth  
Tracking

Knowledges (9) - Building (wood, metal and stone)  
Cooking (incl. skinning, purify water, etc)  
Cultivation (farming for food, fuel, etc)  
Finding Haven  
Larceny  
Linguistics  
Medicine  
Science  
Stories

The following may also be taken, probably by no more than one player in any group, if any. Players may also wish to suggest more.

Extra Talents - Music (incl. singing)

Extra Skills - Archery  
Bowying & Fletching (also useful for xbows)  
Ride

Extra Knowledges - Technology (computers, cameras, radios, etc)  
Academics

### **Backgrounds**

3 Backgrounds are gained at character creation, but this section is primarily used for no XP character gains earned through roleplaying alone. And lost through bad decision or as part of a story which repays the player in some other way.

**Item** (rating is total, ie. a +1d to hit, +1d dmg would be rating 2), items are not magical the bonuses are because the character is inspired by the item. An item can be anything. Ie. Tyrese's hammer. Items also include Tech, a water purifier kit is massively useful. It might be home made or a military grade one. A pair of walkie talkies could be a rating 2 item. Etc.

**Buddies** (rating equals the number of norms in your group, norms do not get powers, can be experts. Useful buddies are important figures. Out of Jim and Dale it is possible (ok so a little unlikely) that Jim was the PC and Dale the NPC. When Jim died, his player decided to play Dale instead. Buddies do not need character sheets, unless their note paper gets too complex, as much as possible should be left without detail for as long as possible. If they need to roll they need some values. If they become a PC, these values are treated as minimums)

**Dependants** (rating equals the number of dependant norms in your group, each dependant taken at character creation is a -1 flaw, dependants usually have no skills of use other than doing chores and offering advice. Established dependants can be taken on missions, Eg. In the early days Carl needs Rick to take actions looking after him for some time before he becomes a buddy)

**Safety** (You made a good impression on a visit to a different survivor camp, or you know a safe place of another kind. They will offer you aide if you do not ask for too much. Each dot represents how many survivors (plus dependants and buddies) the safe group will accommodate and for how long. 1 week, 1 month, 6 months, 2 years, forever. Eg 4 dots would take you and your buddies and dependants for 2 years, or you and 3 other survivors and all of your collective buddies and dependants for 1 week)

**Scouted locations** (each dot is a few locations that are well known, something like the prison or a small town. Their resources are still going to be random when you go back, and definitely not full - you took something from them on your last visit at least. Encourage the player to help with the detail)

**Secret Stash** (a bunker or other hidden place, rating indicates what it contains for comparison. Location and contents must be detailed in some workable form, ie. XX days distilled water, XX days tinned food, XX miles of diesel fuel, XX rounds 9mm ammo, etc). Rating 1 would be 1 week worth of food and water for one person, 60 miles of fuel and 200 rounds of one caliber of ammo. Rating 2 would be 1 month worth of food and water, 300 miles of fuel and 1000 rounds of ammo. Rating 3 would be 6 months worth of food and water, 1000 miles of fuel and 5000 rounds of ammo. Rating 4 would be 1 year of food and water, 3000 miles of fuel and 20000 rounds of ammo. Rating 5 would be 5 years worth of food and water, 12,000 miles of fuel and 100,000 rounds of ammo. This background does not provide any defences, though the stash is assumed to be well hidden and offsite. When accessed roll Int+Stealth(5+rating), a failure indicates this stash was looted. 1 success and last accessed over a month ago 30% has been lost to decay or neglect. 2 successes and last accessed over a month ago and 10% has been lost. 3 successes or more and all is fine.

**Vehicle** (a single vehicle. A bike is 1 pt, a Harley with bull bars and a bit of character is 2 pts, a mobile home is 3 pts)

## Powers

Each power is a free actions to use, it must be declared in the initiative phase. Each power can be used a limited number of times each day. When the power rating is increased, the number of times the power can be used each day is increased. ie. The rating = a set of check boxes, max 5, refresh 1/day

XP cost = Increase cost is CRx5 for the first power learned, and CRx7 for all others. It costs 10 to learn the the first point in a power.

Chances of success are GM rolls, the GMN always determines the odds.

Descriptions and in character speaking challenges are also costs, in each case the GM must approve the effort or the power fails. Other players who shout out help, or offer "instead of that you could have said" cause the power to fail, they are viewed as shouting over the casting character, cancelling the effect. Unless the GM determines that the shouter is doing so to scupper the active player deliberately.

**Combat Reflexes** (tick to take an additional action this round, or to ignore all multiple opponent penalties for this round)

**Danger Sense** (tick to know if the next corner, junction or blind spot or behind the next door is either 'immediately dangerous' or 'safe/neither'. Ie. a zombie, an aimed gun or a booby trap is dangerous. A man who later stabs you in the back is not.)

**Daredevil** (tick to have a chance for a daring escape or movement method, chance is determined by how fitting and how specific the player's idea is) eg. there might be an old telephone wire angled just right from the corner of the building opposite to allow a swing to street level. Of course the player may not have a means to cut it, and after using it may have broken their hand. The right gear, properly maintained, is important but not a requirement.

**Encourage** (tick to untick any single allies power, ally must be able to hear in character, the player must say what their character would say which would encourage the ally. The table judges if those words were enough. The table may not assist)

**Fortitude** (the first level adds an additional box to the mauled health condition track, the next to the wounded health condition box, etc.)

**Fury** (tick to gain +1 to all physical attributes and ignore wound penalties for this action, but broken legs etc still cause limits)

**Gearhead** (tick to have a chance that one vehicle within sight will have keys and fuel and will work)

**Grit** (when grappled by a zombie, tick to make an attack with a held weapon without penalty, or to draw a weapon, or to grab a weapon within reach)

**Inspire** (tick to allow any visible ally to grant a single use of their power to a third ally. The ally with this power must specify which two allies and which power in the initiative phase when this power is declared. The ally with the power spends the point as if they had used it themselves. Any descriptive costs must be paid for by the recipient of the gifted power. Ie. if a description is required the third ally must tell it. When this power is revealed at the end of the initiative phase the ally with the power may refuse, if they do the costs for this power are still paid). When declared an additional cost the player must communicate in character a command which all three can understand.

**Luck** (tick to re-roll any roll made by the player. A story reason why must be given.)

**Resourcefulness** (tick to have a chance that a common item is in the room. A D10 roll of 4 would find a hatchet in a hardware store, the player would see it, or a sign indicating which isle it is in. If the roll is doubled, ie an 8+ is rolled then it might be within reach.)

**Preparedness** (tick to have a chance for any item under 1lb in your bag, except fuel, food, ammo or batteries. Does not need to be disposed of. Can be retained if desired. Can not be used if you do not have a bag)

**Staredown** (tick to make an opposed willpower(opponents willpower) check against a non-animal, non-zombie. The winner loses successes in dice for the next round of combat this scene.)

**Unbreakable** (activated after an attack, may only be activated before a damage

roll is made. tick to cause a successful zombie bite attack roll to be put to one side, the zombie missed you this time. Describe how as a cost to this power. Record the number of successes achieved. The next attack roll this zombie makes counts the postponed number of successes, not the roll itself. This can be used tactically to throw zombies at foes, the GM is free to use this tactic against you too)

MORE MAY OCCUR DURING A PLAYTEST, REMAIN OPEN TO SUGGESTIONS

Reasoning:

A scouting party would find someone with the resourcefulness ability very useful in finding food. You may think that groups of survivors would try to have at least one of these at all times. These are not supernatural abilities or character classes though. This power is not meant to be used like that, it is for the middle of a fight so a thing is near to hand to fight with. Generally it is assumed that these powers are not known about or understood. Only we the players know they even exist. Eg. Glenn is successful against all of the odds because he has this power, though he does not use it all of the time and anyone can find food. He finds a baby shop, when Lori is pregnant. This ability is about luck when you really need it, not day to day scavenging.

### More Rules

**Starvation** (each day without food requires a stamina(6) check or a -1 to all dice pools, including stamina, penalty is gained. Each time this is failed, start the clock again. Accumulate to -5 maximum. The next level over -5 failed is incapacitated, death will follow soon. Stamina can be boosted, meditation can increase the dice for this roll, as can some medicines, eating some non-nutritious substances, etc. This is recovered at an equally slow rate. Each day of food allows a stamina(8) roll. Each pass negates a day. If the roller has 0 or less stamina, then medical attention (a drip) is recommended, this allows a dice pool of 1. Not 1+ anything, just 1. The other techniques can still be self-applied. Fortitude has no effect on this event.

**The sacrificial limb** (This is a game where a single zombie bite can end your character. If you've dodged as much as is possible. Positioned yourself safely and generally done everything anyone could think of, you could still get bitten and that will end it all for you. This rule allows you to throw your buddies (not your dependants) into the line of fire. Provided they are nearby the bite which just struck you is deemed to have struck a random buddy in the same scene or who is in an equal amount of danger. That bite you just took is converted to bashing damage as the zombie chomps on your thick leather coat. If you have run out of buddies, well the same rule applies to one of your arms or legs. Another PC has a few rounds to quickly act and sever it above the bite. But you keep your character for a little longer so it might be worth it. Some players will choose to refuse this option. They are allowed to bow out gracefully, this is a player choice option)

**Dealing with loss** (a dead character usually leaves behind a few dependants, they may leave behind a buddy or two who were not present or the player thought was too useful to the rest of the party of survivors he is running with. These MUST be taken equally and randomly between each of the survivors. If a survivor has a particular affinity with one of them they may argue their case and avoid the randomisation. Use good judgement to validate these claims. It is usually reasonable to be in favour of dependants to be voluntarily adopted in this way. A dead PC may instead choose to select a surviving buddy, if he does at least one of the dependants and other buddies is added to his sheet. He may volunteer for all of them, the table should judge what is fair in this case.)

**Dealing with cruelty** (Each time a player commits a cruel act they gain a point of 'Turmoil'. A player may remove a point of turmoil when they atone for the act. The GM has the final say in what constitutes cruel and atonement for the act. A player may not roll more mental or social dice than 10 - Turmoil, calculate this value before wound penalties are applied. This represents a level

of unhinged disconnection that everyone can detect in them. It also effects their own inner metal faculties, causing distractions and reducing concentration. When they have gained more than 5 turmoil they are considered deranged. This causes additional negative effects, like a general callousness, or worse acceptance. A permanent flaw may be taken instead of seeking attonement for 5 points in one go. This is never removed. This is not a 'normal' thing in our, pre-zombie apocalypse eyes. Eg. the Occupants of Terminus. Deliberately cruel NPCs will most commonly flip flop between cruel and attonement. Special NPCs like the governor probably walk a thin line keeping a balance, cruel to one person, kind to another. Players who walk this fine line should be wary of who they are imitating)

HISTORICAL NOTES on how the above came into being:  
The Talents, Skills and Knowledges were taken from this master calculation list:

New Ability -       Camping (wilderness),  
                  Foraging (wilderness) - Identifies if a potential source of  
  something is worth the risk, ie. find water source,  
  fuel, ammo, food, batteries, etc  
                  Farming,  
                  Finding Haven (urban),  
                  Scavenging (urban) - as foraging  
                  Mechanic: compound skill (car, boat, generator, etc) ie. -1 if  
  not known  
                  Tracking  
                  Zombie Lore (just what are their powers anyway?)

Existing Ability -Empathy  
                  Brawl, melee, dodge, firearms (incl Xbows but not archery),  
                  Drive, Ride  
                  Alertness  
                  Athletics  
                  Intimidation  
                  Leadership  
                  Subterfuge  
                  Animal Ken  
                  Larceny (replaces security, back to the dark ages but still  
  useful)  
                  Stealth  
                  Commerce (replaces finance, did swapping an old shotgun for  
  this thing count as a trade up or a trade down?)  
                  Linguistics  
                  Medicine (extra useful, can reduce any wound by 1 (max))  
                  Science (how to purify water, make gunpowder, make bio fuel,  
  etc) and what to farm and what to scavenge for (+1 with  
  a book)

Removed Ability - Academics (still available, just not important)  
                  Computer (some will still work, but not enough for this to be  
  added to the generic sheet)  
                  Politics (nobody to vote for, other uses go to leadership)  
                  Survival (too generic and confusing)  
                  Expression, Performance (not enough to use it on, still  
  available to the artistic players though)  
                  Streetwise (no contacts to be found)  
                  Crafts (each needs detailed for this game, woodwork, etc is  
  assumed known by all a bit, nothing built can offer more  
  than a function eg. a door)  
                  Ettiquette (it's just not going to gain the player anything  
  useful)  
                  Investigation (dropped in favour of tracking)  
                  Law  
                  Occult (there is only one monster)

Removed backgrounds -  
                  Allies (other survivors, not NPCs)  
                  Retainers  
                  Contacts  
                  Generation  
                  Resources  
                  Status  
                  Influence  
                  Fame/ Infamy  
                  Mentor