

GURPS

Fourth Edition

ZOMBIES



By Sean Punch

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

BRAAAINS!



Do you cross the street to avoid the graveyard? Does a viral outbreak make you bolt the door? How about street drugs that turn abusers into cannibals, fungi that change insects into mindless biting machines, or people who swear they've spotted their dead loved ones laboring in the fields?



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- Advice on using zombies in any genre – not just horror.

GURPS Zombies requires the *GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition*.
The exhaustive analysis of the undead may save the life of any zombie fan.

By **Sean Punch**

Additional Material by S.A. Fisher, Kenneth Hite, Phil Masters,
William H. Stoddard, and Hans-Christian Vortisch

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STEVE JACKSON GAMES

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Dedicated in memory of Michael Ryan – friend, gamer, and fellow fan of B-movies.

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About GURPS

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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.

INTRODUCTION

Shaun: Don't say that!

Ed: What?

Shaun: The zed-word. Don't say it!

Ed: Why not?

Shaun: Because it's ridiculous!

– *Shaun of the Dead*

Why does **GURPS Zombies** exist? Because everyone loves zombies! In reality, of course, many people – including plenty of gamers – find zombies disgusting, ridiculous, or overused. Even fans have undying debates over what zombies are, how they should behave, and what sources are canonical. Helping gamers have fun even when facing these challenges is the *real* motivation for **Zombies**. Converting rabid non-fans is a job for the zombie plague, but this book hopes to “turn” the curious.

For starters, **Zombies** looks beyond rotting shamblers. An inclusive subject-matter guide rather than a worldbook, it has something to offer all zombie enthusiasts – not just devotees of George A. Romero and his walking dead, but also fans of the fast-moving infected of recent films (like *28 Days Later*), fantasy gamers seeking lowly undead slaves for necromancers, and purists interested in Vodou tradition. These viewpoints and countless others have a home here. Can they all get along? That's up to you!

Zombies doesn't confine itself to horror, either. Zombies are *monsters*, and all kinds of stories need those. They can be antagonists in sword-and-sorcery fantasy, sci-fi action, and many other speculative genres. They're often ridiculous enough to fit comedy. Even when zombies are horror, they needn't be *survival* horror – a lone zombie terrorizing a village yields old-fashioned creature horror or modern splatter, while zombies serving a vampire master suit stylish Gothic horror.

To accomplish all this, **Zombies** delves into many fictional sources but takes the tack that *visual* media offer the best inspirations. Zombies rarely have much to say; the shrieks (or laughs) they evoke stem from their deeds and appearance. It's the *sight* of the shell of a person that thrills and chills. **Zombies** brings this excitement to the tabletop.

Whatever zombies and genres you like best, **Zombies** is sure to inject new life into your campaign!

ZOMBIES 101

GURPS Zombies is a long book. Reading it cover to cover might make a zombie out of you, the dear reader. A few words on avoiding that fate:

Everybody should read Chapter 1. It explores the five Ws and one H of folkloric and fictional zombies, establishing terms and tropes invoked throughout the book. For GMs, it's a treasury of ideas. For players, it's a source of worries – what parts will the GM use? For casual readers, it's the chapter without complex game stats.

Players should then read Chapter 2, on creating and equipping PCs. Those who like to strategize might first review the mechanics governing how zombies find, attack, and infect heroes, in Chapter 4 – but much of this depends on GM decisions, so it won't all be reliable information! Regardless, see Chapter 5 to learn what to expect in a **Zombies** campaign.

Game Masters should follow Chapter 1 with Chapter 5 for further inspiration, visit Chapter 3 to select or create zombies, and finally read Chapter 4 to learn how to use those zombies.

Casual readers will find Chapter 5 a useful source of non-**GURPS** campaign ideas. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 might also be inspiring, but they pull no punches when it comes to rules and stats.

*The dead don't walk
around, except in very bad
paperback novels!*

– George,
*in Let Sleeping
Corpses Lie*

PUBLICATION HISTORY

This is the first edition of **GURPS Zombies**. It was strongly inspired by the author's earlier work, **GURPS Undead** (for **GURPS Third Edition**), portions of which have been updated to **GURPS Fourth Edition** in this book.

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), and the **GURPS Action, GURPS Dungeon Fantasy, and GURPS Power-Ups** series . . . and the list keeps growing. Sean has been a gamer since 1979. His non-gaming interests include cinema, cooking, and wine. He lives in Montréal, Québec with his wife, Bonnie, and their two cats, Banshee and Zephyra.

CHAPTER ONE

GETTING TO KNOW YOUR ZOMBIES

Burt: I thought you said if we destroyed the brain, it'd die!

Frank: It worked in the movie!

Burt: Well, it ain't working now, Frank!

– *The Return of the Living Dead*

When dabbling in zombies, the most important question to ask (your survival might depend on it!) is, “What is a zombie?” There are many common answers:

Walking dead. Zombies *can* be “undead,” but that isn’t required. In Vodou folklore, they don’t always die – they might be still-living people turned into slaves by sinister drugs or black magic, their brief visit to the grave serving to disguise the misdeeds of the *bokor*. And plenty of entities that qualify as “walking dead” aren’t zombies, vampires being the best-known example.

Monsters that infect humans to make more monsters. This is another thing that’s often true of vampires but almost never of traditional zombies, like the Vodou variety. Even in B movies, contagion isn’t universal – ancient curses, toxic waste, radiation, and myriad other plot devices give rise to beings that viewers and screaming victims call “zombies.” Infection isn’t the *definitive* zombie trait.

Humanoid monsters that come in hordes. Clustering is just a side effect of infection. It isn’t necessary – lone reanimators in horror stories create one-off zombies all the time, while fantasy necromancers often seem to have limits on how many zombies they can control. Anyway, zombies haven’t cornered the market on two-legged monsters that come in vast hordes; consider orcs or the legions of Hell. There must be something more.

Former humans that eat people. Some B-movie zombies do this. Others savage people for no obvious reason, and in a few cases the story takes pains to explain how they lack a working digestive system. Meanwhile, real-world cannibals and psychos eat their victims without being zombies. Many decidedly un-zombie-like humans-turned-monsters – such as werewolves – eat people, too.

So what *is* a zombie, then? There is a recurring theme: *the mindless shell of a human being*. He might be mindless because of disease, drugs, or black magic – or, yes, because he’s dead. As a result of being mindless, he

might revert to primitive, animalistic behavior, like running in packs and attacking prey. And the ravages of time or the force that made him a zombie might eventually erase the last vestiges of his humanity. But all that is of secondary concern.

First and foremost, the zombie is *us*, minus the social behaviors that keep us polite, absent the personalities that make us unique. The zombie is a human body – sometimes living, sometimes dead – marching on without a human mind in control. Maybe this is inevitable, or perhaps zombies don’t start that way but grow more monstrous with time; just possibly, some zombies never quite descend into complete mindlessness. But when human judgment is replaced by some sort of program – an agenda imposed by black magic or mad science, the biological imperative of an infectious organism, the base instincts of a brain deprived of conscious decision-making by chemicals or radiation – the result is a zombie.



What Are We Dealing With?

Before delving too deeply into zombies, it's necessary to establish some ground rules.

Mindless, Not Brainless

GURPS Zombies assumes that zombies are, with rare exceptions, *mindless*. In game terms, this doesn't mean that all zombies have IQ 0, like brand-new clone bodies. Some might, but here, "mindless" means that zombie "racial" templates drastically penalize IQ (racial IQ modifier of -2 or worse); restrain or remove free will via Reprogrammable (p. B150), Slave Mentality (p. B154), or Automaton (p. B263); and/or impose disadvantages consistent with animalistic behavior, like Bestial (p. B124). It doesn't follow that when individuals or races have such traits, they're zombies – only that when someone acquires or is afflicted with a template that stacks atop his racial one, inflicting one or several of these mental shortcomings, **Zombies** reserves the right to call him mindless (it's shorter than this explanation!) and label him a zombie.

Dead or Transformed?

Many zombie fans insist that a corpse is a prerequisite for a zombie. **Zombies** doesn't assume this, for several reasons. First, while the earliest traditional monsters that one could call "zombies" were undead, this line blurred later on, and there's a good case for the term "zombie" to mean a mind-controlled living slave; for details, see *Historical Zombies* (pp. 11-14). Moreover,

fiction (see *Fictional Zombies*, pp. 14-17) often borrows from tales of demons that were never alive, or applies zombie-movie tropes – notably cannibalism, contagion, and mindlessness – to strangely afflicted living people. Finally, even in strict zombie canon, *it isn't always clear* that the erstwhile human expired from the infection or curse that zombified him; some zombies crawl from graves or rise after being pronounced dead, but often all we see is victims sickening, falling immobile, and rising. Thus, we accept acquired mindlessness as sufficient.

Slow vs. Fast

Another vocal debate concerns whether zombies must be slow-moving. This image originates from tales of drug-addled Vodou zombies, which came along relatively late in zombie lore, amplified by the opinions of influential horror filmmaker George A. Romero, who strenuously insists that zombies *must* be dead and the dead *can't* move quickly. Asserting that rot and rigor should slow a zombie is applying logic to an illogical subject, however – traditional undead are typically *faster* and *stronger* than the living, and it's valid to claim that zombies, pushed beyond human limits by inhuman forces, should move quickly. Also, the "atrophied corpse" argument isn't applicable to living zombies modeled on drug-using maniacs (*Zombies in the News: Zombie Drugs*, p. 22) or on rabies victims (*Zombies in the News: Zombie Diseases*, p. 20), who may be very fast indeed.

WHY ZOMBIES?

Why not?

More seriously, zombies make compelling monsters – perhaps even a great theme for an entire campaign – for a wide variety of reasons. For one thing, they are *us*, minus a working mind, staring back with hollow eyes. That alone is plenty scary, and might be all that's needed for pure horror!

Zombies also tend to be *straightforward* in a way that other monsters aren't. While a curtain of secrecy similar to that popular in vampire and werewolf tales can make them scarier (see *Conspiracy*, p. 146), it isn't required; gamers don't expect scheming subtlety from creatures as dumb as zombies. This directness can spare the GM significant world-building effort. Related to this is the fact that while using devious, powerful monsters as day-to-day antagonists is hard on suspension of disbelief ("We fight vampires 24/7, yet nobody believes they exist?"), an unrelenting backdrop of zombies is a traditional device for *enhancing* the mood. This can save the GM even more time, as he needn't dream up alternative threats or new scenery on a regular basis – the zombies are a constant, visible danger to everyone.

Still, it's possible to dig deeper, identify some broad thematic categories, and expand on them. Understand that these explanations aren't exclusive, though – many campaigns with zombies will invoke all of them. What varies is the mix.

ZOMBIES AS FEARS

Obviously, zombies can be scary. When trotted out in the modern media – when made the subject of cute video games, funky dance numbers, and trendy "zombie walks" (p. 16) – they lose some of that. Scratch the surface, though, and *zombies are fear*. No stylish wardrobe or coy dialog hides the fevered aggression of the infected, the inexorable advance of the sorcerer's slaves, or the shreds of rotting flesh caught in the ghoul's teeth. And this never quite goes away, even in soft focus; the zombies in the film *Fido* may be tame, and those in *Shaun of the Dead* might seem silly, but neither would hesitate to tear you apart under the right circumstances.

Twofold Terror

On the most fundamental level, two distinct mechanisms make zombies scary. These often occur together – but on their own, they give rise to very different kinds of stories.

Fear of Zombies

This is the obvious fear. Nearly all zombies are mindless. Most never rest. Many are inhumanly strong, tough, and pain-resistant, and a few are *fast* on top of that. If one attacks you, there's no reasoning with it – a fight is certain, and it has lots of advantages there. You might not be able to flee it, if it is fast or gets hold of you, and even if you do, it can search for you forever.

Suppose the zombie *isn't* out to get you – it is a listless shambler, is restrained by mad science or sorcery, or otherwise doesn't regard you as a target. It's still terrifying to look at. At best, it's a hypnotized human slave with red, sunken eyes and sore-covered skin, filthy from forced labor and possibly regular burial. At worst, it's a rotting corpse with maggots writhing in empty eye-sockets, its stench almost as deadly as its bite.

In short, zombies are innately scary. This is the fear exploited by traditional creature and splatter horror, and action-horror crossovers (such as dungeon fantasy and monster-of-the-week sci-fi). Yet it's unsubtle and in fact newfangled . . .

Fear of Becoming a Zombie

This is the less-obvious fear, but also the older one. Three centuries before the first video game or RPG, 250 years before the first zombie movie (*White Zombie*), and 100 years before the first Gothic novel (*The Castle of Otranto*), folk who knew of zombies didn't fear being attacked by them. No, there were scarier things out there, such as the sorcerers who *made* zombies in Vodou lore. What people feared was *becoming* such a monster, because that meant giving up whatever free will, joy, and life they had to serve a master as an eternal slave. And slaves being valuable assets, masters didn't set them on people who might fight back. Settling scores was a job for magic – magic like turning enemies into zombies, say.

Flash forward to the modern zombie story and this fear hasn't disappeared. The scary thing about infected zombies, living or undead, *isn't* their combat abilities or disgusting appearance. In fact, stories often take pains to depict individual zombies as stupid, slow, easily defeated, and not terribly threatening. What's truly terrifying in many cases is that the tiniest scratch or drop of blood can turn you into one of them. Hack and slash all you want – one mistake means you may win the fight but lose *everything*.

This fear is most often exploited for psychological and survival horror, supernatural mystery and suspense, and even social commentary (pp. 9-10). However, it also feeds back into the fear of zombies, strengthening genres that use it. Zombies that can turn you have another inhuman power to fear – and another fear means more psychological power. The zombie that's an imposing physical threat *and* capable of turning you into one of its kind is twice as scary. The same goes for the zombie slave that can overpower you

and carry you off to the *bokor* or mad scientist for workplace orientation.

Symbols of Fear

Beyond being objects of dread in themselves, zombies can embody more abstract fears. Such subtle, arty stuff is rarely the deliberate focus of B movies. However, the GM looking to run a campaign rather than a one-shot survival-horror adventure might want to explore a few of these possibilities.

Fear of Death

Undead zombies have “dead” as a prerequisite, while the infected and enslaved kinds are rarely long for this world. This makes almost all zombies powerful symbols of death. In horror settings, they're often found in places of the dead, like cemeteries. Dying, dead, or undead, they remind us of where we're headed. And they can do this without trying to kill anyone – whether they serve traditional sorcerers, fantasy necromancers, or priests of fictional death gods, they need only stand around silently to convey that the dead have no voice, in every sense.

The zombies that best evoke the fear of death are mute, slow, and dull. They lack will. If they're well-preserved, like bodies embalmed for burial, so much the better – the near-normal appearance serves to emphasize how close life is to death. Then again, those that serve death cults might be all gleaming skulls and scythes, literal avatars of Death.

Fear of Decay

It isn't always the end result that frightens us – sometimes it's the process. The rotting undead, the infected ravaged by disease, and the overworked zombie slave all show us that maybe death would be merciful, because who would want to walk around riddled with insects and gaping wounds? There's peace in death, but only pain in fever and necrosis and munching centipedes.

To evoke the fear of decay, zombies must look the part. If they're alive, they should be sore-ridden, vomiting, and preferably mangled. If they're undead, hold that thought but add some rot and beetles and maggots. It's especially dramatic if they're weak, slow, and fall apart messily when taken down – no player is going to say, “Hey, I want to be undead!” when that means being one accident away from collapsing into a pile of grue. Done right, no player is going to want to let such a zombie get anywhere near his PC, either.

Fear of Disease

Decay isn't the only horror that infected zombies convey; there's also disease in its own right. People have a healthy fear of infection – that's a survival mechanism, arguably a human instinct. We fear sickness even though we know that normal pathogens incubate for days to weeks (two to 21 days for Ebola, two to 12 *weeks* for rabies), that the deadliest diseases have survivors, and that if we beat the odds, we'll still be human.

But zombie plagues aren't so forgiving. They work in hours, minutes, or perhaps seconds. There are no survivors that the plot doesn't call for. Worst of all, victims who succumb become *monsters*, and go forth to infect friends and loved ones. How's your fear of infection now?

The only strict requirement for zombies to evoke fear of disease is that they're in fact infectious. The means of infection can vary: a pathogen borne in saliva or blood, a contagious curse, even foul macroscopic creatures that breed inside the body and creep out to crawl into the orifices of the living. Throw in a little decay to make the disease even scarier.

Fear of Conformity

While many people throughout history have been happy enough to live according to tradition and be part of the crowd, they didn't have to contend with cities holding tens of millions (modern-day Jakarta contains more people than were alive worldwide when the Egyptians were building pyramids for their undead), a globe with *billions* of souls (we crossed that line in around 1800), or runaway urbanization (as of 2005, more than 50% of us lived in cities). And countless forces, from communist propaganda to capitalist cola ads, say "Conform." The threat of facelessness hangs over us all.

Zombies are a wonderful symbol for this fear. Play up their lack of creativity, will, and identity. Make them servants that do what they're told. Emphasize the huge mobs of the classic apocalypse scenario, and show how people who had names, lives, and loves get sucked into the faceless sea known only as "the horde." Or use infection again, but this time to capitalize on our fear of becoming just like everybody else, individuality supplanted by an acquired program.

Fear of Cannibalism

When some serial killer chops up and eats his victims, or a drug-crazed maniac chews somebody's face off, it freaks people out. And with good reason – *humans* don't do that. Cities and laws and manners set us apart from the hyenas,

right? Zombie ghouls turn that on its head. They represent the veneer of civility crumbling, exposing us for the opportunists we are.

The classic way to strike fear into hearts with cannibalism is to have the zombies eat people. Undead ghouls are scary enough, consuming the living to maintain an unnatural state. Far scarier are ghouls that aren't dead yet – crazy or infected zombies that evoke all the terror of a psycho killer without the faintest hope that words will be understood or that remorse will grant a reprieve. Mutant teeth are always a nice touch.

Even grimmer, what if it isn't the *zombies* who are eating people? A zombie outbreak could leave survivors hungry, and we're made of meat . . .

Fear of the Afterlife

All of the previous fears are *mundane*. We witness conformity, disease, and decay daily. Even if we're fortunate enough to avoid firsthand brushes with death, the news reminds us of it in the form of crime and warfare. Cannibalism is rare, but we see predation and madness, which are close enough. But the afterlife isn't ours to know. And that's scary.

Many could accept life *ending* at death, but what if the afterlife isn't a paradise? What if it's full? What if our sins condemn us to eternal torment? Zombies may well be the face of divine punishment, the fate of souls turned away from Heaven's gates, or the consequences of Hell being too full to hold the evil dead.

Zombies that play on fear of the afterlife work best when they retain a small vestige of the person they're made from – they might be physically intact or just repeat mindless phrases from life. Those being punished may be cursed, perhaps in awful ways that are dangerous for the living.

Ones rejected from Hell should exhibit malice in their actions and appearance. In all cases, occult lore or supernatural powers in the setting ought to reveal them *not* to be soulless. Then the PCs can worry about whether dispatching them is duty or sacrilege.

Fear of the *Lack* of an Afterlife

Perhaps worse than reaching the afterlife and finding out that it's full or horrific, or that you don't qualify, is dying and not going anywhere. Religious or not, most of us assume that consciousness thankfully ends at death; then either we wait for Judgment or reincarnation, or we're flat-out *done*. But with the right metaphysics – or the wrong chemicals or radiation in the burial ground – maybe our corpses just sit around, vaguely aware. And sometimes they get up. Death isn't necessary for this fear to take root . . . what if the mutant virus or experimental serum makes you *immortal*, but also mindless?

This fear goes well with zombies that spontaneously erupt from graves. They're not necessarily evil – they just have nowhere to go. The *living* kind, made by immortality-granting superscience, may be fiendishly tough. In all cases, if there's no Heaven or Hell, then juju and undead-turning powers might do little good. If the players are roleplaying well, their characters should be seriously worried about death not because they fear it, but because they fear the aftermath.

The Z-Word

"Zombie" entered Western lexicons – including Dutch, English, French, and Spanish – from the *Vodou* faith (colloquially, "Voodoo"). There, it's customarily spelled "zombi" or "zonbi," and can be associated with any of living-but-drugged slaves, animated corpses, or bound spirits that augment the power of a *bokor* (sorcerer). Details vary by individual tradition and with anthropological (mis)interpretation.

Having been developed by African slaves in the Caribbean, much of Vodou's jargon has African origins. Here the trail gets hard to follow, as various Niger-Congo languages offer a bewildering variety of similar terms: *ndzumbi*, *nzambi*, *nzumbe*, *nzumbi*, *zambi*, *zumbi*, etc. Meanings encompass "fetish," "god," and "cadaver or spirit of a dead person." Vodou practitioners might have borrowed such a name to describe a bound spirit, the fetish in which it was bound, a slave created by such a binding, or a deity worshipped by zombie-makers.

It's safe to say that somebody going for a Vodou feel could use any of these variants. To the typical gamer, they'll sound about the same and send the right message. For other options, see *Ghouls, Infected, and Walkers* (p. 10).

Then they can seek immortality only to learn that it results in zombies, too.

ZOMBIES AS SOCIAL CRITICISM

Zombies needn't be scary, though – at least not in the deep-seated, horror-story sense. They or their existence can be allegories for other concerns. Some of those things might scare us, but that isn't what matters. The point is that battling (even *becoming*) the zombie is an analogy for a struggle against a social ill. Most of the better zombie movies play around with this, if subtly, and so can the crafty GM. He can mine such associations for bits that would enhance the zombie story, adapting elements of the social problem to the zombies or having the problem *cause* the zombies.

Drug Abuse

It's almost too easy to compare zombies to addicts. For starters, numerous drugs leave people in a zombie-like state – at least mentally, if not in appearance. Dealers prey on users of hard drugs, who in turn prey on everybody else for drug money. Dealers also go out and hook people, to create more customers. Once immersed in drug culture, abusers lose possessions, then social ties, and finally memories. The parallels with mindless, wasted, violent ghouls with a craving should be slap-in-the-face obvious; those with sinister *creators* of zombies, only slightly less so.

The GM who wants to import aspects of drug culture into a zombie story is tilling fertile ground. Look up the real-world effects of drug abuse and use these to inspire the zombies' mental and physical traits. Match the appetites of ghouls to the patterns of addiction, with more and more flesh needed to satisfy the cravings, and the effects of greater usage accelerating the loss of humanity. Have the zombies congregate in "bad areas," whether because they instinctively know that there's safety in numbers or because ordinary people have ghettoized them.

And certainly, drug culture could give rise to any number of zombie stories. After all, some takes on Vodou explicitly identify drugs as the cause of zombies – perhaps a modern urban *bokor* is the area's biggest pusher? If his poison is made from dead people, especially from brains, then users may decide to harvest their fix from passersby. There need not be an identifiable mastermind, however; in a weird-science story, when junkies turn to some industrial chemical for a high, zombies are a probable consequence. Finally, don't forget that drug culture is a hotbed of disease. If a zombie plague is going around, then those sharing needles and prostituting themselves for drugs will be among the hardest hit.

Overpopulation, Overconsumption, and Pollution

Another parallel is that between modern economics and a zombie disaster. This one is harder to get at first. The key to seeing it is to note that there are hordes of us and we're devouring a lot of resources (perhaps far more than we need), creating a demand that fuels industry. Production

poisons the world, and then our garbage further desecrates the land. And in many cases, we're doing this not because it's necessary but because it's expected – ads and peer pressure tell us that it's a good idea. *We* are the zombies in this picture, increasing our numbers and always *consuming*, possibly just to do someone's bidding.

Many elements of these ills are fairly begging to be borrowed into a zombie scenario. Resource depletion is the big one – if the zombies are ghouls, they'll eventually run out of people to eat, and being mindless, they won't think to conserve. If some zombies are different from others, they may well experience the equivalent of class struggle or war; with magic or sufficiently weird science in the picture, they might rapidly evolve to obtain a winning advantage, with humans caught between "factions" composed of ever-scarier monsters. Then again, the winners might be the zombies who eat less, or change to thrive on plants, or otherwise develop traits that are unusual for ghouls.

There are also lots of ways to present a zombie story as a *symptom* of overpopulation and overconsumption. Many a fictional zombie outbreak originates in a dump full of biological, chemical, or radioactive waste; in a fantasy setting, *magical* dumps are an interesting possibility. Or perhaps products from Big Industry cause the problem – an unsafe vaccine, an unapproved additive, corners cut at the sausage factory, or who knows what else? For a weirdly comedic take, "zombies" might be people who snap as a consequence of too much junk food, media bombardment, and rush-hour stress. And of course a crowded city, an overburdened medical system, overtaxed water and food supplies, and cars and jets zipping rapidly between population centers could only help spread a zombie plague.

Propaganda and Totalitarianism

The term "zombie" has been applied to blind adherents of social systems for a reason: Such people come awfully close to the classic brainwashed slave. Not everybody accepts the theory of memes, but there's no denying that some ideas are contagious and that not everyone who adopts them analyzes them first. If they did, then the likes of Hitler, Stalin, and Pol Pot wouldn't get very far. And totalitarian states typically try to eliminate people who differ, assimilate those who remain, and spread their blight to neighboring lands. A lot like infectious zombies, really.

Concepts useful for zombie tales are legion here. For instance, there's the "innocent idea" that isn't – it starts small, takes root, and then takes over. This could describe the progress of a zombie curse or plague, which is subtle and stealthy ("It's just the flu."), and only shows its hand when it's too late. There's also motivation to consider; a zombie horde *might* be a shambling, disorganized mass, but what if there's a "hive mind" behind it, driving human-wave attacks that would be the envy of the world's most oppressive regimes? And if zombies are necromantic servants or mad-science constructs, they might truly march in lockstep and behave like the most fanatic of suicide commandos.

Going in the other direction is even better, though. To start with, what oppressive regime *wouldn't* like a surefire way to keep people in line? If the local state of the art in sorcery, demon worship, or weird science offered such a thing, you can be certain that totalitarians would adopt it.

The question becomes whether they would control the results or if, as with so many great leaps forward, zeal would prevail over prudence. And then there's the *Pontypool* approach: the meme *is* the thing, and merely listening to Their propaganda turns you into a zombie.

ZOMBIES AS TARGETS

Everything so far might be thinking the issue to death, though. Zombies often appear in fiction – and especially in RPGs – for another, far less sophisticated reason: to offer a “safe” target for exciting action violence. Yet even this can be given a fancy explanation.

For as long as there have been adventure tales – starting with the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (second millennium B.C.), at least – heroes have beaten, chopped, impaled, burned, shot, exploded, and otherwise mangled the bad guy of the day. While this might be yet more allegory, it's often explicit propaganda. A single villain is easy to find: a deposed ruler or an enemy leader, perhaps, or someone the audience deems a criminal. Hordes of villains are trickier, because then you're dallying with mass murder or genocide, which have never been easy topics – not even when treated with Old Testament reverence.

Canny storytellers give this nasty job to an enemy in a declared war, or to a race for which the intended audience bears little love. For the modern Western reader, the best example in the first category would be Nazis. If we're

being frank rather than blinkered, then as recently as our great-grandparents' memory, the second has included indigenous peoples everywhere, dying at the hands of colonial armies and colonists. Today, Nazis still merit disdain, but many question the morality of keeping their memory alive. Targeting an actual ethnic group, meanwhile, is pure bigotry. (Indeed, the two concerns are faces of the same coin.)

So where does one find legions of foes for genuine good guys to mow down with moral impunity? In a fantasy story, you can invent “monster races” like orcs, with evil in their DNA, or you can posit Evil Empires that resemble Nazis with swords and pet demons in place of rifles and panzers. In science fiction, you have endless choices, including soulless robot or cyborg armies, inhuman alien bugs, and Evil Empires that are a lot like Nazis with blasters and spaceships in place of rifles and panzers. And in any story with strong occult elements, you can have the hosts of Hell.

But when none of that fits, zombies will work. They'll work in fantasy, raised by a black-clad and unquestionably evil necromancer waving a skull-tipped wand. They'll work in science fiction, created by mad science, weird science, or superscience. And they'll work in tales of the occult, animated by cursed burial grounds or a *bokor*, or turned loose as the hosts of Hell. If you need lots of bad guys for the PCs to take out without anyone getting broken up over it, zombies will always work. Still, there are degrees of this.

Ghouls, Infected, and Walkers

Not everyone likes the word “zombie.” Even those who do might want a few other terms for a game which features a variety of zombies. Fortunately, fiction offers plentiful options:

cadaver, carcass, corpse, or dead: These words retain their usual meanings in settings with zombies, but an adjective like “living,” “returned,” or “walking” denotes a zombie – usually an undead one – and people sometimes omit the extra word.

ghoul: Zombies that eat people are often given this name, which has its origins in the Arabian *ghul*, a monstrous eater of the dead. This term is used in many B movies – including some in which the zombies don't actually eat the dead!

hungry dead or ravenous dead: Examples of **dead** embellished with an adjective, typically to describe a kind of **ghoul**.

infected: Near-universal label in modern fiction for zombies created by a pathogen. Purists sometimes point to the use of a distinct term as evidence that these creatures aren't zombies, but if it looks like a zombie and acts like a zombie . . .

living dead: The single most common example of **dead** decorated with an adjective, just about always meaning an undead zombie.

raised, reanimated, reawakened, or revived: Alternative names for deliberately created zombies, usually undead ones.

returned or risen: Yet more terms for undead zombies – typically ones that weren't raised on purpose.

walker: Sometimes shorthand for **walking dead**, but also appears in RPGs and video games with adjectives that imply otherwise; e.g., “plague walker” for **infected**.

walking dead: Another common example of **dead** with an adjective, used to mean an undead zombie.

The Name Game

Fantasy games (particularly *video* games, because a computer can organize a bewildering variety of zombie variants in a way that a GM can't) regularly add adjectives that describe the zombie's origins or appearance. These often imply special powers. Examples include “burning dead” for a zombie that's charred or even on fire, “drowned corpse” for a zombie that emerges from underwater, “rot walker” for a putrid, diseased zombie, and so on. Doubling up to yield terms like “ghoulish returned” and “risen walker” is also common. And some monsters are named for their defining trait, such as “plague-bearer” as a synonym for infected, or “corpse-eater” instead of ghoul.

Fodder Zombie

Deliberately animated zombie targets are often little more than makeweights. Need a quick army? Raise one from the cemetery or inject the 3rd Space Soldier Division with that experimental serum. When cannon-fodder zombies occur spontaneously, and serve no one, they're instead an environmental hazard along the way to the *real* adventure: "We have to cross the Harrowed Dun. That means zombies." A few elements define zombies that fill such minor roles.

First, the fact that they were once people is simply *ignored*. Presumably, the mortal owner of a dead body went on to his reward before his remains started walking around, while a still-living creature volunteered for the procedure. The point is, zombie legions are a disposable asset, while random hordes are seen as little but dangerous predators.

Second and more important, zombies in this role are fundamentally "speed bumps." If the zombies constitute an organized army, then the *real* baddies are evil priests, necromancers, or undead higher up the food chain (the usual suspects being vampires, liches, and mummified pharaohs). If the zombies are spontaneous, then the *real* monsters are something else – something that may have nothing to do with the zombies (the dragon's lair is on the far side of the Haunted Heath).

Finally, such zombies *can't* be deep. They might nominally embody fears (pp. 6-9), but that's window dressing. The GM may have a social message (pp. 9-10) in mind, but the players are free to ignore it. The zombies are here mostly to fight.

Cathartic Zombie

Zombies meant for smashing don't have to be devoid of emotional or moral weight. But when they aren't, the desired effect is typically catharsis. This might ostensibly be for the PCs – but often, it's really for the *players*. If their characters had a hard time in the last few battles, give them

some zombies to trounce. If everything in the campaign is caught up in a big, complicated plot, take a timeout for less thinking and more fighting.

This doesn't mean that the GM has to ignore the *characters'* motivations. Portray zombies as intrinsically evil (vomited forth from Hell, possessed by evil spirits, or similar), and righteous do-gooders can kick arse for their lord. Position the zombies as the *product* of evil (raised by The Devil or dark sorcery), and the same situation results. Blame science gone weird or wrong, and you inspire heroic cries of "Die, foul abomination against Reason!" Even the least-honorable monster-hunter might get to win zombie treasure or a bounty, satisfying his greed. Everybody gets to have fun playing a role . . . and trashing zombies.

This works best when the zombies are undead. Killing live people for the fun of it isn't a healthy pastime for heroes. Pretending to do so isn't much good for players, either.

Unfortunate Zombie

And sometimes the zombie needs destroying *for his own good*. Perhaps the zombie infection or serum causes horrible pain, which is why the zombie is savage, and forces the former person to watch helplessly from within, which is why it's mindless. Maybe some necromantic spell or zombie curse is keeping the soul of the body's original (or *current*) owner from going on to his reward. A still-living zombie might be so run down by his ordeal or so horrified at his actions that he wants to die.

In that case, there's a kind of catharsis, or at least liberation, on both ends of the gun or sword. If the zombie-hunters win, *both* sides win. The brave heroes get to live to fight another day, and to lecture about how they brought closure to the dead or laid evil to rest. The zombies get their peace. This kind of thing *does* work well with fears (pp. 6-9) and social criticism (pp. 9-10) – though fear is liable to be inverted onto the zombies, who are doing the suffering.

THE ORIGIN OF THE ZOMBIE

Now that we've considered *why* zombies belong in an RPG campaign, let's examine the *where* and *when* of the matter. The goals here are twofold: to suggest where features and variants of the zombie myth might have come from (useful to GMs running games set in the real world – well, the real world plus zombies), and to look at how zombies clawed their way into games. This exploration doesn't claim to be authoritative; rather, it's speculative, with a bias toward gaming. Given zombies' current popularity, there are many theories and timelines out there, and proponents of some of these would vocally disagree with much of what follows!

HISTORICAL ZOMBIES

What we know today as "zombies" didn't rise intact from any one historical source. Endless myths and legends contributed bits and pieces, which modern fictionists stitched together into the familiar form.

Classical Corpses

The earliest proto-zombies were the undead kind: dead bodies walking around when they shouldn't be. Who to credit with this ghastly vision is unclear, though it may well have been the first Neolithic man who buried a loved one – for whatever reason (see *Undead Zombies and Funerary Rites*, p. 18) – and then had a hopeful dream of that person's return descend into a nightmare. It's easy to imagine that a pallid, staring, silent corpse wouldn't look a whole lot different if it got up again. But it takes civilizations to *really* spread ideas.

The Mesopotamians (Sumerians, Akkadians, Babylonians, and Assyrians) supported full-time priests who had the freedom to ponder the universe's mysteries, with death and rebirth high on the list. Since the dead obviously weren't being reborn into the land of the living, these thinkers invented the Land of the Dead. In line with contemporary politics, this kingdom required a ruler: Ereshkigal, Queen of the Dead (Allatu, to the Assyrians).

Naturally, her armies were the dead. In one myth, when the minor god Nergal balked at becoming her consort, she threatened to “send up the dead that they might devour the living.” Thus, an apocalypse of flesh-eating ghouls was scaring people *millennia* before the idea turned up in movies.

Over in Egypt, where the god Osiris was hacked to bits by the god Set and reassembled by the goddess Isis, reanimation was part of the mythology. It’s anyone’s guess whether the Osiris myth was an allegory for mortal funeral practices or if the priesthood came up with ritual consistent with the tale – but whatever the case, the ancient Egyptians became masters of elaborate funerary rites. They preserved their upper-class dead as mummies and built monumental tombs, and their sacred texts provided formulaic instructions on how to enter the afterlife, including the names of beings encountered along the way, protocols for addressing them, and spells of protection from its dangers (e.g., rotting). As they believed in physical resurrection in the Land of the Dead, the body had to arrive intact. Their immortality charms and well-preserved remains gave the zombie-lover at least two things: the possibility of corpses reanimating, and the *necromancer* – a mortician, priest, and wizard who deals with the dead.

Across the Mediterranean, the Greeks followed the now-standard practice of ancient traditions everywhere, establishing a subterranean Land of the Dead (Hades or Erebus) ruled by a deity (also called Hades, or Plouton). Their dead were by-and-large confined to that realm, and Hades didn’t make a habit of threatening to send them back – indeed, he was a stickler for keeping what was his. However, the dead had to get there, and on the way they had to pay the ferryman Charon for passage across the Styx, the river marking the boundary between the mortal world and the underworld. Thus, when the dead were buried, they were laid to rest with a coin – and when this was overlooked, well, we get tales of the wandering dead.

The Roman underworld was similar to the Greek one, and was ruled by Pluto (or Dis Pater). But the Romans had one thing the Greeks didn’t: Etruscan occultism. Contemporaries of the early Romans, the Etruscans believed that unless the dead were propitiated, they would come forth from their tombs to seek vengeance. While the form of this revenge varied widely with the telling, some versions of the tale were clear on the fact that these restless dead, or *lemures*, were at least partly solid, grotesque, and capable of collective violence when community standards of worship grew lax. Such an assault might not be a true *zombie* apocalypse, but it bears many of the hallmarks.

The Romans persecuted the Jews, and the Christians who followed, but Roman lands eventually became Christian ones. In the scripture of these faiths, the dead didn’t reenter the mortal world – mostly – but the main event that set Christianity apart from Judaism was the return from the grave of Jesus of Nazareth, who went on to bring back Lazarus. It would be offensive to style either figure as “undead,” but these physical resurrections, apocrypha that speak of other people rising from the dead, and the Christian tenet of bodily resurrection definitely fired overactive imaginations: *Everybody who ever died* is lying around, awaiting Final Judgment; there are powers that can raise them; and Satan and his servants, flouting Heaven’s laws, might manage the “walking” part, but would have little use for the “free-willed” part and no interest at all in the “good” part.

Shambling Out of the East

Further east, cremation was widely practiced to commit the dead back to the universe for reincarnation. In Tibet, the ancient tradition of exposing or dissecting bodies to be eaten by wild animals – a practice known as *jhator* – would later come to serve a similar purpose in the local denomination

of Buddhism. Consequently, one finds fewer tales of the corporeal walking dead here. “Fewer” isn’t “none,” however.

In India, the Hindu practice of cremation was reinforced by cautionary tales starring the walking dead. Failure to burn a body to release the soul broke the universal cycle of reincarnation (*samsara*) – a violation of the natural order, particularly offensive to Kali (goddess of death) and Yama (lord of the underworld). The uncremated dead might walk as misshapen, hungry *pretas*, be reanimated by dangerous spirits such as *vetalas*, or be raised as rotting, leprous *pishachas*, perhaps by the *rakshashas* ruled by the demon king, Ravana. Such entities were as much ghosts

as corpses, somewhere between vampires and zombies, and more demonic than undead – but their physical form, if any, was typically foul, obviously dead, and ravenous like a ghoul. Fans of the *Evil Dead* series will recognize the pattern.

The other big exception was in China, where unlike their neighbors to the southwest, people buried their dead. This didn’t seem to be much of a problem until Taoism came along and explained that a body buried prematurely or in the wrong sort of soil, or struck by lightning, or traversed by a cat – or that of an improperly worshipped ancestor, an evil person, or a suicide – could rise as a *jiang shi*.



Again, this is more vampire than zombie; specifically, it's the infamous Chinese "hopping vampire." However, when created with black magic, it was the servant of its summoner (a *lot* like a Vodou or fantasy zombie), and modern Chinese moviemakers often borrow Western zombie lore into their tales of it.

Heading back west across Asia, we encounter tales that might have started in India – or conceivably Persia – turning up in Arab lands in time to be part of *One Thousand and One Nights* as early as the ninth century A.D., and definitely by the 12th. These stories mention the *ghul*: a corpse-eating, desert-dwelling demon. While not mindless, and only ambiguously undead, it's certainly ravenous and definitely the origin of the word "ghoul" for eaters of the dead.

Christian Terrors

Further west than that, Christianity swept across Europe. At each stop, it confronted local traditions – some easily assimilated, others a poor fit to its worldview. Since God had created only humans in his image, supernatural beings living under burial mounds – like Celtic *sidhe* and Norse *alvar* – were quietly relabeled as spirits of folk who had the misfortune of dying too soon for Christianity to save them. Hills packed with remains of the damned became fertile ground for tales of the undead (if they weren't already). The Celts seemed to be content with ghosts, but Norse corpses had a proclivity for walking around bodily, these *draugr* offering another example of the evil dead.

When Europe faced the Black Death in the 14th century, the scope of the disaster brought macabre themes into Christian art and thinking (which in truth had never quite recovered from the plague that struck the Byzantine Empire in the sixth century). Faced with the possibility of an early, unexpected death, even the devout succumbed to the desire to live for the present – and whether because this included the artists or because the Church was scrambling to keep up with the times, skeletal, sickle-wielding Death often replaced Satan in the period's imagery. By the 15th century, walking skeletons and other animated corpses featured prominently in religious art, and from there strolled into the era's fiction. As late as the 1660s, John Milton's *Paradise Lost* presented a medieval view of Hell full of walking, rotting corpses.

Into Africa

The unfortunate thing about searching for beliefs consistent with zombies in Africa south of Egypt – a vast continent, home to hundreds of civilizations – is that its literate history is dominated by exploitation: first by the Egyptians (see *Classical Corpses*, pp. 11-12), then by their Muslim successors (and powerful Muslim kingdoms, such as Mali), and finally by Europeans (and even later, their colonies). Too much of what we "know" comes secondhand. Two sweeping generalizations can be made, however.

First, like many other cultures discussed so far, historical African ones venerated their ancestors. This practice was unusually strong here, though. The most common view was – and often still is – that death marks a *transition*, not an *end*.

Second – and in part as a consequence of the first – peoples here traditionally favored burial over other funerary practices. Sorcerers constituted an exception to this rule.

Their actions rendered them unfit for the afterlife (believed to mirror the mortal world, more or less), so they were liable to be cremated or butchered and fed to beasts.

The presence of buried bodies and eternal souls, and the exclusion of magic-workers from all this, sets the stage for one of the nigh-universal abilities of sorcerers in African cultures: reanimating the dead. This power was most prevalent in West Africa, which is where Vodou originated and with it the notion of the zombie (and the word "zombie" – see *The Z-Word*, p. 8). People definitely believed that a dead person could be revived by a sorcerer to serve as his slave. It isn't universally true that the slave would be *called* a zombie; that term might mean a god, fetish, or spirit involved in the process. But this is the land of the walking dead.

Similar beliefs are found in the south of the continent, where many cultures assert that zombies can result from sorcerers killing the living and possessing the body. Here, these slaves are muted by cutting out the tongue, controlled with magical potions, and hidden from sight during the day. This folklore acquired an interesting twist when rail was laid to transport workers: tales of "zombie trains" or "witch trains," some of which didn't roll on tracks, run by zombies and used by sorcerers to capture and transport undead slaves.

Across the Atlantic

The tribes of North America had elaborate animistic and totemic belief systems, some of which professed the existence of a bipartite soul, one part animating the body and returning to nature upon death, the other living on forever in the spirit world. The idea that this immortal spirit could return, possibly with a shaman's intervention, was widely accepted. The thought of the body coming back was stranger – especially among cultures that stripped the dead down to skeletons before burial – but not unknown. Tales tell of the dead rising from their graves, usually when burial mounds were disturbed. The concept of the "old Indian burial ground" as a source of zombies might be a white man's conceit, but the red man was definitely serious about not disturbing his dead.

South into Mesoamerica, there's little that looks like the walking dead. However, this is a land that knew blood sacrifice to death gods. The idea of "Aztec zombies" boiling up from the remains of ancient temples is a modern one, and gets an assist from Mexico's cultural fascination with death – *Día de los Muertos*, celebrated on November 1, has its roots in indigenous death festivals (and, as Day of the Dead, lends its name to a zombie film). But don't forget that only some aspects of Vodou came from Africa; a lot of that stuff was here and in the nearby Caribbean islands all along. That comment could be extended to the northeastern shoulder of South America, where "that stuff" included poisons for hunting, which would go on to be used to create zombies from the living.

And this brings us to Vodou (Haiti), and similar syncretic faiths, such as Candomblé (Brazil) and Santería (Cuba). These belief systems merged West African traditions (see *Into Africa*, above) with native ones, often adding Roman Catholic beliefs (whose role in views of death was hardly minor – see *Christian Terrors*, above). From this potent stew arose both undead zombies with imprisoned souls and drugged zombies that had never died.

This is where a huge number of the influences mentioned so far merge into what many chroniclers agree is the most immediate source of what's recognizably the modern zombie.

Lurching Into Modernity

Worldwide, the passage of time saw many of the beliefs discussed so far surviving – albeit sometimes in syncretic forms – into the age of genuinely global empires, the sort on which the sun never sets. But Rationalism, on the rise throughout, brought with it two things that helped build such empires and which were in turn nurtured by them: science and secularism.

Science led eventually to industrialization, and industry required laborers. Against a backdrop of pollution, crowding, unemployment, and shameless exploitation of workers (see *Overpopulation, Overconsumption, and Pollution*, p. 9), old beliefs found new currency. This yielded such novelties as South Africa's "witch trains" (see *Into Africa*, p. 13), and brought tales of zombie slaves to New World production centers such as New Orleans.

Secularism, meanwhile, gave people more latitude to mix and match the world's beliefs. Western writers combined Christian and non-Christian philosophies – including not just Rationalism, but also pagan folklore brought back to the great old cities by those exploiting grand old cultures from Egypt to China, down into Africa, and across to the Americas – in the Gothic novel and the literary forms that this spawned. For more on this, see *Books* (below).

From the late 19th century on, the budding mass media – beginning with newspapers and dime novels printed on steam-powered presses and shipped by rail, and moving on to telegraph, telephone, radio, and television – ensured that the zombie made its way into horror fiction and thus the public imagination. Sometimes zombies were the slaves of the shady "natives" and their witch doctors or shamans. Other times they were the work of mad scientists. Either way, the thought of human beings turned into mindless drones resonated with people whose bosses often treated them as . . . mindless drones. And for the average man, it wasn't hard to believe that science was *actually* capable of this stuff; after all, it was on one hand curing once-fatal diseases, while on the other hand causing ever-more-insidious ailments.

FICTIONAL ZOMBIES

By solving mysteries and delivering speedy transportation and even speedier telecommunications, science weakened superstition's hold and made the world seem less bewildering. Storytellers no longer had to confine themselves to *one* set of beliefs; they had access to the entire world's traditional tales, minus the imperative to understand or particularly respect them. Zombies shuffled from faith – or folklore, at least – to fiction for fiction's sake. They became entertainment.

Popular views of zombies are almost inevitably syncretic, borrowing from *several* of the sources under *Historical Zombies* (pp. 11-14), not to mention earlier fiction. Writers pick and choose scarier traits and capabilities while discarding traditional weaknesses in order to make their zombies

Zombies in the News

Owing to zombie fiction's current popularity, anything that even vaguely hints at zombies attracts attention. Thus, zombies live on in today's folklore – which takes the form of yellow journalism, urban myth, and pop culture. Examples of traditional views of zombies being twisted to fit the news and of contemporary contributions to zombie lore appear in *Zombies in the News* boxes on pp. 16, 20, 21, and 22.

seem frightening or potent enough to be worthy challenges to the modern scientific and military arsenals. Indian burial grounds are doused with toxic waste, leading to "evil dead" who devour flesh like the Arabian *ghul*. A monkey bite infects the victim with a contagious curse, blending disease and juju to get zombies that have the occult zest of sorcerous enslavement and the viral menace of rabies. And so on.

The accelerating pace of science also begets entirely *new* sorts of zombies. From the late-18th-century pseudoscience of mesmerism and experiments with galvanism, through modern-day reports of brain-destroying prions and madness-inducing street drugs, to futuristic miracles involving cryonics and nanotech, writers cook up bizarre new theories for mindless-but-menacing shells of humans. Then they stitch the zombie's face onto the results to kick-start new horrors with old fears.

What follows is a brief, broad survey of how zombie themes have been co-opted and mixed in fiction. For an annotated filmography and bibliography, see pp. 153-156.

Books

Zombies might be highly visual monsters, but they first walked out of tradition and into fiction on paper, and specifically in the Gothic novel. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818) was arguably the single most important influence. This story singlehandedly brought science (well, Science!) into the reanimation game by depicting unnatural life imparted to dead flesh not by black magic, but by chemistry. While Victor Frankenstein's creation emphatically wasn't mindless, critics and admirers often ignored both this and Shelley's cautionary message about scientists playing God to seize upon the tale's trappings: dead bodies, a lab, and a "mad scientist." If they chose an animating force other than chemistry, it was the Industrial Era's other futuristic promise, electricity (also an influence on Shelley). From here we can already glimpse zombies raised by toxic waste (*The Return of the Living Dead*) or twisted bio-tech (*Resident Evil*).

The Gothic tale fragmented into a great many things, including the modern horror and fantasy genres, each of which interprets zombies differently. Horror zombies retain many traditional characteristics, with some authors going to great lengths to research myth and folklore in order to give their monsters an air of authenticity. After all, one time-tested approach to a successful horror story is to engage the reader and make him believe that *something terrifying could happen*. Real-life beliefs held for centuries or millennia send a thrilling subliminal message: "People thought these things were real for a long time.

Is it prudent to dismiss them out of hand?" **GURPS Horror** is heartily recommended to the GM interested in exploring this style.

The fantasy zombie, meanwhile, became sword-fodder for heroes, a physical monster bereft of its myth. J.R.R. Tolkien, one of the founders of modern fantasy, populated *The Lord of the Rings* (1954) with animated corpses ("barrow-wights") borrowed from Celtic or Norse myth, an undead army bound to an oath (the Dead Men of Dunharrow), and Ring-Wraiths who were in thrall to a dark lord. None were strictly zombies, but all hailed from beyond the grave and lacked genuine free will – and as with Shelley's work, later writers often preferred the imagery to the story. This isn't meant judgmentally (**GURPS Dungeon Fantasy** does it, too!); "fantasy" is the opposite of "reality," and while a light sprinkling of real-world tradition provides much-needed verisimilitude, too much defeats the purpose.

This isn't a hard-and-fast split, though. Zombies in fantasy are frequently the servants of evil wizards or priests – just as horror zombies might serve a *bokor* or other juju man. Both sorts of zombies can serve as direct, physical adversaries, the salient difference being that where horror protagonists are prone to end up eaten or joining the horde, fantasy heroes in the spirit of Robert E. Howard's Conan *prevail* – it's in the job description. A fantasy zombie and a horror one may be functionally identical (in **GURPS** terms, the same stats might describe both), with the real differences being in mood and the characters' odds.

Not every zombie in print arrived via the Gothic route, however. Wade Davis' *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (1985) was presented not as fiction but as an ethnobotanical case study of a supposedly real Vodou zombie created from a living person using drugs. *Necroville* (1994), by Ian McDonald, resurrects the dead with nanotechnology. These are but two examples of countless late-20th-century works that contain the science-fictional zombie (often of the living variety rather than the undead kind), tales of which are social commentary more so than horror or fantasy.

In this vein, it's important to mention Max Brooks, whose synthesis of zombie media took the interesting tack of blurring the line between fiction and reality. *The Zombie Survival Guide* (2003) might not be the first handbook on how to survive an infectious zombie outbreak, but it's definitely the most influential, removing most of the horror from survival horror and offering zombies as a practical problem, with preparedness as the solution. His novel *World War Z* (2006) "documents" a global zombie apocalypse in a similar voice. As a consequence of his contributions, an entire generation

of readers regards zombies more as a natural disaster than anything else, and holds nontraditional theories about which weapons and tactics will work against them – all of which has gone on to greatly influence 21st-century zombie fiction.

Movies

Still, zombies *are* extremely visual, and the big and small screens have added more elements to the zombie myth than all other media combined. Many people have learned everything they know about zombies from these sources. As well, aggressive hoopla and one-upmanship in the film and televi-

sion businesses – the struggle to dominate the box office and the ratings – ensure that each retelling borrows from past tales in order to fit into a marketable genre while adding something new (and occasionally controversial) as a unique selling point.

The first true "zombie movie" was Victor Halperin's *White Zombie* (1932), which stayed moderately true to the Vodou take on zombies as mind-controlled slaves. John Gilling's *The Plague of the Zombies* (1966) perverted Vodou zombies toward monsters and foreshadowed zombie contagion. George A. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) broke significant new ground, introducing the ancient folkloric concept of a flesh-eating revenant horde (shades of Mesopotamia) into the modern zombie tale while simultaneously hinting at a pseudoscientific explanation; his

Dawn of the Dead (1978) added explicit zombie contagion to the growing list of common tropes. And Dan O'Bannon's *The Return of the Living Dead* (1985) refined flesh-eating to *brain-eating*, which many fans consider de rigueur.

Changes in viewers' tolerance for violence have rendered zombies ever-tougher, too. The zombies of *White Zombie* were hapless victims, but by the time of *The Plague of the Zombies*, burning and collapsing a mine on top of them seemed wise. A couple of years later, in *Night of the Living Dead*, only headshots would work – and while headshots remain popular, we also have films like Peter Jackson's *Braindead* (1992), wherein zombies are pureed (in that story, by a repurposed lawnmower). The force required remains extreme in such recent movies as Robert Rodriguez's *Planet Terror* (2007), Tommy Wirkola's *Død Snø* (2009), and Dahan and Rocher's *La horde* (2009), and typically disagrees with claims by the likes of Max Brooks that military hardware just won't work. Regardless, all of the above contradicts folklore, where the undead can only be laid to rest with the proper ritual.



Another movement is away from zombies strictly as undead and toward zombies as mindless shells. This is harder to track, because films that suggest that the living die and are then revived by some influence blur into those where similar-seeming forces cause the living to lose their minds directly. However, by 2002, both Paul W.S. Anderson's *Resident Evil* and Danny Boyle's *28 Days Later* had borrowed zombie-movie mood and tropes (contagion, hordes, violent attacks, and often the monsters' physical appearance) for tales of twisted bio-tech converting live people into still-living creatures that many fans accepted as zombies. Other 21st-century offerings have attributed zombie behavior in the living to even stranger origins, with Bruce McDonald's *Pontypool* (2008) taking the prize for originality, positing a memetic plague transmitted by word of mouth. A near-universal feature of living zombies in cinema is that they move more quickly than the traditional undead kind.

A further evolution has been away from horror. As early as Sam Raimi's *The Evil Dead* (1981), there was a certain goofiness to zombies, while Raimi's later films and O'Bannon's *The Return of the Living Dead* clearly played zombies for laughs, if sick laughs. Michele Soavi's *Dellamorte Dellamore* (1995) featured moderately traditional undead zombies, but looked mostly at their existential plight as a mirror for the human hero's own. By the time of Edgar Wright's *Shaun of the Dead* (2004) and Andrew Currie's *Fido* (2006), humor mixed with social commentary had become as common as horror. While there are claims that zombies have always been allegory and social criticism (pp. 9-10) –

and every film cited above holds hints of this – *Shaun of the Dead* marked the point where the average moviegoer “got it.”

One final contribution from the movies is the idea that zombies might not be utterly stupid and monstrous. We see hints of this in Romero's work, both in the “tame” zombie Bub in *Day of the Dead* (1985) and in the general status quo in *Land of the Dead* (2005). *Fido* is probably the best example of a feature film that explores the idea, though.

Comics

Horror comics of the 1950s – particularly those from publisher Entertaining Comics (“EC”) – constantly sought new supernatural threats to feature, and series such as *Tales from the Crypt* dredged up Vodou zombies and flesh-eating undead ghouls. Pressure on publishers to curb such “disturbing” content triggered the creation of the Comics Code Authority in 1954. This forbade several monsters by name, including the walking dead. Marvel Comics mostly circumvented this restriction with *zuvembies* – zombies in every way that mattered, named after the female zombies in Robert E. Howard's 1938 short story “Pigeons from Hell.” The walking dead had to be discreet and avoid identification as “zombies” until the Code was changed in 1989.

These classic comics influenced moviemakers – famously George A. Romero – and used tongue-in-cheek narration that foreshadowed the humorous zombie story, but added little genuinely new to zombie lore. Their zombies were the Vodou kind, mashed up with Gothic horror.

More recently, though, two series have made novel contributions.

The Walking Dead (2003-present), written by Robert Kirkman, presents a zombie saga in an episodic, essentially soap-operatic format. While it's survival horror, it doesn't strictly hew to the “Ten Little Indians” model of most of that subgenre; instead, protagonists who die are eventually replaced. In keeping with this, it doesn't succumb to the temptation to end the story with a catastrophic “the zombies kill everyone” or a feel-good “we cure the zombies.” Most important from the perspective of **GURPS Zombies**, it shows that an interesting long-term campaign set in a zombie apocalypse is possible. It's practically required reading for GMs who aspire to run such.

Marvel Zombies (2005-present), which counts Kirkman among its founding writers, depicts zombies as point-of-view characters – a rarity. Even more unusually, it explores what would happen if people with superpowers became zombies in form, afflicted with a ravenous hunger but otherwise in control of their faculties. Thus, its zombies are among the most powerful and least mindless in fiction. The plague that's responsible for them is also interesting, in that it spreads across universes (**GURPS Infinite Worlds** fans take note!).

Zombies in the News: Zombie Walks

The concept of a “zombie walk” – people dressing as zombies and shambling around town – originated with a 2001 movie promotion in Sacramento, California. It caught on from there, leading to a worldwide spate of zombie marches, zombie mobs, and so on ever since. Some events have reportedly drawn over 10,000 participants, blocking traffic and occupying downtown cores.

At first, the zombie walk seems to be nothing more than a tribute to existing zombie lore, although it's worth noting that you see *lots* of different zombies at a walk, ranging from classic white-faced, bloody-mouthed undead ghouls, through red-eyed infected, to “sexy” zombies who are decidedly alive and intact. But think a little harder: When the real zombies come, will people who are used to zombie hordes getting in their way be desensitized, and not care until it's too late? And if an evil zombie-master wanted to work a zombie curse, spray a zombie serum, or give a zombie virus a good start, could he do it at a gathering and pass it off as a practical joke if anybody complained?

All this holds equally true for other kinds of zombie-positive gatherings. These range from zombie-themed musical acts, through zombie burlesque, to zombie strippers. Would the typical strip-joint patron even care if an infected zombie smeared infection all over him, as long as she was still relatively intact? *Zombie Strippers!* (2008) says “no.”

Games

Like other modern fiction, tabletop and digital games mix influences. Being younger than all of the previous media, they have many sources from which to borrow, and do so freely. But game designers tend to be researchers at heart, and many like to add in actual folklore, too.

Tabletop RPGs

Zombies in traditional RPGs *might* be a central feature, as in Eden Studios' *All Flesh Must Be Eaten*, but usually they're just one of many monsters – the more varieties, the better. Thanks to the fact that RPGs are largely played out in gamers' imaginations, with no need to offer visuals beyond illustrations in rulebooks and no absolute requirement to offer a closed story (that's what playing the game is for!), there are few constraints on hybrid zombies. If the designer or GM wants to declare that fantasy zombies are actually skeletons that rise from desecrated burial mounds, spread via infectious bites, wither victims to dry skeletons within moments of death, and have a ravenous appetite for flesh despite lacking a digestive system, then no problem. There's no F/X budget to break and complete freedom to make up beliefs for a fantasy world.

Such thinking extends to zombie-related abilities for the living, too. For instance, the idea of holy folk "turning" (repelling) zombies with faith was invented by *Dungeons & Dragons*, and likely originated from borrowing folklore connected to other undead (like tales of vampires and crosses). The notion of casting an all-purpose spell to raise almost any dead creature as an undead zombie – without worrying about the fact that traditional views of the living

dead involve a *human's* soul or soulless body – also originates from RPGs, which favor game-mechanical approaches ("spell X does Y") over folkloric ones.

Digital Games

Zombies are popular in computer games for technical reasons. Opponent AI that isn't so *dumb* as to damage suspension of disbelief presents a challenge that zombies can help finesse – everybody expects zombies to be simple-minded, so nobody cares when they get stuck behind obstacles or use no strategy beyond a suicide charge. As digital games lack a GM to judge when characters can invoke abilities, they handle "spotlight time" mechanically: "You can always do your thing if you have enough resources" (e.g., mana points). This gives us the zombie-raising necromancer who summons minions from any patch of ground, regardless of whether there would plausibly be dead bodies there. And computers can trivially keep track of countless variant monsters, giving developers free rein to invent novel zombie types. In short, such games are a hotbed of new ideas.

The *real* contribution of digital games to the subject of zombies isn't in the types of zombies or zombie-masters they offer, though, but in *who they offer them to*. Such entertainment brings zombies to gamers who wouldn't otherwise be interested. First-person shooters such as *Left 4 Dead* and *Dead Island* sell copies to those whose chief gaming interest is shooting things, while third-person games like *Plants vs. Zombies* expose the casual gamer to "cute" zombies. These days, even players who've never seen a zombie film are at least aware of zombies, and accept without judgment that zombies might come in different varieties with distinct abilities.

Good zombie movies show us how messed up we are, they make us question our station in society and our society's station in the world . . . there's always an undercurrent of social commentary and thoughtfulness.

– Robert Kirkman

ZOMBIE ARCHETYPES

The touchstones and examples offered so far address *when*, *where*, and *why*, bringing us to the question of *what*. Answering this necessitates thinking about the nature of both the zombie's body (*The Meat*, below) and the force that drives it (*The Motivation*, pp. 19-23). Matching game stats to these archetypes is the topic of Chapter 3.

THE MEAT

All of the zombies discussed so far fall into a few basic physical types, though there's considerable latitude within each category. The form of a zombie's body tends to determine things like its strength and speed, and how foul and disgusting it is.

Undead Zombies

The oldest and most common class of zombies is the undead kind: people who died before being zombified. These are most often maggoty corpses that crawled out of or were conjured from recent graves. However, in ancient myth (see *Classical Corpses*, pp. 11-14), bodies of the dead who are denied admission to the Land of the Dead or Hell, or spat back out, are sometimes indistinguishable from the living. Individuals who die on cursed or weirdly irradiated ground, or from an infected bite, and "turn" within minutes might also be relatively intact – as might zombies reanimated from well-preserved cadavers (frozen, embalmed, stored in a climate-controlled morgue, etc.).

Undead Zombies and Funerary Rites

If your campaign has *undead* zombies, local *funerary rites* become important. These are the rituals that surround praying for, mourning, and disposing of the dead. Such practices are found in almost every faith. Some people believe that they came about because early man noticed the association between disease and corpses, and learned to dispose of cadavers for his health. Others theorize that such rites were always about providing closure for the living. A few hold that spiritualism came first: man conceived of the immortal soul and disposed of mortal remains in a way that would appease spirits or facilitate resurrection.

Whatever the case may be, the *religious* intent is ultimately to ensure that the soul goes to its proper reward. Preventing the dead from becoming the undead is a likely side effect. This can make things hard on zombies.

Cremation is widely practiced by Buddhists and Hindus, and was known among many civilizations in antiquity – the Greeks and Romans in the Old World, and the Aztecs and Inca in the New, often engaged in it. Many cultures accepted it in wartime, as stacking the dead like cordwood simplified battlefield cleanup. Whatever the process symbolizes, it leaves no body to reanimate.

Burial is more widespread, but this doesn't always mean *intact* burial. Some cultures (most famously the ancient Egyptians, and the Guanches of the Canary Islands) prepared mummies. Others (such as some

North American Indian tribes) cleaned flesh from bone, leaving skeletons. Still others (notably traditional Tibetans) exposed and sometimes dissected the dead for wild animals to eat. Such rituals will affect what the local zombies look like: rotten, dehydrated, or skeletal, and intact or mangled.

Then there are the *supernatural* implications of ritually laying the body to rest. The locals might not believe in zombies, but if they believe that corpses aren't supposed to be disturbed – physically or magically – then their ceremonies may incorporate incantations, ritual objects, and tomb seals designed to protect against this. If these have real power, people who receive proper funerals can't become zombies.

That leaves only those who didn't, which is common among people who were too poor to pay for a funeral, who received the wrong ritual (especially burial where cremation was mandated), who received an incomplete ritual (e.g., partial cremation), whose corpses weren't found (died in isolation, lost at sea, perished down a mine, murdered and concealed, slain in battle and left on hostile soil, etc.), or who were executed and left to rot. Each possibility tells a tale – and suggests its own zombie variant. Zombie soldiers may be tough, zombie criminals or murder victims might be angry, drowned zombies could have bizarre water-themed powers, half-cremated zombies might get fire powers, and so on.

On the other hand, those who've been dead for a long time may be skeletal or mummified. Funerary practices play a major role here; see *Undead Zombies and Funerary Rites* (above).

This state often comes with either pronounced decrepitude or supernatural vigor – the body's demise could leave the zombie weak, the victim of rigor mortis and rotting flesh, or the reanimating power might operate it like a puppet, exerting forces that exceed the safe limits of a living body. It's rare for such zombies to sleep, and they tend to be highly resistant to disease, poison, and the elements. Being dead already, they have few vital spots, excepting those that "anchor" their means of reanimation.

Living Zombies

Living humans driven to mindless or violent behavior are almost as common as the undead. This is typical of zombies created by things like horrid curses that inflict insanity, pharmaceutical means (Vodou powders, weird-science serums, and madness-inducing street drugs), perverted bio-tech that mutates the living, and infections that don't kill the victim before zombifying him. Such causes are particularly widespread in recent zombie lore. For ideas, see the *Zombies in the News* boxes, particularly *Zombie Diseases* (p. 20), *Zombie Insects* (p. 21), and *Zombie Drugs* (p. 22).

These zombies sometimes differ from the living only in behavior; in fact, they might look like anybody else from a

distance. Telltale signs are likely, though – in the movies, such creatures often have black, red, or glowing irises, or discolorations of the skin. If they're ghouls, then bloodstains and the stench of death may make them difficult to tell from the dead. Such zombies often possess superhuman capabilities, too, displaying the strength of a psychotic drug-user, a rabies victim, or an *Ophiocordyceps*-infected ant. Those created by weird bio-tech are liable to exhibit bizarre and obvious mutations.

Constructs

An intermediate case between "undead" and "living" appears in some zombie tales: zombies stitched together from parts prior to reanimation. This describes two distinct forms, which are inextricably linked to specific motivations.

The first kind of construct is assembled from dead bodies and then animated as an undead monstrosity. This is most often accomplished through supernatural means. Such a creation typically qualifies as a zombie because it's formerly human (if only nominally) and now a mindless slave – probably motivated by a low-grade spirit, if not shocked into motion by jolts of brute-force magic.

The second kind of construct is put together the same way but reanimated by giving it *life*. This is typically the work of *Frankenstein*-style weird science. This creature counts as a zombie because it's a mindless servant of its creator, likely owing to the fact that its perverse, unnatural body – living though it may be – cannot support a free-willed mind.

Perhaps it has a dog brain, a damaged human brain, or an intact human brain that can't get enough blood. It's likely that the reanimator took steps to ensure that his creation would be easy to control.

The main feature of note for constructs is that while they share the usual traits of the undead or the living (as the case may be), the creator can "fine tune" the body to give it special capabilities. He might select beefy limbs for great strength, attach animal parts, or even include mechanical components. Often, repairs are easier, too. But traditionally, constructs of either variety are prone to errors of design.

Spirits

Spirit lore often intersects zombie tales. Usually, this is a matter of motivation more than form: When evil spirits animate dead bodies (as in Indian myth; see *Shambling Out of the East*, pp. 12-13), you get undead zombies. When demons possess the living, turning them into mindless killers (as in John Carpenter's *Prince of Darkness*), you get living ones. But there are exceptions.

Spirits of the dead sometimes solidify "bodies" for themselves by sheer force of will. Roman *lemures* and other Mediterranean spirits appear to operate this way at times (see *Classical Corpses*, pp. 11-12). And some older legends from India, Persia, and Arabia feature demons in humanoid form that aren't alive and so cannot actually be undead, either. In either case, these entities are made of the stuff of tangible spirits in the local lore – chaos, ectoplasm, ichor, smokeless flame, whatever. They might not be zombies per se, but if they look like humans, lurk in charnel places, and savagely attack the living, then people are likely to count them as such; certainly, there's little consensus as to whether the Arabian *ghul* is demon or undead. Most such monsters have all the strengths of undead zombies with fewer of the weaknesses, as they lack bones to break or muscles to tear, and often enjoy the benefits of partial insubstantiality.

THE MOTIVATION

There are as many explanations for zombification as there are zombie tales, and these are often the genesis of a zombie's more memorable features, such as supernatural abilities (or super-powers), fatal flaws, and unnatural contagion. Like physical forms, motivations can be broadly classified but not pigeonholed. A lot of them are strongly associated with specific body types, and vice versa – but ultimately, there are no hard-and-fast rules, and some effects can lead to any of several forms.

Having a motivation isn't the same as people *knowing* it, however. In horror stories, especially, the protagonists might never discover what caused the zombies! The GM can invoke "motivation unknown" to increase dramatic tension – although he should know the truth even if the PCs never learn it, if only to let him assign consistent stats.

Curses

Higher powers – spirits, gods, Fate, Death, etc. – might use zombies to right wrongs or punish misdeeds. In some cases, a plague of zombies is sent as retribution; in others, the transgressor is doomed to become a zombie. Either way, it's a curse (ghastly magic spells are sometimes dubbed "curses," too, but this typology files those under *Black Magic*, p. 22). The zombies serve as a moral force with neither worldly cause nor mortal master. This is the oldest explanation for zombies, dating to Ereshkigal's threat to send the dead to devour the living, if not to Neolithic burial taboos; see *Classical Corpses* (pp. 11-12).

Apocalyptic Curses

Curses (above) discusses zombies as retribution for particular wrongs, or as a price paid by a specific group of individuals. But it's possible to think bigger.

When Hell Is Full . . .

You know Macumba? Voodoo? My granddad was a priest in Trinidad. He used to tell us, "When there's no more room in Hell, the dead will walk the Earth."

– Peter, in *Dawn of the Dead* (1978)

Zombies might be a punishment directed at all of humanity, for everybody's sins. We've been so depraved that our souls have filled Hell to bursting, so the dead are being turned away to walk the Earth . . . as zombies. Overpopulation is unlikely for an infinite realm like Hell, so the real message here is that mankind's sins have made the world Hell on Earth, meaning that the dead need not leave it to end up in perdition – they can just keep on keeping on, as undead. The real question is whether our sentence is being confronted by zombies while alive or being fated to become them after death.

The Curse that Keeps on Cursing

While a curse might afflict a single, unlucky soul, or start and end with those currently in the Land of the Dead returning as zombies, this needn't be the case. Some transgressions might be so great – or some curses so potent – that they don't merely turn you into a zombie, but into a *zombie that passes along its curse to those it attacks*. This results in a zombie plague, but not the pathogenic kind; it's contagion with a supernatural genesis rather than a weird-science one. For the high-minded victim, the *real* curse isn't "now you're a zombie," but "now you're going to turn everyone you ever knew or loved into a zombie."

Big, Bad Voodoo

Sometimes the big curse results from deliberate zombie-making, usually black magic (p. 22), gone horribly wrong – the supernatural equivalent of an industrial or nuclear disaster. This is most often due to the zombie-master getting sloppy, or invoking forces he doesn't understand or can't control. Perhaps his spell backfires and raises all the dead in a huge area, or maybe he contaminates food at the Caribbean specialty shop with Super-Effective Zombie Powder. The end result of his hubris is a curse on *everyone*, in the form of a zombie invasion.

Divine Displeasure

A god who's unhappy with an individual, with a group (typically a faith or a nation), or even with another deity may decide to inflict a zombie attack as punishment. While such a curse might be directed at the transgressor, higher powers work in mysterious ways; in pantheistic faiths, divine quarrels are often taken out on humanity. Zombies sent by gods are nearly always walking dead. However, in ancestor-worshipping cultures – such as Rome, China, and many African civilizations – the spirits of neglected ancestors long since turned to dust may solidify bodies to use as vehicles of vengeance, and these might manifest as monstrous zombies that possess only part of the original person's personality or memories.

Unhallowed Ground

Zombies might originate from spots that are cursed by the gods (as above); desecrated (or consecrated to the *wrong* gods) by blood sacrifice, murder, or suicide; or used as the workshop of witch doctors or necromancers. Historical cultures had such locales haunted by incorporeal menaces, but cinema often ties in zombies. Almost any kind of zombie is possible. In the film *Braindead*, the Bad Place is an island infused with primitive black magic, a monkey taken from there bites someone, and the result is a transmissible curse that causes zombies that are nominally still alive (“They’re not dead exactly, they’re just . . . sort of rotting.”). In Ryûhei Kitamura’s *Versus* (2000), a hidden portal to the afterlife lets murder victims left in the Forest of Resurrection return as living dead. And just about any dead person who receives improper funerary rites (p. 18) lies in unhallowed ground.

Unfinished Business

Some people, usually evil or dishonorable individuals, curse *themselves* to end up as zombies. This resembles the classic ghost motivation: someone died before completing an important task or fulfilling a sworn promise, and is therefore fated to haunt. While the power that enables such a curse might flow from gods, spirits, or Justice incarnate, the blame is on the victim. Such zombies may be eminently physical undead corpses, like the pirates in Gore Verbinski’s *Pirates of the Caribbean* (2003), cursed to recover every piece of gold in a stolen Aztec hoard. Or they could be materialized spirits, like the oath-breaking Dead Men of Dunharrow in *Lord of the Rings*, doomed to linger until they discharge their duty as soldiers.

Such creatures provide one of the rare examples of not-very-mindless zombies: They outwardly resemble other zombies, and they’re bound to their purpose as surely as other zombies are slaves to sorcerers, but they’re smart enough to understand their plight.

Vengeance

Some zombies – nearly always the undead kind – manifest to deliver payback. This usually takes the form of a curse on the fool who disturbed the zombie’s grave. It might be due to a charm placed in the tomb to maintain the sanctity of the dead, as in ancient Egypt (see *Classical Corpses*, p. 11). More often, it’s the supernaturally prescribed reaction of the dead to a disturbance, as made famous in folklore about “old Indian burial grounds” (see *Across the Atlantic*, p. 13). Rarely, the curse on the defiler isn’t being attacked by the dead, but joining them (the classic Egyptian “Curse of the Pharaohs”), which cinematic license can turn into becoming *undead*.

Zombies in the News: Zombie Diseases

Rabies, caused by a lyssavirus, has informed many fictional zombie plagues. Transmission is via bite, leading to mania and violent behavior, with greater than 99% mortality after symptoms appear . . . the connection should be obvious. This influence is often overt; e.g., *28 Days Later* called its zombie virus “rage,” which is the French word for “rabies.”

Less famous is “nodding syndrome,” known in Tanzania, Sudan, and Uganda since the 1960s. It only affects children and is typically fatal in three years. Its bizarre symptoms include extreme violence, as well as severe seizures when the victim is presented with food. It isn’t well understood; doctors lack good protocols for diagnosis, never mind a cure. Even its cause is mysterious – it’s linked to the parasitic nematode *Onchocerca volvulus*, which is fairly common in the area, but which doesn’t normally produce *these* symptoms. Researchers have posited that the complicating factor might be military chemicals, pesticides, or even tainted monkey meat. The fact that neither nematodes in the brain nor toxic chemicals can be transmitted from person to person hasn’t discouraged B-list reporters from announcing a “zombie disease” that might spread like a plague.

Almost any transmissible disease of the brain leads to sensationalistic reports of zombie plagues, too. *Prions*, irregularly folded proteins that carry no RNA or DNA, yet which manage to infect and spread by inducing pathological folding in proteins in the body, are exceptionally scary. They’re tiny compared to viruses, hard to detect, and difficult to destroy. The conditions they cause – most prominently Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease and kuru – affect the patient’s behavior, are ultimately fatal, and have no cure. They’re commonly contracted by eating infected meat; consuming flesh from one’s own species, particularly the brain, is especially risky.

Zombie lore has been painted onto these and other diseases, co-opting new medical findings to explain old stories – and such ailments have influenced zombie lore right back. Where the classic B-movie infectious plague would be a virus, we now have nematodes and prions. Moreover, modern science is often implicated in manufacturing chemicals that mutate or potentiate existing pathogens, as well as in deliberately engineering new plagues, often for sketchy military purposes. This has moved some recent zombie fiction out of the traditional plantation or graveyard, and into the lab or warzone.

Ties to the tomb aren't the only possibility. A sufficiently hateful or angry person, or one who had a pact with Dark Forces in life, might return from death as a zombie bent on wreaking vengeance on his killer. This is a double-edged curse: The dead person rises not with mind and body intact, but as a foul, mindless monster. His slayer, meanwhile, is pursued by said fiend.

Forces of Nature

Other zombies result from "natural" disasters of the weirdest and most speculative kind. Where creatures motivated by curses are typically undead, these ones are likely to be living but transformed. Such zombies lurk almost exclusively in the realm of cinema.

Infection

Infection – typically with a pathogen such as a bacterium, fungus, prion, or virus, but possibly by something weirder, like the meme shown in *Pontypool* – is the most common explanation for cinematic zombies. Sometimes victims die and return as undead, but just as often they *change*, becoming the still-living "infected" of *28 Days Later* or *Left 4 Dead*. It's possible to have both; **GURPS Infinite Worlds: Worlds of Horror** offers Gotha-Z zombies, which are "fast zombies" until they die, after which they rise as undead shamblers. And occasionally, there are no short-term effects at all; zombification occurs only after the subject dies from causes unrelated to the contagion, which might mean a beating or a mundane disease courtesy of zombies, an unrelated injury (e.g., a bullet or a car crash) or illness (like a heart attack), or even old age.

Infection usually means a communicable zombie plague (pp. 24-25), but transmissibility isn't a given. The zombies might have to be dosed by eating something – or perhaps only primary infection makes zombies. Several of the real-world candidates for zombie diseases (see *Zombies in the News: Zombie Diseases*, p. 20) aren't especially infectious.

Infestation

When whatever is doing the infecting gets big enough, "infestation" becomes a better word. Such an agent might still be difficult to see. For instance, while adult *Onchocerca volvulus* – the worm believed responsible for "nodding syndrome" (see *Zombies in the News: Zombie Diseases*, p. 20) – can be over 16" long, the zombie-like symptoms are caused by its microfilariae (young), which are microscopic. Organisms inspired by the real world like this would parasitize the victim, targeting the brain to alter behavior and create living zombies.

Fictional parasites might be considerably larger and capable of reanimating the dead. The "corpse worm" in the computer game *Diablo III* resembles a decent-sized snake or eel, and apparently crawls into and animates cadavers. If the resulting undead are left alone, these things breed inside and escape to create more zombies; if the zombies

kill, the worms get ready-made hosts; and if the zombies are destroyed, the parasites escape to infest other bodies. Or consider the corpse-kissers of **GURPS Creatures of the Night**: centipede-like wrigglers that possess a hive mind, capable of *filling* a corpse and then animating it to attack victims and spew parasites into their wounds.

Zombies in the News: Zombie Insects

In 2011, it was hard to avoid photographs of ants with fungal growths erupting from their heads, usually under a headline containing the word "zombie." Several fungi of the genus *Ophiocordyceps* have become famous for the strange way in which they parasitize ants, chemically attacking the brain in a manner that controls behavior: The ant wanders off and bites onto a leaf with "uncommon strength" until death, whereupon the fungus feeds on it and sprouts from its dead body. Scientific journals note that other insects are affected, too, inspiring the less-scientific kinds of periodicals to extrapolate to every living thing, especially humans. This contributes interesting possibilities such as fungus zombies, and zombies that *start* alive and *stop* walking once they reach the graveyard – an inversion of the usual undead model.

Then there's baculovirus, which infects the gypsy moth larva. The virus tinkers with hormones to send the caterpillar into a state of constant hunger, devouring everything, growing instead of molting. The caterpillar climbs to reach food and eventually dies in the treetops. This gives the virus a nice, fat larva to liquefy and turn into lots more virus to spread over the forest. Again, despite the pathogen being harmless to humans, there are those who speculate that it might somehow "mutate" and create zombies. Meanwhile, some legitimate agriculturalists talk of using the virus for insect control – and how could *that* possibly go wrong? Expect to see caterpillars and crop-dusters in zombie stories any day now.

Mutation

"They're mutants!" has explained countless video-game and comic-book humanoids that exhibit ghoulish, bestial behavior, and which could fairly be deemed living zombies. These are usually caused by manmade meddling (pp. 22-23) such as radiation, toxic waste, or deliberate experiments, but there's another possibility: We're "evolving" into zombies. This last notion isn't found in popular zombie fiction, but snarky social commentators occasionally joke that over-prescription of antidepressants, being so lazy that we'll drive a block to the corner store, too much television, and similar problems are breeding a race of zombies. This is the zombie as social criticism (pp. 9-10). Fitting this into a game would be an interesting challenge.

Space Dust

Not all "natural" sources of zombie-ism are native to the planet. In *Night of the Living Dead* (and, as a tribute, *Shaun of the Dead*), there are hints that the cause fell from space; *Fido* makes it explicit. This resembles infection (above) or infestation (above) if the stuff is biological, radiation (p. 23) or toxic waste (p. 23) if it isn't.

Like those things, it may raise undead or alter the living. The factors that make space dust interesting and distinct are its status as a Space Age danger that *isn't* manmade, the implication that zombies aren't confined to Earth, the possibility of zombies with distinctly alien traits, and the lingering doubt that we'll find a cure or even an explanation for something not of this world.

Manmade Meddling

Quite often in fiction, zombies are *made*. In some cases, this is deliberate, the work of a zombie-master. In others, it's the cost of pollution or a manmade disaster. The lines blur – especially when time comes to assess blame – and social criticism (pp. 9-10) is never far away.

Black Magic

The most traditional form of deliberate zombie-making involves magic. A wizard or a priest (usually evil) invokes supernatural forces (ditto) to create zombie servitors, which might function as goons, laborers, or demonstrations of power. This is most overt in West African sorcery (see *Into Africa*, p. 13), but it probably wouldn't be beneath

some Egyptian or Etruscan necromancer (see *Classical Corpses*, pp. 11-12).

Black-magic zombies aren't universally undead. Even in traditional African magic, there's the belief that sorcerers can curse the living or trap their souls, turning them into zombies without killing them. Indeed, soul-trapping is a fairly reliable way to create a slave in many cultures. Vodou inherited this idea, and mind-altering drugs (p. 23) might not be the *cause* of zombies, merely an ingredient in the spell.

In fantasy RPGs and computer games, though, most such zombies *are* undead. There, black-magic zombies have supplanted almost all other kinds, with NPCs and PCs alike casting spells that can reanimate just about anything dead and sometimes even conjure undead from any convenient patch of ground. Constructs given unlife by magic aren't unknown, either.

I Only Eat . . . Flesh: Not all wielders of arcane powers are studied sorcerers. Some powerful undead possess the innate ability to recruit less-powerful servants. In vampire lore – inspired by the fates of Lucy and Mina in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), and built on by practically every vampire story and RPG since – these slaves customarily take the form of lesser vampires or mind-controlled people. Sometimes the results are little better than zombies, whether they're actual undead monsters or still-living thralls or "ghouls." It's debatable whether such zombies qualify as "manmade" (their creator wasn't strictly human), but they're undeniably the result of deliberate meddling.

Galvanism

The notion of electrically reanimating the dead originated with Luigi Galvani (1737-1798), who used electricity to cause a dead frog to twitch. The experiments of Galvani's nephew, Giovanni Aldini (1762-1834), were known to Mary Shelley and an influence on *Frankenstein*, though the creature in that story got its spark from chemistry (see *Serums*, p. 23). The idea of animating humans this way seized the popular imagination; in 1837, Henry R. Robinson sketched "A Galvanized Corpse," a cartoon portraying a cadaver with its arms outstretched, foreshadowing the B-movie zombies to come over a century later (interestingly, this was a *political* jab at resurrecting outdated thinking). Consensus at the time was that no good could come of "playing God" like this – the results would always be imperfect and lack humanity. Consequently, when galvanic creations have shown up ever since – whether as *Frankenstein*-style constructs or as simple corpses given life or unlife by a jolt – they've rarely been better than zombies.

Zombies in the News: Zombie Drugs

Many drugs – ranging from alcohol, through treatments for everything from insomnia to psychosis, to heroin and powerful anesthetics – are sometimes said to turn the user into a zombie. A large class of these, *anticholinergic* agents, are found in plants (notably *Datura*) used in preparations intended to create Vodou zombies. Despite this overlap, "zombie" is normally used in the context of drugs to describe someone who's barely conscious and stumbling, not a monster. Still, numerous compounds can cause violent dissociative states, and sensational journalism loves to play these up.

The current favorite of dodgy news reports is *methylenedioxypyrovalerone* (MDPV). A stimulant, its outward effects include blood-shot eyes, growling, and grinding of the teeth. In low doses, it induces cravings for higher doses; in high doses, it causes panic, psychosis, and apparently cannibalism. In 2012, at least four "zombie attacks" were linked to MDPV in the U.S.: two attackers tried to eat the victim's face, one went for the hand, and one used a knife to get at the heart and brain. Even the presence of armed policemen in two of these cases didn't dissuade the assailants. Naturally, the yellow press linked these incidents into an epidemic and – seizing upon the image of a tooth-gnashing, red-eyed ghoul from zombie movies – described it using words like "zombie apocalypse." (Meanwhile, drunk drivers who are zombie-like in the zoned-out sense kill more people *every three hours* on U.S. streets.)

However, the idea of scary street drugs being at the root of the zombies is out there. It's certain to enhance acceptance of zombies as living menaces rather than undead ones. And already there's talk of the assailants and victims' socioeconomic status in the 2012 attacks, with hints that some ultra-conservative secret agency invented the drug to kill "human garbage" – *Propaganda and Totalitarianism* (pp. 9-10) lurking behind *Drug Abuse* (p. 9).

Mind-Altering Drugs

The idea that drugs could send someone out of his right mind, rendering him a violent ghoul or a zombie slave, is nothing new. Such notions have been intertwined with Vodou lore for ages (see *Across the Atlantic*, pp. 13-14), given semi-credibility by modern works such as *The Serpent and the Rainbow*, and linked to the evils of street drugs (see *Drug Abuse*, p. 9). *Zombies in the News: Zombie Drugs* (p. 22) offers a recent example of the latter. Drugged zombies are often portrayed as alive, if barely – although there's debate over whether the traditional Vodou zombie is a living person subdued by drugs or a corpse controlled by magical ingredients that happen to be drugs.

Radiation

Like galvanism (p. 22), radioactivity was once poorly understood and used to justify any number of things, including sci-fi zombies. There are hints in George A. Romero's movies that the zombies – definitely undead – might have been animated this way. There's no question that the ghouls in the *Fallout* video-game series are living beings altered by nuclear radiation. (In that setting, radiation can somehow render the body corpse-like yet extend life, but in cases where it fails to spare the brain, the result is a mindless monster that resembles a B-movie zombie which irradiates those it attacks.) Living or undead, such zombies are manmade but rarely deliberate creations – they're usually victims of reactor accidents, nuclear waste spills, or fallout from atomic bombs.

Not all zombifying radiation is of the nuclear kind, be warned! As we learn in *Let Sleeping Corpses Lie* (1974), *acoustic* radiation can also wake the dead.

Serums

Weird-science bioengineering and chemistry have been linked to reanimation since *Frankenstein*. In H.P. Lovecraft's short story "Herbert West – Reanimator" (1922), a mad scientist turns dead bodies into violent undead with a chemical injection. In Michael Miller's *Silent Rage* (1982), a formula developed by genetic engineers brings a psychotic killer back from death's door, whereupon he behaves much like a zombie. The *Resident Evil* video games and movies revolve around biotech (the "Tyrant Virus") that mutates people into monstrous bioweapons, notably zombies. And super-soldier treatments that use viruses to genetically alter the living seem fated to create contagious zombie plagues – witness *Flight of the Living Dead* (2007) and *Zombie Strippers!* (2008).

Whatever the rubber science (biology, chemistry, nanotechnology, etc.), the recurring theme is that a serum created with another purpose in mind – sometimes one as innocent as "saving lives" – turns everyone exposed to it into murderous zombies. Some formulas transform live subjects into zombies of the living variety; others bring back dead people as undead, or animate constructs made from

cadavers; and still others kill the living to create undead. Injection using an outsized needle is traditional. If the stuff is viral, it will almost inevitably lead to *Infection* (p. 21).

Military-Industrial Zombies

In fiction set at TL6+, the appearance of zombies often smacks of conspiracy (p. 146). Two important forces in zombie stories aren't distinct causes but are often to blame, and put a spin on many of the topics discussed throughout *The Motivation* (pp. 19-23).

Weapons of Mass Zombification

Someone desperate enough to win a war might deploy chemical, biological, or radiological weapons that create zombies. The zombies would behave like those noted under *Toxic Waste* (below), *Forces of Nature* (pp. 21-22), or *Radiation* (above), respectively – or as in *Serums* (above), if the stuff is sprayed on friendly forces to produce super-soldiers. The twist isn't (usually) in the zombies' capabilities, but in how people or corpses are exposed to zombification. Artillery shells, aircraft bombs, missiles, or "zombie rays" fired from armed satellites could blanket vast areas and mass-produce zombies for an instant zombie apocalypse (pp. 24-25). For an example, see Larry Hama's comic series, *Nth Man: The Ultimate Ninja* (1989-1990).

The Corporation

Such weapons have to come from somewhere – and that's most often a corporation that seeks lucrative military contracts, such as Black Mesa in the *Half-Life* video games and the Umbrella Corporation in *Resident Evil* fiction. Again, the twist isn't in the zombies as such. The new wrinkle is the fact that these outfits do *research*. Their facilities are liable to be home to dozens of failed experiments, variant zombies with unusual abilities, and constructs in settings that don't otherwise have them. They might even contain unrelated types of zombies, with electrically animated corpses in one easily escaped cell and live infection victims in the next.

Toxic Waste

Not all chemically created zombies result from deliberate experiments. Sometimes the stuff that causes them is turned loose in the world unintentionally, often before its weird effects are recognized. The best-known example is in *The Return of the Living Dead*, where the fictional chemical "trioxin" enters the environment by accident, reanimating corpses exposed to it as brain-eating ghouls. While these zombies are undead, toxic waste could affect the living instead or as well, with effects similar to *Mind-Altering Drugs* (above).

This cause bears many similarities to *Serums* (above), but differs in three important respects. First, it's more uncontrolled disaster than experiment. Second, there are lots of zombies from the outset, not just a few test subjects. Finally, contagion isn't a consideration; such outbreaks do spread, but only when the agent is carried further afield by runoff or air currents.

ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE

All of which brings us to *who*: Who becomes a zombie? How many are there?

Black magic, galvanism, mind-altering drugs, and serums tend to be administered on an individual basis; the same goes for anything that animates constructs. Unfinished business and vengeance are personal motivations, even if a group of people share them. Unhallowed ground is traditionally confined to an area like a particular graveyard, evil island, or haunted forest. And *The Corporation* (p. 23) locks its doors (though more for secrecy than for safety). Any of these could be the origin of a zombie outbreak – and if the necromancer or mad scientist is a workaholic, or if there are enough evil dead in the mass grave, the results may qualify as a horde, even an army. Ultimately, however, the problem is local.

On the other hand, radiation, toxic waste, and *Big, Bad Voodoo* (p. 19) have a nasty tendency to drift. Infection, infestation, and *The Curse that Keeps on Cursing* (p. 19) are actually *contagious*. Old-time divine displeasure targets an entire religion or civilization, while mutation threatens to become the fate of a whole species. And when Hell is full, space dust falls, or some crazy uses *Weapons of Mass Zombification* (p. 23), nobody is safe.

When this second class of things spirals out of control and threatens enough people – besieging them with and/or turning them into zombies – you have a *zombie apocalypse*. The zombies are taking over. They've spread far enough that mankind is locked in a war against them, and possibly far enough that civilization has been erased but for scattered survivors. This outcome is a staple of zombie fiction. For some fans, it's a required element of any *real* zombie story.

Unlike everything else in this chapter, the zombie apocalypse isn't about origins or motivations or form or purpose – it's about outcomes. Still, “apocalyptic zombies” do have to meet stricter criteria.

*If we stopped anyplace too long,
they would be drawn to us. Only a
few at first, but then more and more.
A never-ending army of undead.*

– Alice, in *Resident Evil:
Extinction*

THE DEAD RISE

The oldest variety of zombie apocalypse – found in ancient myth from Mesopotamia to the Med, and in the first truly apocalyptic zombie flicks – has only the dead becoming zombies. The monsters are the immediate threat. If the zombies are dangerous, as most are, then people killed by them might join them if they aren't torn to bits or

eaten. If this happens, though, it isn't due to contagion but because dying renders a person susceptible to whatever zombifying power is loose in the world. An important hallmark of such an event is that the living are more worried about *avoiding* zombies than *becoming* them.

This sort of apocalypse might see cadavers rise as corporeal undead or have dead souls “solidify” and invade from the afterlife. Divine displeasure or Hell filling up could send either kind of zombie, depending on whether the deceased pass into the Land of the Dead bodily or in spirit. On the other hand, zombifying influences that pollute the land – be they rubber science (radiation, space dust, or toxic waste) or supernatural (*Big, Bad Voodoo*, p. 19) – just about always reanimate dead bodies. An ambient infection or parasite that can't be passed to the living might also animate corpses, although this isn't particularly common in the source fiction.

Since only the dead in the “hot zone” of the curse, pollution, infection, etc. return as zombies, this kind of apocalypse relies on a good-sized starting area – it can't spread via contagion. To work dramatically, the affected region must be at least nation-sized, if not the whole planet or even the entire afterlife. If the scope is less than global, then the territory in question should be large enough that the rest of the world can't afford to intervene, while people inside have little hope of escaping – whether because the distances are too large on zombie-ridden roads or because the outside world has sealed the borders. The latter is a distinct possibility if the zombifying influence *seems* to be spreading, which is likely if it's strongest in one place and zombies take longer to rise elsewhere, or if the zombies are originating from a single spot (like the Mouth of Hell) and walking to the four corners of the Earth.

Finally, although it's traditional in both myth and popular fiction for the zombies to devour or at least attack the living, *this isn't required*. The zombies could simply shuffle around and get in the way, clogging infrastructure or even overloading the social system, as in Robin Campillo's *Les revenants* (2004). Dead bodies sometimes harbor *mundane* microbes and parasites which aren't good for the living, meaning that the zombies can cause people to sicken and die just by loitering – particularly if they wade mindlessly into the water reservoir or leave rotting body parts lying around the market.

THE ZOMBIE PLAGUE

In recent apocalyptic fiction, zombification is almost inevitably transmissible – the zombie apocalypse is a *pandemic*, built on fears of disease. The agent at work is usually a virus, sometimes a bacterium, fungus, parasite, or prion, and very occasionally a meme. Mutation, radiation, and chemicals are less likely, although it wouldn't be beyond rubber science to grant zombies a toxic or radioactive attack that creates more zombies with such abilities. *The Curse that Keeps on Cursing* (p. 19) is one of the few supernatural origins that works here, but don't discount divine displeasure emanating from a god of disease or spirits of pestilence!

The essential feature – more important than the precise agent involved, or whether the explanation invokes pseudoscience or the occult – is that *living people* become zombies. In this sort of apocalypse, the transformation is the thing. Even if the zombies do nothing worse than stagger around like ordinary disease victims, sneezing or vomiting rather than attacking, people are afraid of them. One misstep around them means catching what they have and losing your humanity. Thus, it is important to know how the condition is transmitted and how it progresses, which can in turn affect the zombie's physical form and abilities.

Transmission

Zombie plagues can be conferred in any number of ways, but these fall into a few broad categories:

Ordinary Vectors: If the condition involves a typical pathogen (well, typical aside from the fact that it creates zombies!), then it could spread in any of the usual ways. Bodily fluids from saliva to blood are always good. Coughing and puking work. Look up your favorite real-world disease and go from there. Don't read "ordinary" as "less scary," though. A zombie plague that can infect those who are merely in the same room, or who get bit by the wrong mosquito, is *insidious*, making it far more dangerous than one that calls for a direct attack.

Physical Attacks: Because violent assaults offer more exciting visuals than ordinary contagion – even if they're less suspenseful – zombies in or influenced by movies must often deliver a *specific* attack to transmit their plague. The overwhelming favorite here is biting: the zombie can punch, kick, grab, and scratch, and sometimes even bleed on you, but one nibble and you're doomed. However, plenty of zombie fiction has any physical contact that breaks the skin do the job. Occasionally, the designated attack is bizarre, with mutated zombies developing claws, 100-foot tongues, or disgusting talents like bleeding on demand or vomiting great distances (the *Left 4 Dead* games are inspiring here).

Supernatural Means: A zombie plague that's a curse of some kind might still rely on biting, scratching, spitting, etc. – many older beliefs don't differentiate between "curse" and "disease" anyway. But it's always possible that it's transmitted in whatever manner sorcerers work magic in the setting, be that a gesture or walking three circles around the victim's home. Alternatively, the zombie may have abilities in common with demons and more powerful undead, in which case it might suck the breath from the living or reach a spectral hand into the victim's chest to squeeze his heart.

Even Weirder: Fiction has zombification spreading in all kinds of other ways, too. As mentioned several times already, the film *Pontypool* has spoken words reprogram the victim into a zombie. And there's a whole nasty subgenre of zombie

movies where one has to get very intimate indeed with the zombie before contracting the plague.

Lethality

The other big question is whether the zombie plague kills those who contract it.

Lethal

In older apocalyptic fiction with zombie plagues, the condition kills the victim, whose corpse rises as an undead zombie in the spirit of old-fashioned monsters of all kinds (a lot of vampire and werewolf folklore outlines a similar pattern). The decline might be swift – death in seconds – or protracted, depending on the specific plague. The schedule for reanimation is similarly variable. A lethal plague can be hard to tell from something in the ground, air, etc. that reanimates *any* corpse, but there's one surefire distinction: only people exposed to zombies become zombies.

Nonlethal

In more recent fiction – the film *28 Days Later* and the video game *Left 4 Dead* are excellent examples – the plague *doesn't* kill. Rather, it alters behavior and possibly the body, turning the victim into a living zombie (though purists prefer the label "infected"). Being sick is synonymous with being a zombie. Again, time scales vary from plague to plague; symptoms might surface seconds or weeks after exposure, and the transition from "feels ill, but still human" to a growling monster likewise varies. Some nonlethal contagion doesn't even do this; it's asymptomatic until death, and spreads rapidly only if the zombies promptly maul their victims to death, which makes it easy to confuse with swift lethal contagion (both look like "He died of zombie bites and got back up!").

The End?

An important consideration in a zombie apocalypse is whether it's final or can be reversed, cleaned up, controlled, or at least contained. Stories like *Fido* and *World War Z* have humanity going to war with the zombies and winning back the world, but such plots are rare and almost always leave zombies around as a lingering threat. An apparent human "victory" might be nothing but a lull, as Juan Carlos Fresnadillo's *28 Weeks Later* (2007) aptly demonstrates. Mostly, the zombies win.

The End Has No End

This doesn't make it impossible for an ongoing campaign to feature a zombie apocalypse. Many sources – notably the *Walking Dead* comics, *Resident Evil* films, and *Left 4 Dead* video games – tell the stories of small groups of survivors who would make fine PCs. Pulling this off successfully does mean selecting suitable zombies, though. The situation described in *The Dead Rise* (p. 24) is easiest, as the heroes can view zombies as cannon fodder and need not worry about turning until death – a situation little different from hack n' slash fantasy, truth be told. *The Zombie Plague* (pp. 24-25) is harder unless the GM allows replacement characters (see *Replacements*, p. 150) or hands out immunity (see *Heroes, Resistance, and Immunity*, p. 30).

CHAPTER TWO

VICTIMS AND KILLERS

If you got a gun, shoot 'em in the head. That's the sure way to kill 'em. If you don't, get yourself a club or a torch, beat 'em or burn 'em.

– Sheriff McClelland, in *Night of the Living Dead*

GURPS Zombies prioritizes the nitty-gritty of zombies over describing those who face them simply because so many existing supplements augment the **GURPS Basic Set** with abilities, gear, and genre advice for heroes. **GURPS Action 1: Heroes**, **Dungeon Fantasy 1: Adventurers**, **Gun**

Fu, **Martial Arts**, and particularly **Monster Hunters 1: Champions** are useful guides to creating suitable PCs, while **Low-Tech**, **High-Tech**, and especially **Loadouts: Monster Hunters** are indispensable when outfitting them. Still, *good* zombie stories are about the *people* rather than the zombies, so some discussion of victims, survivors, zombie-killers, and zombie-masters is in order before wading into the details of their tormentors, targets, and thralls.

GET READY TO FIGHT

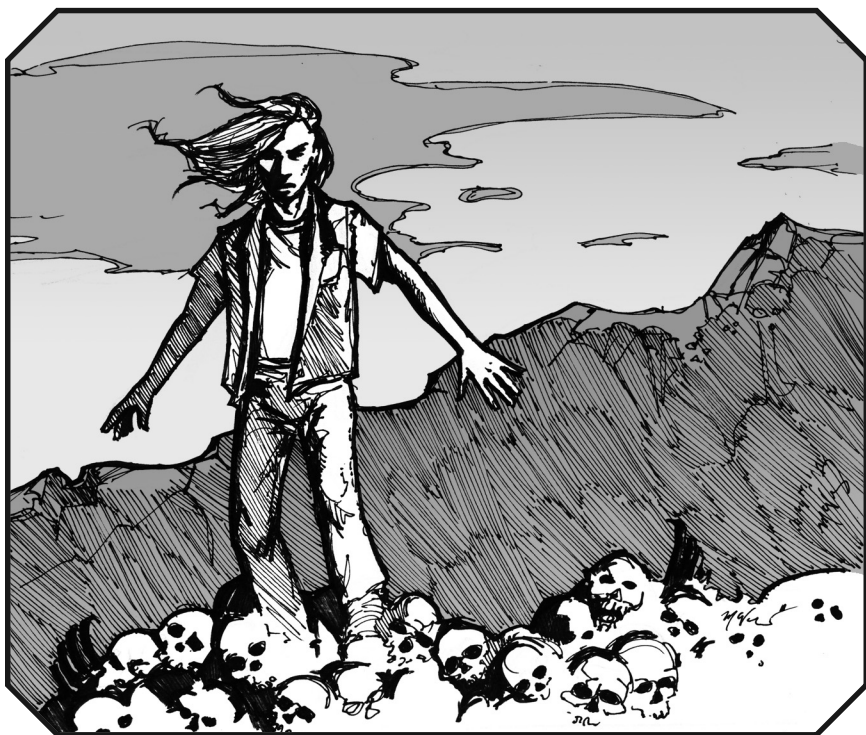
Characters who contend with zombies don't *necessarily* have to differ from ones who don't. A widespread zombie-fiction convention is that the protagonists are everymen; if they prove to be heroes, they're heroes of necessity.

Then again, fantasy games are chock-full of professional monster-hunters, and there's a popular and growing sub-genre of occult fiction which imports such figures into what would be horror settings, if only the leading actors weren't fearless. And in some game worlds, PCs may be zombie-makers.

The direction in which a particular **GURPS Zombies** campaign will lurch is the topic of Chapter 5, but players whose alter egos must confront zombies might want some idea of what will work and what won't.

ADVANTAGES

Zombies are mostly uncomplicated physical threats – one will try fight you, 10 or 100 will savagely mob you and tear you apart, and many more than that may make short work of *society*. Thus, the most useful advantages for dealing with them are those that improve combat ability, toughness, and self-sufficiency in general; see *Survival Traits* (p. 27). Advantages for PCs who can manipulate zombies or specifically resist zombie abilities merit more detailed notes, however.



Allies

see p. B36

In campaigns where PCs can have zombie servitors, it's reasonable to allow a casting of Mass Zombie to create an *ad hoc* army for the duration of one battle or even an entire adventure. However, if a *bokor* desires reliable slave labor, a fantasy necromancer wants undead a gesture away at all times, or a mad scientist insists on an escort of zombots or constructs, then the GM should treat zombies as Allies. Something like the Zombie spell or Gadgeteer advantage becomes the *prerequisite* for such Allies, not a replacement for them.

Allies like these are supernatural abilities, not social advantages (see **GURPS Powers**, p. 41). Thus, while Allies are normally reserved for PCs, those discussed below are also available to NPC zombie-masters.

Zombies' Power

Most kinds of zombies aren't worth many points. It can therefore be useful to extrapolate *Ally's Power* (p. B37) below 25% of the zombie-master's own point total, to a minimum of 5%, which covers 0-point and negative-points zombies:

Point Total	Cost
5%	0.2 point
10%	0.4 point
15%	0.6 point
20%	0.8 point

Apply multipliers for ally groups and frequency of appearance, adjust for percentage enhancements and limitations, and round up at the end. For instance, zombies worth 5% or less of a PC's points start at 0.2 point, 100 of them are $\times 12$ (2.4 points), 12 or less appearance gives $\times 2$ (4.8 points), and Summonable adds +100% (9.6 points). Thus, 100 weak zombies which erupt from the ground on 12 or less cost 10 points.

This is a reasonable price in games where PCs might otherwise create hordes of zombies in play for free. In other campaigns, however, even 10 zombies can get out of hand, never mind 100. The GM may therefore wish to enforce a minimum point total of 25% for zombies – a fair solution, given that the master *will* benefit from more-capable servants. The following approaches are particularly suitable, and can be combined:

- Offer “improved” zombie templates with fewer weaknesses than non-Ally zombies. They might retain human IQ and lack Cannot Learn, so that they can “grow” in points in step with their master; removing the typical IQ-2 and Cannot Learn will add 70 points to a zombie. Or perhaps they have Unaffected by (Spell) perks (p. 57) to protect against magical dispelling and theft.

- Set a minimum point value in attributes and useful skills for the “raw material.”

Survival Traits

Zombie-killers and apocalypse survivors will find certain abilities exceptionally valuable. These fall into a few general categories (traits in **boldface** appear more than once, and are good buys):

Staying Frosty: High Will (or **IQ**); **Combat Reflexes**, Fearlessness, and Unfazeable.

Running Away: High FP and Basic Move (**DX** and **HT** boost Basic Move via **Basic Speed**, and **HT** also helps FP); **Fit/Very Fit** and Perfect Balance.

Surviving Attacks: High **HT** and HP (or **ST**); **Fit/Very Fit**, Hard to Kill, Hard to Subdue, High Pain Threshold, Rapid/Very Rapid Healing, and Resistant (pp. 30-31).

Spotting/Avoiding Trouble: High Per (or **IQ**); Absolute Direction, Acute Senses, Danger Sense, Intuition, Night Vision, **Outdoorsman**, and Peripheral Vision.

Fighting Back: High **ST**, **DX**, and **Basic Speed** (**HT** helps here, too!); **Combat Reflexes**, Enhanced Dodge, and Extra Attack.

Survivalism: High **IQ**; Artificer, Common Sense, Green Thumb, Healer, Less Sleep, **Outdoorsman**, Photographic Memory (no books or computers!), Reduced Consumption, Serendipity (“Look – ammo!”), Temperature Tolerance, and Versatile.

... and obviously **Luck**. Spend a little in each category, points permitting. Pay attention to the first three lists, anyway – in a group, not everyone needs to be a scout, a fighter, and a survivalist.

Not Since *THEY* Came

In a full-on zombie apocalypse, social traits are unlikely to survive. If society collapses, then so will the organizations behind most varieties of Duty, Legal Enforcement Powers, Legal Immunity, Rank, Security Clearance, and Tenure; the records supporting Debt, Independent Income, Status, and Wealth, and that make Alternate Identity and Zeroed meaningful; and the networks and traditions that set the norms for Reputation, Social Regard, and Social Stigma.

There *might* be police and military out there keeping everyone polite, and survivalists *might* cooperate in large groups that qualify as societies, but don't count on it. Ask the GM before choosing the traits above. In a campaign where the disaster will happen in play, he may allow such things for 0 points – they're mostly just interesting backstories that explain skill sets, although the likes of “Former sheriff” or “Ex-Green Beret” could justify a Reputation among a small survivor group.

Appearance, Charisma, Cultural Adaptability/Familiarity, Fashion Sense, Languages (and Language Talent), Smooth Operator, Social Chameleon, and Voice remain useful if enough people survive to rally and bargain with. They're poor investments if the campaign is “a few against the zombie-infested ruins,” though. In that case, the GM will probably forbid points back from disadvantages like Clueless, Low Empathy, No Sense of Humor, and Oblivious, too. (*Zombies* can have those, because such problems help define their inhumanity.)

For instance, generic warriors-made-zombies might start with ST 11, DX 11, HT 11, and 25 points in combat skills, picking up 65 points.

This isn't to say that players have free rein to fiddle with zombie templates or character sheets – they don't. Like all Associated NPCs (p. B31), Allies are the GM's to create. The GM applies whatever changes are needed to raise the zombie's point value to 25% or more of the PC's points. This will make the cost less trivial. For example, at 25%, a horde of 100 zombies that materializes on 12 or less is a serious 48-point advantage, not a minor 10-point one.

Horde Size

Even with this measure, vast zombie legions can warp the campaign. The GM may wish to restrict large forces to zombie-masters with suitable adjunct abilities. "One Ally per level of Magery, Power Investiture, or an appropriate power Talent" is simple but perhaps too strict. It might be better to look up level in the "Size" column of the *Size and Speed/Range Table* (p. B550) and then read "Linear Measurement" in "zombies" rather than "yards": three zombies for Magery or Power Investiture 1, five at level 2, seven at level 3, etc. For mad scientists, use levels of a standard skill Talent such as Artificer, or even levels past IQ in Science! skill (p. B175).

If the GM is generous and of a tactical mind, and intends for PCs to lead armies in play, then he could permit

hordes large enough that at a spacing of one zombie per hex on a battle map, each level of the enabling trait lets the zombie-master command one ring of zombies around him. This works out to $3 \times \text{level} \times (\text{level} + 1)$ zombies. The next table sums up the results: "Level" is the level the trait, and also the number of rings; "Horde Size" is the total number of zombies in those rings; "Group Size" is the standard range used to price Allies; and "Group Multiplier" is the multiplier to Ally cost for that group size.

Level	Horde Size	Group Size	Group Multiplier
1	6	6-10	x6
2	18	11-20	x8
3	36	21-50	x10
4	60	51-100	x12
5	90	51-100	x12
6	126	101-200	x14
7	168	101-200	x14
8	216	201-500	x16
9	270	201-500	x16
10	330	201-500	x16
11	396	201-500	x16
12	468	201-500	x16

Whatever the limit, a horde consists of interchangeable Allies with *identical* character sheets. The player who wants diversity must purchase one Allies advantage per subtype or individual with its own distinct write-up.

Hordes in GURPS Mass Combat

Someone with many zombie Allies (pp 27-29) might send them to war. This calls for **GURPS Mass Combat**, with these notes:

Element type. Zombies are usually infantry of some kind, and begin with the stats of the element they were made from.

Numbers. Number of elements is (horde size)/10, dropping fractions; e.g., a necromancer with 126 zombies commands 12 elements.

Logistics. At TL0-3, zombies cost nothing to maintain; at TL4+, they're 50% less costly to maintain. Cost to replace casualties is also lower – subtract 50% unless the means of zombification is clearly better or worse.

Special classes. Only zombies that can understand orders (GM's decision) and speak (no Cannot Speak or Mute) keep the Reconnaissance class. Only those that can use equipment (IQ 6+ and not Bestial) retain *any other* class. "Zombie" isn't a useful class in itself.

Features. Savage zombies are Impetuous; those with suitable advantages have Night (with Dark Vision or Night Vision) or Sealed (requires both Doesn't Breathe and Vacuum Support); and those with positive template values might rate Super-Soldier (GM's decision).

Equipment quality. Bestial and IQ 1-5 zombies can't understand gear, making effective quality Poor. The same goes for ancient undead reanimated with rusty old gear. Otherwise, use whatever quality the zombies had before zombification.

Troop quality. Leaderless, savage, or IQ 1-5 hordes are Inferior. Zombies that obey a master's orders unquestioningly are Average. Zombies never rise above Average.

Travel. Undead and constructs suffer no penalties from a forced march.

Replacements and Recruits

If a zombie-master wishes to replace lost Allies, he might have to pay in time, money, and/or magical energy, but never in points; to determine such costs, see *Zombification* (pp. 133-136). The GM may further require a day and a skill roll to "attune," "bond," or "program" each replacement. This should involve a suitable skill chosen from those under *Maintenance* (p. 62).

Growing a group of Allies follows the same guidelines, except that the PC must also pay the difference in point cost between new and old group size, and possibly raise the level of some enabling trait to justify this.

New Special Enhancement

Zombie hordes consist of Minions. These nearly always have Slave Mentality (in the Automaton meta-trait), for +0%, but if the zombie template lacks this disadvantage, the modifier becomes +50%. Despite being "weird," zombies rarely rate Special Abilities – the gifts on their templates cost points, raise their point value, and thus *already* increase Allies cost. If the zombies magically appear or emerge from the ground, then add either Summonable or the following new enhancement:

Conjured: As Summonable (p. B38), except that each time the advantage is used, instead of summoning the same beings, it produces different ones. The GM must make a reaction roll whenever new Allies appear, to determine their willingness to obey orders. If they're killed, the summoner must wait a full day to call replacements. The drawbacks of conjuring entities with no memory of or devotion to the summoner offset the benefits of being able to replace slain Allies just by waiting a day, so the enhancement costs the same as Summonable. +100%.

*Good zombie stories
are about the people
rather than the zombies.*

Gadgeteer

see p. B56

In most game worlds, anyone who wants to create zombies without magic (see *Spells*, pp. 36-37) requires this advantage – and sometimes even wizards need it, if they must invent their spells first. Curing zombie plagues or restoring zombies to their original selves usually calls for it, too, though mundane inventing *might* be up to the challenge. Finally, the GM may deem Gadgeteer a prerequisite for weird-science zombie Allies. If he does, you need not roll dice to make your zombies – simply assume that it worked, and treat the Allies advantage as a fancy way to price Unusual Background (Invention) (p. B477).

New Special Limitations

Specialized: Your Gadgeteer or Quick Gadgeteer advantage has limited scope. You're only a cinematic inventor in one narrow area. Most specialties of importance in **GURPS Zombies** mirror those of the Hazardous Materials skill: *Biological* (anything involving genetic engineering, medicine, pathogens, or surgery), *Chemical* (nonmagical brews of all sorts, from drugs to toxic waste), *Magical* (inventing new spells), *Nanotech* (engineering and defeating nanomachines), and *Radioactive* (gizmos that rely on or shoot radiation, whether to cure, kill, mutate, or reanimate). The GM may also allow *Robotics* for everything from tiny bug-bots, through androids, to giant mecha. Specialties are by theme, not skill, and you may sometimes need skills that aren't obviously in your area; e.g., Bioengineering (Genetic Engineering) to mutate with a radiation beam. A specialty is fully general within its theme – there's no requirement to work with zombies! -50%.

Zombies: The GM may allow a *Zombies* specialty that covers *only* creating and curing zombies – but *all* kinds of zombies. This is normally just an exotic form of Specialized, but it can be taken in conjunction with one of the usual forms to greatly limit your mad science to specific subtypes of zombies: Biological Zombies, Radioactive Zombies, etc. -50%, or -80% if doubly specialized.

Mind Control

see p. B68

A rare few fictional people can control zombies without being their creator or original master. Many modifiers – including a few defined in **GURPS Powers** and repeated below – are common here. For two examples of how these work, see p. 54; while those abilities are intended for zombies that control other zombies, non-zombies *might* have them.

New Special Enhancement

Many zombies have Immunity to Mind Control (p. 54), which *negates* Mind Control, even when it has Zombie Command to turn it into a zombie-control power. Someone who's bent on controlling all zombies – including those that supposedly can't be suborned – needs Cosmic, Irresistible Attack, +300%. This bypasses Mind Shield, Resistant, Immunity, etc., but it adds a whopping 150 points and can still be defeated by zombies with Cosmic, +50% on their defense.

Zombie-masters who want to give fire-and-forget orders will need another costly enhancement:

Independent: Your Mind Control doesn't require ongoing attention. If it works, you're free to do other things. You must still concentrate to initiate control, but you can't claim the +2 or +4 for lengthy concentration. If the victim fails to resist, control persists for one minute per point by which he lost the Quick Contest; you can't maintain it indefinitely by concentrating. These drawbacks are minor next to the benefits. First, only an attempt to force the subject to act against his principles can break control; you're "out of the loop" already, so incapacitating you changes *nothing*. Second, since your attention isn't divided, each contact is separate from all others; there's no -1 per slave, and critical failure with one victim doesn't free the rest. +70%.

New Special Limitations

Almost all forms of zombie control have the new Zombie Command limitation. Sense-Based, -20% is also typical – customarily as Hearing-Based, requiring the zombie-master to give voice commands.

The new Emotion Control and Suggestion modifiers can be combined with a further Accessibility limitation worth -30% that specifies *one particular* emotion or suggestion. For Emotion Control, this is usually "vague loyalty," meaning the zombie will stay near its new master and try to protect him, but *not* obey orders. For Suggestion, it's typically "attack this target," meaning the zombie will go after a particular victim, but once more without the controller being able to dictate how.

Emotion Control: You can't control the subject's *actions*, just his feelings. For some guidelines on what's possible, see the Sway Emotions skill (p. B192). Emotion Control is mutually exclusive with Conditioning Only and Suggestion. -50%.

Suggestion: You can't command the subject to take specific actions – you can only suggest a *general* course of action. Effects are as for the Suggest skill (p. B191). Suggestion is mutually exclusive with Conditioning Only and Emotion Control. -40%.

Zombie Command: You can only control *zombies*. Each target's racial template must be worth less than your own (fewer than 0 points, if you're human). In a campaign with many zombie types, you may limit scope further using Accessibility. -25%.

Resistant

see p. B80

All the usual forms of this advantage exist in a **GURPS Zombies** campaign. Resistant to Disease is of particular value against zombies carrying *mundane* disease (many do), or in a flyblown, corpse-strewn apocalypse where water-treatment plants, pharmacies, and hospitals are things of the past.

If the story features zombie contagion, the GM must decide how resistance to *that* works. Several options follow, and *Heroes, Resistance, and Immunity* (below) offers more. Players beware: The GM isn't obliged to share this decision – uncertainty among survivors may be essential to the campaign!

Extraordinary Symptoms: A zombie plague could be an “ordinary” bacterial, fungal, parasitic, or viral disease with astonishing symptoms. The resistance roll may be difficult (as severe as -6 for infectivity), but a robust immune system helps. In that case, Resistant to Disease functions normally. Certain forms of contagion make a roll to infect instead of

offering a roll to resist; against these, treat +3 or +8 to HT as -3 or -8 to the *disease's* success roll. Whatever rolls are involved, Immunity completely blocks an “ordinary” zombie plague.

Extraordinary Disease: The cause might instead be some weird-but-comprehensible factor such as chemical toxins, nanomachines, or prions. If a HT roll is allowed, then it's reasonable to permit PCs to buy extra resistance, but separate from Resistant to Disease. Resistant to Poison involves a “Common” category (base 15 points); Resistant to Nanomachines, an “Occasional” one (base 10 points); and Resistant to Prions, a “Rare” one (base 5 points). These protect from zombie contagion just like an equivalent level of Resistant to Disease – *if* you have the right trait. Restricting ordinary humans to +3 in these categories is most realistic.

Unique Disease: A zombie plague needn't make any sense in real-world terms. If the GM rules that it's its own thing, then it is. It counts as “Rare,” but it *isn't* a subset of an “Occasional” group such as disease or poison – it's a whole other specific item. Base cost is 5 points, and the GM decides whether PCs may buy Resistant to Zombie Plague. There are plenty of examples in the source fiction where no hero can resist!

Resistant to Curses

Curses *can* work like plagues, but with the “Mental Resistance” rule in effect so that Resistant aids Will rather than HT.

Heroes, Resistance, and Immunity

When planning any campaign that features a zombie plague, the GM must answer a vital question: Can the PCs be resistant, perhaps even immune? The answer may well be “no.” This is prevalent in zombie fiction, but it *does* mean either a short-term campaign or one where creating new PCs is a regular feature. If that isn't desirable, other options exist.

The approaches listed under *Resistant* (above) are all straightforward. Where Resistant to Disease, Poison, Prions, or Nanomachines is involved, *immunity* is implausible for humans, but a modest level of natural resistance is reasonable. The GM might even adopt “all survivors have an amazing immune system” as a campaign premise, and require the PCs to have a minimum total resistance roll, whether they get it from high HT, Fit/Very Fit, or a suitable variety of Resistant.

Another possibility is that the PCs are *immune* to zombie infection. This, too, appears in fiction, and makes a fun campaign premise: The heroes are among the lucky few, be they humanity's last hope or genetically engineered monsters themselves. Such immunity can alter the game's entire tone, and thus should be a campaign advantage, mandatory for all PCs. The “unique disease” approach works best here – that is, Immunity to Zombie Plague [5] – because it avoids general Immunity to Disease, Poison, etc. which would deprive the GM of other dramatic tools. The GM might

want to add an Unusual Background, but that's unnecessary; if *all* the PCs are immune, nobody is more unusual than anybody else, and power level is better preserved by adjusting starting points.

Curses, Foiled

Against curses, the GM might wish to use Magic Resistance or Mind Shield *instead* of Resistant. This keeps resistance to the zombie curse consistent with resistance to other curse-like effects. It also makes it easier to tune characters to a minimum resistance score, if all PCs are required to be tough but not immune.

However, Immunity is still best handled by Resistant – as Immunity to Zombie Curse [5] – and should still be a campaign advantage.

Typhoid Mary, Zombie Larry

Heroes who are immune to a plague or a curse are ideal subjects for another twist found in fiction: They're carriers! For a zombie, this is a 0-point feature (see *Infectious*, p. 67), because creating new zombies isn't a bad thing. It's definitely bad for people, though, so it counts as Social Disease (Carrier) [-10] (pp. 33-34). The GM can make this disadvantage a prerequisite for Immunity to Zombie Plague [5] or Immunity to Zombie Curse [5], setting the net cost to be an asymptomatic carrier at -5 points.

Cost depends on category breadth: a broad power source or advantage origin (p. B33) such as Chi, Divine, or Spirit is “Very Common”; a particular power like one of those on pp. 121-136 of **Powers** (Bioenergy, Death, Evil, Vampirism, etc.), the evil influence of a specific deity, or a body of curses equal in depth to a whole college of magic, is “Common.” Skip “Occasional” unless there’s an entire subset of abilities or curses that enslave the living or reanimate the dead. One specific zombie curse is “Rare,” like a unique plague.

For alternatives to Resistant in this case, see *Curses*, *Foiled* (p. 30).

True Faith

see p. B94

This advantage only affects *some* zombies: those with the Can Be Turned By True Faith quirk (p. 66), a trivial Dread. The GM should tell players whether True Faith is worth having.

New Special Enhancement

To repel anything even vaguely unnatural, add Cosmic. Affecting subjects who ought to be immune is what **GURPS Power-Ups 4** calls a “godlike trick”: +300%. For just “all zombies, whatever their traits,” the GM may reduce that to +150%.

Cosmic or not, if True Faith works, this next enhancement makes it work better:

Turning: You can “turn” the entities that your True Faith repels. Take a Concentrate maneuver and roll a Quick Contest of Will with any such being that can see you. Roll just once for hordes of identical monsters with the same Will. Any creature you win or tie against can’t move any closer to you than yards equal to your margin of victory (minimum one yard). If it’s inside that radius, it must flee as described for unmodified True Faith. This effect endures for as long as you concentrate and for 1d seconds after you stop. +65%.

PERKS

Zombie- and survival-specific perks can spice up a **GURPS Zombies** campaign. The GM may wish to limit each PC to a small number of these (say, two or three).

Enhanced Z-Factor

Prerequisite: Resistant (pp. 30-31) to whatever causes zombies.

In settings where Resistant to Disease, Nanomachines, Poison, or Prions is effective against zombie plague, this perk makes *your* advantage better. It boosts the +3 level to +8, or the +8 level to full Immunity, against that specific danger.

Good with Zombies

When you encounter zombies, you get an IQ-3 roll to deduce their general motivation (“following orders,” “hunger,” “revenge,” etc.). You also receive +1 on any Psychology, Tactics, or Teaching roll the GM requires for “taming” or outflanking zombies.

Horde-Walker

Out of combat, zombies in hordes *ignore* you provided that you walk no faster than they do – maybe you smell like them! For this to work, you must stay in the horde and let the zombies see and jostle you. If you walk with zombies that cause a contagion roll (see *Contagion*, p. B443), you roll at +1 for “touched briefly” *at best*. If combat breaks out, then regardless of who starts it, the zombies will recognize you for what you are.

Hot-Zone Hero/Heroine

Prerequisites: Hazardous Materials (any) and NBC Suit at 16+.

You’re exempt from *routine* skill rolls to don or decontaminate hazmat gear: masks, suits, etc. This has no effect on *extraordinary* uses, or on rolls to handle dangerous stuff rather than to suit up.

NBC Suit Experience

The NBC Suit skill (p. B192) doesn’t limit your DX or DX-based skills when wearing biohazard gear that isn’t bulky enough to give at least -1 to DX.

Rest in Pieces

Prerequisite: Blessed, Power Investiture, True Faith, or other holy status.

You have a holy gift: Anything that you, personally, slay can’t be reanimated. Once it’s down, it’s down for good and won’t be returning. This doesn’t bypass advantages such as Extra Life, Supernatural Durability, and Unkillable – it simply prevents a spell, zombie plague, etc. from zombifying the corpse.

Rule of 15

A Fright Check normally fails on any roll of 14+, regardless of modified Will (*The Rule of 14*, p. B360). This perk means you only fail on 15+. Will and any bonuses must total 14+ for this to be *useful*, of course!

Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)

Each SOP perk exempts you from having to tell the GM that your PC is doing one particular thing that’s second nature for him. You always enjoy the benefit of the doubt. This doesn’t give you the *material* resources your perk needs – it just means that if you have those resources, you use them.

Check the Bodies: You never assume that a body – however broken – is “safe.” If the GM makes noticing zombies among corpses a matter of asking, seeking to trip up the unwary, he must treat you as having asked. If detection requires a skill roll, he must roll for you even if you didn’t specify that you were using your skill.

Clean Freak: If there’s clean water, you wash. If there’s soap, you use it. And if there was a chance to decontaminate your gear safely, you did it. You’ll always qualify for any small bonus to HT rolls vs. contagion from such measures.

On Alert: You always have full kit packed and ready to go in the event of emergency. This doesn't mean you react faster (get Combat Reflexes for that) – it just means always being able to scoop up all your gear without wasting valuable time.

Tastes Bad

You taste terrible to flesh-eating zombies. They can smell this, making them reluctant to bite you. Whenever one *could* bite you, roll 3d (in a horde attack, roll once per turn for all the zombies):

3-6 – It's desperate, and bites you anyway.

7-14 – It opts to attack in some other way: grapple, punch, etc.

15-18 – Wow, you're gross! It attacks a nearby ally, or avoids you if you're alone.

Won't Rise

In a campaign world that has *undead* zombies, you'll never join them. Zombie plague – or zombie bites – may kill you, but that's truly the end. If there are spells, serums, mad-science rays, etc. that reanimate the dead, they flat-out fail on your corpse. Think of this as insurance for your pals!

*It's not the end of the world,
it's just the end of the day.*
– Grant Mazzy, in **Pontypool**

DISADVANTAGES

In a campaign that features zombies or survival situations, unusual personal problems might surface. If the triggering circumstances seem unlikely, the GM may rule that these disadvantages give fewer points or none at all.

Compulsive Behavior

see p. B128

In a zombie apocalypse (or any disaster scenario), a new compulsion is valid:

Compulsive Survivalism: Your zeal for preparedness often preempts common sense. Make a self-control roll whenever you see an opportunity to scrounge ammo, food, fuel, medicine, or other scarce resources, even if the area is dangerous; e.g., a "hot zone," or a mall overrun by zombies or gangs. Failure means you *must* investigate.

Whenever you have downtime, you must dedicate a percentage of it to maintaining gear, inventorying supplies, and triple-checking perimeters, regardless of whether that's necessary. This reduces the time you have for learning skills, which can ultimately make your survival *less* likely.

Self-Control Number	6	9	12	15
Free Time Spent	80%	40%	20%	10%

Finally, your insistence on drills and escape plans affects how people react to you: +1 per full -5 points in this disadvantage (after the self-control multiplier) from others who have it, but an equal-sized penalty from those who don't. -5 points.*

Delusions

see p. B130

Many zombie-related Delusions are possible:

Minor: "Zombification is reversible" or "Zombies are their old selves, deep inside," unless commonly known to be true. "Society will return to normal," in most apocalypse scenarios. -5 points.

Major: "I'm immune to becoming a zombie," if zombieism is contagious and you're *not* immune. "Headshots kill zombies" or "Holy water burns zombies," if widely known to be untrue. -10 points.

Severe: "I am a zombie" – accompanied by moaning, biting, etc., and even running into hordes to join your brothers. -15 points.

These mostly annoy others with undue optimism or disturbing behavior: -1 to reaction rolls per -5 points. However, if the GM feels it's the sort of thing that wouldn't matter in polite company (or if there's no polite company left!), he may handle it as a combat disadvantage *instead*.

Combat Delusions have self-control numbers, and on any turn when such a Delusion would apply in a fight (GM's decision), you must try a self-control roll (see p. B121). Success lets you act normally. Failure means you must do something *risky* – much as if suffering from On the Edge (p. B146), and usually involving either an unnecessary skill penalty (e.g., -7 to target the skull when it'll make no difference) or an All-Out Attack. On a critical failure, you'll either fight the rest of the battle that way or do something radically unwise (like run into the horde screaming, "Brothers!").

Flashbacks

see p. B136

If it's possible to be a *former* zombie – a face-eating psycho who broke his addiction to zombie drugs, a rehabilitated Vodou slave, someone cured of zombie plague, or even a formerly undead person made dead and then resurrected – then this disorder is fitting. Any level is possible, though the GM may wish to start newly cured people at Crippling and have them buy off the disadvantage one severity level at a time.

Obsession

see p. B146

If it's possible to create zombies but the Zombie spell is unavailable to starting PCs, or the process involves mad science rather than magic and requires costly, time-intensive gadgeteering or inventing, then variations on "Create a zombie" are -5-point Obsessions. If zombification is well-known but poorly regarded, then raising *many* zombies can be tricky and lead to unwise decisions, so "Raise a vast zombie army" is also -5 points.

Are They People?

The thorny question of whether zombies are *people* arises when buying certain traits, particularly mental disadvantages.

Morally, the answer depends on the common understanding of zombies. If zombies are known constructs, mutants, or undead – or look it – they don't fall under the aegis of “good” disadvantages: Charitable, Pacifism, Sense of Duty to their former race, etc. Intolerance of them isn't worth points; they're monsters, tolerated only by those with Delusions (p. 32). And being monsters, they trigger Teratophobia.

Zombies that are alive but infected, drugged, or similar – or look it – are *victims*. If there's no known cure, individuals with Charitable, Pacifism, or Sense of Duty can euthanize zombies without undue guilt, but must do so *humanely*; a bullet in the brain is fine, burning alive isn't. If a cure exists, or the high-minded hero has a Delusion that one does, zombies enjoy the same status as non-zombies, and will trigger mental disadvantages regarding the sick. Cure or no, Intolerance (Zombies) becomes a heartless trait akin to Intolerance (Sick People), worth -5 points and earning -3 on reactions from most NPCs. In a setting where zombies are regarded as useful workers, pets, or beloved ex-family members, even grossly inhuman zombies will be seen this way!

Sense of Duty to zombies is a special case. When the subject of an *existing* disadvantage is irreversibly zombified, euthanasia is acceptable – but a *new* problem like Sense of Duty (My zombie family) [-5] or (Zombies) [-15] can be interesting. If zombies are

monsters, this gives -1 to reactions per -5 points; others are unlikely to understand.

Zombie Dependents are in a similar boat. It's fair and dramatic to permit all sorts of zombified loved ones, friends, or acquaintances to retain their status – and to permit *curable* zombies as Dependents in general. Other zombies are property at best, unsafe pets at worst; they can't be Dependents.

People or not, zombies add headcount for the purpose of Demophobia, which is about crowds, not personhood. Only zombies that can speak or gesture can hold Autophobia or Chummy at bay, though. But if they can communicate even a little, a lonely nutcase might keep them as pets!

Likewise, whatever their status as people, zombies are *different*. They always activate Xenophobia and Xenophilia. Xenophobia's additional -3 to self control around nonhumans kicks in only if people *don't* regard zombies as victims or pets, however.

Physically, living zombies count as members of their original species for the sake of exotic traits like Weakness to the presence of a race, and for limitations such as Accessibility. Constructs and undead are considered separate races – to encompass them, broaden the scope. Where an advantage such as Detect has the “undead” specialty, it affects undead zombies only. “Zombies” is a legitimate category, however; it's a step rarer or more restrictive than “undead” or “living” in a setting with one sort of zombie, or on a par with these categories if several varieties exist.

If creating zombies is believed impossible, then a fixation on doing so is a -10-point Obsession. In most zombie-apocalypse scenarios, so is “Find a cure.” Either will mean many points poured into ever-higher occult or scientific skills, along with vast resources wasted on fruitless or dangerous experiments.

Phobias

see p. B148

All zombies trigger Xenophobia, while hordes play havoc with Demophobia. The infected set off Mysophobia; magical slaves, Manaphobia; and the undead, Necrophobia. And zombies that aren't clearly people are a problem for Teratophobia (see *Are They People?*, above). In settings with many zombies, the GM may allow a unique Phobia:

Zombies (Zombophobia): The mere sight or sound of a person reduced to a mindless, ambulatory state terrifies you. Make a self-control roll whenever you encounter someone whose words or actions seem feverish or robotic due to drugs, illness, mind control, etc. Bona fide *monsters* – particularly undead, and constructs sewn together from corpses – give -3. Hordes also give -3. These penalties are cumulative! -10 points in a zombie apocalypse, -5 otherwise.*

If several Phobias apply, roll just once. For this purpose, treat Squeamish as a Phobia. Use the *worst* self-control number for the roll and to gauge the penalty for mastering the Phobia, with an extra -1 per additional Phobia.

Example: Necrophobia takes -6 for unnaturally animated bodies. Xenophobia suffers -3 for nonhumans, which includes genuine undead. If a survivor with Necrophobia (12) and Xenophobia (12) met the walking dead, he'd use the lower of $12 - 6 = 6$ or $12 - 3 = 9$, add -1, and roll at 5 or less. If he succeeded, future actions would have the -2 for self-control 12, plus -1 for the extra Phobia: -3.

Social Disease

see p. B155

If you have zombie plague, you normally become a zombie in minutes, hours, or days. However, the GM may allow indefinitely delayed cases, as follows:

Social Disease (Carrier): You were exposed to the zombie plague, but for whatever reason, you didn't turn. Unless you buy immunity separately (see *Typhoid Mary*, *Zombie Larry*, p. 30), future exposure will affect you normally. However, your *current* infection won't turn you – it just causes people around you to roll for *Contagion* (p. B443).

You show no symptoms, and suffer no social effects until it's clear what you are; then people react at -3! -10 points.

Stress Atavism

see p. B156

A former zombie may have this *instead* of Flashbacks (p. 32) if he used to suffer from Bestial (p. B124). It can't be worth more than Bestial; thus, someone who had Bestial [-10] could have a Mild case with a self-control number of 12 or 15, or a Moderate or Severe case at 15 or less. As with Flashbacks, the GM may phase it out gradually; e.g., Severe (15) [-10] to Moderate (15) [-7] to Mild (15) [-5], or perhaps Mild (12) [-10] to Mild (15) [-5], and then a quirk, and finally no sign of it at all.

Susceptible

see p. B158

Categories applicable to zombie plagues mirror those used for Resistant (pp. 30-31), but rarities change to accommodate all the possibilities. Either Disease or Poison is -4/level, and worsens "ordinary" contagion or toxins, respectively; either Nanomachines or Prions is -2/level, and weakens resistance to all relevant threats; and Zombie Plague is -1/level, affects that one problem, and is only permitted if zombie plagues exist. In all cases, if the contagion itself rolls to succeed instead of offering a resistance roll, treat the HT penalty as a bonus to the disease's success roll.

Terminally Ill

see p. B158

A slow-acting zombie plague can be considered a terminal illness, worth the usual points, if four conditions are met:

1. The campaign will run for long enough for it to matter! Terminally Ill is off-limits in "everybody dies" survival horror.
2. The GM doesn't allow quick-and-easy replacement characters.
3. The illness will transform the victim into a mindless *thing*, turning the PC into a (probably hostile) NPC.
4. No cure is known when the campaign begins. If cured in play, replace Terminally Ill with equal points in health problems: reduced HT, Addiction to a drug, Susceptible, Unnatural Features, and perhaps disadvantages from the zombie template the survivor narrowly avoided. These can be bought off normally.

The GM decides whether this condition makes the PC a carrier. If it does, so it goes – as the player is already getting back 50 to 100 points for Terminally Ill, he doesn't score another 10 for Social Disease (Carrier) (pp. 33-34).

SKILLS

So many skills *might* be useful to survivors, zombie-killers, and zombie-masters that detailed notes on them all would fill the book. Thus, what follows is an annotated checklist for players to consider. Similarly, because numerous rules rely on or at least mention these skills, it's most efficient to name the principal ones just once: *Discovering*

Zombie Flaws (p. 35), *Giving Heroes the Upper Hand* (p. 112), *Knowledge and Equipment* (pp. 118-119), *Biohazard!* (pp. 119-120), *Staying Out of Reach* (pp. 120-122), *If Thine Eye Offends Thee* (p. 128), *A Better Tomorrow* (pp. 129-133), and *Zombification* (pp. 133-136).

Acrobatics (p. B174), *Climbing* (p. B183), and *Escape* (p. B192): Enable *many* stunts for evading zombies in an urban apocalypse.

Acting (p. B174): Can fool *some* zombies by letting you behave like one or feign death. This and *Fast-Talk* (p. B195) may be able to confuse zombies by tricking them into thinking about their former life, too.

Alchemy (p. B174): Required to invent magic potions that cure or cause zombification. Also used to maintain magical zombies that rely on chemical preservation.

Area Knowledge (p. B176): Can provide a life-saving edge when fast zombies give chase, and help you recall routes and resources in familiar areas.

Armoury (p. B178), *Electronics Repair* (p. B190), and *Mechanic* (p. B207): Vital for salvaging, maintaining, and improvising equipment in an apocalypse that takes out all the shops and factories (which is traditional). Mad scientists use these skills to maintain their techno-constructs.

Bioengineering (p. B180): Use *Genetic Engineering* to invent zombifying mutations and pathogens, and *Tissue Engineering* to grow constructs. The specialty needed to make zombies can also be exploited to find flaws in them or (where necessary) maintain them. The *Vaccines* specialty is essential when developing cures for plagues. Bioengineering is hands-on and requires a lab; for theory, get *Biology*.

Biology (p. B180): Covers the theory behind Bioengineering's practice. If zombification relies on mutation or pathogenesis (the action of parasites, viruses, etc.), use this to guess zombie weaknesses or how a pathogen spreads – or to *conceptualize* a cure or a new form of zombie.

Brainwashing (p. B182) and *Psychology* (p. B216): When zombie "plagues" are actually memes, nothing else will do.

Camouflage (p. B183): Indispensable for survivors hiding in zombie territory.

Carpentry (p. B183) and *Masonry* (p. B207): Help survivors shore up wooden or stone hideouts (as appropriate) in the short term, and build shelter in the long term.

Cartography (p. B183): Roll vs. skill to create or use maps of zombie hot zones.

Chemistry (p. B183): Survivors use this to synthesize explosives and fuel; mad scientists, to invent serums and toxins that create or preserve zombies; and sane scientists, to develop antidotes for those toxins.

Diagnosis (p. B187): The go-to skill for recognizing zombie plagues and deducing their progression, and for finding zombie weaknesses via medical testing. Needed to avoid -5 to Cure Disease, where that spell cures zombies.

Disguise (p. B187): If zombies have been around for a while, then *Disguise (Zombies)* might exist and work much like *Disguise (Animals)*. Yes, you have to wear zombie gore.

Driving (p. B188): Vital for modern-day heroes who want to roll through hordes of zombies without trashing their ride.

Electrician (p. B189): Needed to maintain zombies animated via "galvanism" (e.g., jolts of lightning).

Engineer (p. B190): Required to build constructs that have machine parts. The *Nanotechnology* specialty is essential for contagious nanotech, whether you're causing or curing zombies.

Esoteric Medicine (p. B192): May replace *Diagnosis*, *First Aid*, or *Physician* where the treatment or cause of the zombies is supernatural but isn't entirely the bailiwick of spells and powers.

Exorcism (p. B193): Can cure zombies created through possession.

Expert Skill (p. B193): *Epidemiology* may replace *Biology* as the "theory skill" required to invent zombie plagues or their cures. *Memetics* fills a similar role for memetic plagues.

Farming (p. B194), *Fishing* (p. B195), *Gardening* (p. B197), and *Tracking* (p. B226): For apocalypse survivors who are thinking beyond MREs and canned goods, and aim to find game or fish, or plant crops.

First Aid (p. B195): Essential for all survivors! There are even (crazy?) theories about using it to resuscitate friends deliberately "killed" in order to halt the zombie plague; see *Resuscitation* (p. 133).

Forced Entry (p. B196): A way into boarded-up shops in a full-on apocalypse.

Hazardous Materials (p. B199): Crucial for anyone who must decontaminate gear, handle samples, or cleanse infected corpses before they return as undead. *Biological* is the "traditional" specialty, but this changes if zombies are radioactive, toxic, etc.

Herb Lore (p. B199): Vodou drugs rely on this, *not* on *Pharmacy* (Herbal).

Hidden Lore (p. B199): Use *Demons* to understand possessed corpses or *Spirits* to fathom solidified spirits. If zombies have been around for a while, there may be a *Zombies* specialty covering known zombie types. A roll on the correct specialty will recognize zombie plagues or curses, provide information on how they work, recall weaknesses in zombies, and possibly reveal known countermeasures.

Hiking (p. B200) and especially *Running* (p. B218): For fleeing dangerous areas and hordes.

Housekeeping (p. B200): To scrub potentially infectious goo off gear.

Intimidation (p. B202): Can shoo away weak-willed, pathetic zombies – but not enraged or inexorable ones!

Knot-Tying (p. B203): The go-to skill for survivors securing gear . . . or zombies.

Machinist (p. B206) and *Smith* (p. B221): For shoring up hideouts via welding – and, for survivors, making tools.

Navigation (p. B211): Advisable for survivors leaving hot zones or using maps of them.

NBC Suit (p. B192): Required to use and maintain biohazard gear properly in plague situations.

Observation (p. B211): Spotting hordes from afar lets you avoid them (and possible infection).

Occultism (p. B212): Catchall (roll at -6) for knowledge of flaws in supernatural zombies and possible ways to break their curse. Often a required "theory skill" when inventing such monsters or cures for them.

Pharmacy (p. B213): The laboratory skill for brewing (pseudo-)scientific cures for zombie-ism – and serums that create or sustain certain mad-science zombies.

Physician (p. B213): Needed to prescribe mundane treatments for zombification (e.g., antibiotics, if they work), invent cures, resuscitate friends before they turn, and – if your name is Igor – repair zombies.

Physics (p. B213): Mad scientists use this to create galvanic and radioactive zombies; their rivals, to defeat them.

Physiology (p. B213): Provides the theory behind constructs made of meat.

Poisons (p. B214): Needed to avoid -5 to *Neutralize Poison*, where that spell cures zombies.

Professional Skill (p. B215): The *Mortician* specialty can treat corpses to ensure that they won't or *will* rise as undead, and is used to maintain more fragile walking dead.

Discovering Zombie Flaws

In some campaigns, zombies have few secrets. They've been around for a while – whether they've killed most of the world or are the low-grade servants of every other Dark Lord – and survivors and monster-hunters know all about them. Details like "aim for the head," "holy folk can turn them," and "they require mana" are common knowledge, although *campaign-changing* information (e.g., how to cure a supposedly incurable zombie plague) might not be.

In other games, zombie flaws *aren't* widely known. If zombies are deliberate creations, then the individuals who cast the spells or carry out the experiments might possess such knowledge but refuse to share – or perhaps they've messed up in an irreproducible, unpredictable way. And it's possible that zombies are a force of nature, or that the heroes are among the first cohort of people ever to encounter them.

In "secret knowledge" situations like the latter, the GM may require a skill roll to learn more. The necessary skill depends on the zombies: *Bioengineering* for super-soldiers and similar ultra-tech creations, *Biology* for parasites or mutations, *Hidden Lore* (*Demons*) for possessed corpses, *Hidden Lore* (*Spirits*) for solidified spirits, *Thaumatology* for anything raised by magic, *Weird Science* for cadavers reanimated by galvanism, etc. A setting with many different zombies might even have a dedicated *Hidden Lore* (*Zombies*) skill. *Occultism* can replace a specific skill pertaining to the supernatural (demons, magic, spirits, etc.) at -6. *Diagnosis* and/or *Surgery* work at no penalty if the heroes procure a specimen of a zombie that lends itself to explanation by science.

The GM rolls *in secret*. For every two points of success, he'll disclose a flaw that's potentially exploitable in combat: *Dread*, *Electrical*, *Fragile*, *Phobias*, *Vulnerability*, *Weakness*, or possibly *Dependency* or *Destiny*, if the PCs could do something with the information (e.g., shove a mana-dependent zombie into a convenient no-mana area). If a trait has a negative point cost, and knowledge of it would help the heroes win, it's a possibility. Failure reveals nothing. Critical failure means the GM lies!

Religious Ritual (p. B217): If zombies are unholy, this skill may let the user bless corpses so that they don't rise, speak prayer aloud to exploit Dread or Weakness toward the sacred, and/or provide non-spell countermeasures to zombification. *Evil* priests use it to maintain theurgic zombies.

Research (p. B217): Can replace specialized knowledge skills in worlds where libraries contain reliable information about zombies.

Ritual Magic (p. B218) and **Thaumatology** (p. B225): Can reveal Dreads and Weaknesses toward magic, deduce *all* kinds of flaws in magically raised zombies, guess how zombie curses behave, and provide the theory (and maybe the practice) needed to develop spells or rituals that cure, create, or maintain zombies. Which skill to use depends on the kind of magic behind the zombie or cure – Ritual Magic is for traditional sorcery like Vodou, while Thaumatology covers fantasy wizardry.

Scrounging (p. B218): The single most important skill for finding supplies when the zombie apocalypse strikes.

Stealth (p. B222): Has myriad uses for hiding in zombie territory and eluding pursuing zombies in locations with many hiding spots. Hordes have lots of eyes – this can never be too high.

Surgery (p. B223): Heroes use this for cauterizing bites before infection sets in, finding zombie flaws via autopsy, and (if desperate) amputating infected body parts. Mad scientists use it to assemble and repair constructs.

Survival (p. B223) and **Urban Survival** (p. B228): Not only keystones of post-apocalypse survival, but also ways to use the terrain to your advantage when fast zombies chase you. Learn the skill that suits your preferred environment.

Tactics (p. B224): Even those who've never met a zombie before can use this to observe zombies in battle and learn their programmed responses.

Theology (p. B226): Provides the theory behind the practice of Religious Ritual.

Weird Science (p. B228): *The* skill to learn for inventing cures not covered by other skills – and, if you're inclined that way, for developing new varieties of non-supernatural zombies (and maintaining them). As an information skill, it can provide information on the weaknesses of mad-science zombies. No gadgeteer should be without it!

Wrestling (p. B228): When a horde grabs you, this skill's ST bonus can mean the difference between escaping and being bitten (or eaten). Handy for restraining biters who attack allies, too.

TECHNIQUES

When fighting zombies that are susceptible to head injury (which isn't all of them!), the desired effect is destroying the brain or severing its connection to the body. In most zombie fiction, the Neck Snap technique (p. B232) counts. On the other hand, zombies that don't breathe – notably the undead – take no damage from Choke Hold (p. B230).

If using **GURPS Martial Arts**, a *choke* from a Head Lock is as ineffective as a Choke Hold if the zombie doesn't breathe, while a *throw* inflicts head injury. The cinematic Lethal Eye-Poke – or any Lethal Kick or Lethal Strike to the eyes – also deals head injury, but if the GM requires HT rolls for contagion after unarmed attacks, these gory moves

give an additional -1! Other valuable **Martial Arts** techniques are Evade (for eluding a grasping horde), Piledriver (delivers *serious* head trauma), Push Kick (for shoving away biters), and Whirlwind Attack (when surrounded).

The following Targeted Attack techniques designed using **Martial Arts** are especially helpful when fighting zombies that have suitable weaknesses.

Beheading Blow

Hard

Default: prerequisite skill-5.

Prerequisite: Any Melee Weapon skill capable of swung cutting attacks; cannot exceed prerequisite skill-2.

This technique buys off the -5 to hit the neck when swinging an edged weapon.

Headshot

Hard

Default: prerequisite skill-5.

Prerequisite: Any combat skill capable of striking the face; cannot exceed prerequisite skill-2.

This technique buys off the -5 to hit the *face* with one particular weapon skill. If the weapon is capable of several attack forms (e.g., thrust *or* swing), pick one.

Noncombat Techniques

One "peaceful" technique is handy in any survival scenario and may be of extra value if zombies are involved.

Resuscitation

Average

Defaults: First Aid-4 or Physician at TL7+.

Prerequisite: First Aid or Physician; cannot exceed First Aid or Physician+4.

This technique improves the chance that *Resuscitation* (p. B425) will revive someone who suffers heart attack (p. B429) or suffocation (p. B436), or who dies while a medic is stabilizing his mortal wound (p. B424). If zombification affects the dead and takes more than a minute to set in, this can save him from turning. It *might* even be possible to "kill" a living zombie for just long enough for the zombie plague to die, and then revive him as his old self. (Good luck!)

SPELLS

GURPS Magic offers a plethora of spells suitable for a campaign that features magic alongside zombies. These fall into two classes, discussed below. Such workings require Magery, Power Investiture bestowed by an appropriate deity (almost *any* god might aid zombie-fighting, but only death gods and demon lords are likely to encourage zombie-making), or a fitting power Talent (e.g., Deathliness, from **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 9: Summoners**).

In campaigns that use alternative magic rules from **GURPS Thaumatology**, players must consult the GM for the relevant Paths (usually Protection for defense and Spirit for creation), Books (The Book of the Names of the Dead is typical), or nouns, Realms, or symbols (Magic, Necromancy, and Spirit seem likely).

Zombie-Fighting Spells

Undead zombies – supernatural or not, including constructs that aren't truly alive – are susceptible to Control Zombie (*Magic*, p. 152), Pentagram (*Magic*, p. 124), Sense Spirit (*Magic*, p. 149), Turn Zombie (*Magic*, p. 152), and Zombie Summoning (*Magic*, p. 153). Assume that this has to do with the metaphysics of death rather than the effects of the Zombie spell. A rare few zombies are spirits given substance, and affected by Bind Spirit (*Magic*, p. 158), Command Spirit (*Magic*, p. 153), and Turn Spirit (*Magic*, p. 151) *instead* of Control Zombie, Turn Zombie, and Zombie Summoning. Either way, zombies that aren't alive are immune to Death Vision, Sense Life, Soul Jar, Steal (Attribute), and Steal Energy.

Living zombies – including the infected, mutants, and any construct that *is* truly alive – are considered ordinary living creatures for magical purposes. Spells that work only on spirits, undead, and other supernatural beings don't affect them.

Caveat magus! Not everything that looks undead or alive is what it seems. And some rare, powerful zombies are explicitly immune to spells that “should” affect them. Unless the wizard has Hidden Lore (Zombies), such details are for the GM to know and the player to find out.

Zombie-Making Spells

Low-grade zombies are reanimated using Zombie (*Magic*, p. 151) or Mass Zombie (*Magic*, p. 153), while high-powered constructs require Golem (*Magic*, p. 59). The GM may allow some variation in either case; see *Magical Undead* (pp. 133-134). There might even be entirely different spells that create new varieties of zombies, as explained in *Variant Spells* (p. 134). It's up to the GM whether starting wizards can learn these spells or must invent them in play as outlined in *Technological Zombification* (pp. 135-136). In the latter case, research necromancers will want the Thaumatology skill and the standard Zombie spell.

DISPOSABLE HEROES

A *GURPS Zombies* campaign needn't be deadlier than any other; *GURPS Tactical Shooting* offers just as many ways to die, and any realistic *GURPS Low-Tech* game will involve as much or more risk of infection. Still, it can be handy to have a speedy way to replace the survivor who turns – or the zombie-master who gets eaten by his pets, blown up by his experiments, or wiped out by actual heroes. These templates aim to help with this; see *How to Use Character Templates* (p. B258) for details.

SCREAMING VICTIM

25 points

Zombie movies, particularly the survival-horror kind, are full of people whose most notable feature is “wrong place, wrong time.” These can still make interesting PCs in a one-off campaign or a game where replacement characters are part of the plan! They represent most of us – their triumphs are *our* triumphs, and their horrible fates add to the horror.

Attributes: ST 10 [0]; DX 10 [0]; IQ 10 [0]; HT 10 [0].

Secondary Characteristics: Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 10 [0]; Per 10 [0]; FP 10 [0]; Basic Speed 5.00 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].

Advantages: 25 points chosen from among ST or HT +1 or +2 [10 or 20], DX or IQ +1 [20], HP +1 to +3 [2/level], Will or Per +1 to +3 [5/level], FP +1 to +3 [3/level], Basic Speed +1 [20], Basic Move +1 to +3 [5/level], Acute Senses (any) 1 or 2 [2 or 4], Animal Empathy [5], Appearance [4 to 16], Artificer 1 or 2 [10 or 20], Business Acumen 1 or 2 [10 or 20], Charisma 1 [5], Common Sense [10], Fearlessness 1 to 3 [2/level], Fit [5], Healer 1 or 2 [10 or 20], Intuition [15], Luck [15], Outdoorsman 1 or 2 [10 or 20], Penetrating Voice [1], Pitiable [5], Serendipity 1 [15], Single-Minded [5], or Standard Operating Procedure (Clean Freak) [1].

Disadvantages: -20 points chosen from among ST or HT -1 or -2 [-10 or -20], DX or IQ -1 [-20], HP -1 to -3 [-2/level], Will or Per -1 to -3 [-5/level], FP -1 to -3 [-3/level], Basic Speed -1 [-20], Basic Move -1 to -3 [-5/level], Appearance [-4 or -8], Bad Sight (Mitigator, Glasses or Contacts, -60%) [-10], Bad Temper [-10*], Chummy or Gregarious [-5 or -10], Code of Honor (Professional) [-5], Combat Paralysis [-15], Curious [-5*], Delusion (“Zombies are just like in the movies!”) [-5], Fearfulness 1 to 3 [-2/level], Gluttony [-5*], Guilt Complex [-5], Hard of Hearing [-10], Honesty [-10*], Impulsiveness [-10*], Jealousy [-10], Klutz [-5], Low Self-Image [-10], Odious Personal Habits [-5 or -10], Overconfidence [-5*], Pacifism (Reluctant Killer) [-5], Phobias [Varies*], Selfish or Selfless [-5*], Sense of Duty (Companions) [-5], Squeamish [-10*], Stubbornness [-5], Unluckiness [-10], Workaholic [-5], or *one* of Skinny [-5], Overweight [-1], Fat [-3], or Very Fat [-5].

Primary Skills: *One* of Carpentry, Computer Operation, First Aid, Housekeeping, or Panhandling, all (E) IQ+3 [8]-13; Administration, Cooking, Electrician, Electronics Repair (any), Farming, Freight Handling, Mechanic (any), Merchant, Professional Skill (any), Soldier, or Teaching, all (A) IQ+2 [8]-12; or 8 points for an additional background skill at three levels higher.

Secondary Skills: Area Knowledge (any local) (E) IQ+1 [2]-11. • *One* of Bicycling (E) DX+1 [2]-11; Driving (Automobile, Heavy Wheeled, or Motorcycle) or Sports (Skateboard), both (A) DX [2]-10; Hiking or Running, both (A) HT [2]-10; or 2 points to raise Area Knowledge by a level. • *One* of Savoir-Faire (High Society) (E) IQ+1 [2]-11; Leadership, Public Speaking, or Streetwise, all (A) IQ [2]-10; Diplomacy (H) IQ-1 [2]-9; Carousing (E) HT+1 [2]-11; Sex Appeal (A) HT [2]-10; Intimidation (A) Will [2]-10; or 2 points for another primary skill at two levels lower.

- Another 2 points for Area Knowledge (any) IQ+1 [2]-11, another choice from either secondary skill list, or to raise an existing secondary skill by one level.

Background Skills: *Four* of Brawling or Guns (Pistol, Rifle, or Shotgun), both (E) DX [1]-10; Boxing, Dancing, Riding (Horse), Sports (any), or Wrestling, all (A) DX-1 [1]-9; Judo or Karate, both (H) DX-2 [1]-8; Current Affairs (any), First Aid, Games (any), Gardening, or Hobby Skill (any), all (E) IQ [1]-10; Connoisseur (any) (A) IQ-1 [1]-9; Artist (any) or Musical Instrument (any), both (H) IQ-2 [1]-8; Singing or Swimming, both (E) HT [1]-10; Lifting (A) HT-1 [1]-9; Skating or Skiing, both (H) HT-2 [1]-8; Fishing or Scrounging, both (E) Per [1]-10; Survival (any) or Urban Survival, both (A) Per-1 [1]-9; or 1 point to raise an existing background skill by one level.

* Multiplied for self-control number; see p. B120.

Customization Notes

This archetype fits the time period in which most zombie films are set: TL6-9. Fiction about lower tech levels tends to portray ordinary folks more as survivors. To generate a survival-oriented modern Everyman suitable for a 50-point campaign, double the advantage allocation, taking care to stick to the usual limits on secondary characteristics.

A defining feature of the victim is *problems*, explaining the large number of disadvantage choices. These fall into three broad groups. Most noble are would-be hero motivations, including Selfless, Sense of Duty, and Workaholic when it's turned toward the common good. Deadlier are difficulties for hapless types – say, a bum knee (reduced Basic Move) or glasses that get knocked off (Bad Sight).

Finally there are *jerk* traits, like Bad Temper, Selfish, or even Honesty when it leads to hassling others about “stealing” survival supplies from an abandoned store. Individuals with the latter kinds of flaws tend to have another side that makes them sympathetic; e.g., the authoritarian-but-protective mall cop. But not always!

Beyond that, pick abilities to suit fictional archetypes with some grounding in reality; e.g., the heavyset contractor who enjoys a few beers and hunting on the weekend gets ST, Outdoorsman, Carousing, Carpentry, Fishing, Guns, and Survival. “Ordinary folks” in the movies often exhibit a few surprising talents – perhaps the soccer mom has high Per for watching kids, SOP (Clean Freak) for cleaning up after them, and an exceptional Driving skill for shuttling them to activities. And certainly there are campy stereotypes, like the cute cheerleader with Appearance, Fit, and Penetrating Voice (for screaming), Dancing as her *primary* skill, and a Sex Appeal level that's decidedly inappropriate for her age.

Most important is a fair player-GM pact regarding genre conventions. It's tempting to create an ex-army marksman with Guns (Rifle) as his primary skill, or to sink everything into useful survival traits, but that isn't true to the stories. A 25- to 50-point campaign is about doing the best you can with what you've got. If the players create plausible delivery-van drivers, high-school jocks, and sales clerks, the GM should be *generous* when such low-powered types try things. This means giving bonuses for routine tasks (p. B345), and allowing the deliveryman to roll Freight Handling to pack the supplies before the zombies arrive, the jock to exploit Sports (Football) to evade zombies, and the clerk to use Per-based Merchant in place of Scrounging at shops.

“Can I Play a Zombie?”

“Probably not, but ask your GM.”

First, realize that there's a huge difference between *entering play* as a zombie and *becoming* one. Any zombie template that the GM lets players purchase at the start of the campaign is liable to be one that won't lead to a PC who infects or eats his friends. For what should be obvious reasons, templates acquired in play tend to be bitey and infectious. Thus, a golden rule holds unless the GM specifically waives it:

A PC who turns into a zombie becomes an NPC.

That said, while **GURPS Zombies** takes the stance that zombies are mindless, there are unusual exceptions in self-identified zombie fiction. As well, certain zombies are only as “mindless” as wild animals, infants, or lunatics. If the GM is up to running a campaign that includes PCs built using zombie templates from Chapter 3 – or wants to design special playable zombies – then that's fine, though not without its challenges.

One problem is that zombie templates often have extreme negative point values, meaning that a zombie

PC built at the same power level as his allies may be able to afford hundreds of points of useful abilities in a low-powered game. For instance, a zombie with a -140-point template in a 50-point “ordinary folks” campaign might buy ST 20 and HT 19, work around its -200 points in disadvantages by letting its associates think for it, and grossly overshadow the others much of the time. A fair solution is to have the player create an ordinary character and *then* add the zombie template; e.g., our example zombie would end up at -90 points. This will attract players interested in a roleplaying challenge, not those seeking a power trip.

At the other end of the scale, constructs and experimental super-zombies are often worth many points. However, if the GM permits (say) a 200-point template, and the player can afford it, the resulting PC is unlikely to be more obtrusive than a 200-point wizard or kung fu master. The real difficulty comes in affording it – if the template is *all* the player has points for, the zombie will be boring. The GM might prefer to allow only templates that leave 25 to 50 points free for personal touches.

HARDENED SURVIVOR

150 points

Near the other end of the spectrum are tough folk who've weathered the storm – and, in a lighthearted campaign, zombiephiles who've spent their free time on *ZombieFit* courses and “zombie runs,” and their money on survival gear. They know what zombies are and what they can do. Most of all, they know how to survive. They aren't masters of *killing* (though they can certainly take down zombies), but of *not dying*.

Attributes: ST 10 [0]; DX 12 [40]; IQ 12 [40]; HT 12 [20].

Secondary Characteristics: Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 12 [0]; Per 12 [0]; FP 12 [0]; Basic Speed 6.00 [0]; Basic Move 6 [0].

Advantages: SOP (On Alert) [1]. • 40 points chosen from among ST or HT +1 to +4 [10/level], DX or IQ +1 or +2 [20 or 40], HP +1 to +3 [2/level], Will or Per +1 to +6 [5/level], FP +1 to +3 [3/level], Basic Speed +1 or +2 [20 or 40], Basic Move +1 to +3 [5/level], Absolute Direction [5], Acute Senses (any) [2/level], Artificer 1-4 [10/level], Combat Reflexes [15], Common Sense [10], Danger Sense [15], Eidetic or Photographic Memory [5 or 10], Enhanced Dodge 1 [15], Fearlessness [2/level] or Unfazeable [15], Fit or Very Fit [5 or 15], Green Thumb 1-4 [5/level], Hard to Kill [2/level], Hard to Subdue [2/level], Healer 1-4 [10/level], High Pain Threshold [10], Intuition [15], Less Sleep 1-4 [2/level], Luck or Extraordinary Luck [15 or 30], Night Vision 1-9 [1/level], Outdoorsman 1-4 [10/level], Perfect Balance [15], Peripheral Vision [15], Rapid or Very Rapid Healing [5 or 15], Reduced Consumption 1 [2], Resistant to Disease (+3) or (+8) [3 or 5], Serendipity 1 or 2 [15 or 30], Temperature Tolerance 1 or 2 [1 or 2], or the perks on pp. 31-32.

Disadvantages: -10 points chosen from among Appearance [-4 or -8], Bad Temper [-10*], Bloodlust [-10*], Compulsive Survivalism (p. 32) [-5*], Delusions (anything zombie-related) [-5 or -10], Guilt Complex [-5], Light Sleeper [-5], No Sense of Humor [-10], Nightmares [-5*], Overconfidence [-5*], Paranoia [-10], Skinny [-5], Stubbornness [-5], Workaholic [-5], or Wounded [-5]. • Another -25 points chosen from among those traits or Callous [-5], Charitable [-15*], Chummy or Gregarious [-5 or -10] or Loner [-5*], Obsession (Find a cure) [-10*], Selfish or Selfless [-5*], or Sense of Duty (Companions) or (All humanity) [-5 or -15].

Primary Skills: Area Knowledge (any local) (E) IQ+1 [2]-13; Scrounging (E) Per+1 [2]-13; Stealth (A) DX [2]-12; and Survival (any) or Urban Survival, both (A) Per [2]-12. • Four of Brawling, Crossbow, Guns (any), or Knife, all (E) DX+2 [4]-14; Axe/Mace, Bow, Boxing, Broadsword, Spear, Shortsword, Staff, Throwing, Two-Handed Axe/Mace, or Wrestling, all (A) DX+1 [4]-13; Judo or Karate, both (H) DX [4]-12; or 4 points to raise one selection by one level (up to three times).

Secondary Skills: Eight of Fast-Draw (any), Forced Entry, or Knot-Tying, all (E) DX+1 [2]-13; Boating (any), Climbing, Driving (any), NBC Suit, Piloting (any), or Riding (any), all (A) DX [2]-12; Acrobatics or Escape, both (H) DX-1 [2]-11; Area Knowledge (any), Camouflage, or

Housekeeping, all (E) IQ+1 [2]-13; Acting, Armoury (any), Cartography, Disguise (Zombies), Electronics Repair (any), Hazardous Materials (any), Mechanic (any), Navigation (any), or Soldier, all (A) IQ [2]-12; Tactics (H) IQ-1 [2]-11; Hiking or Running, both (A) HT [2]-12; Intimidation (A) Will [2]-12; Observation (A) Per [2]-12; 2 points to buy any unselected primary combat skill at one level lower; or 2 points to raise a secondary skill or a primary *noncombat* skill by one level.

Background Skills: Four of Carpentry, First Aid, Gardening, or Masonry, all (E) IQ [1]-12; Electrician, Farming, Machinist, Research, or Smith (any), all (A) IQ-1 [1]-11; Bioengineering (any), Chemistry, Diagnosis, Engineer (any), Expert Skill (Epidemiology), Pharmacy (any), Physician, Poisons, or Psychology, all (H) IQ-2 [1]-10; Biology, Physics, or Surgery, all (VH) IQ-3 [1]-9; Fishing (E) Per [1]-12; Tracking (A) Per-1 [1]-11; or 1 point to buy any unselected secondary skill at one level lower, or an unselected primary combat skill at *two* levels lower.

• Optionally, take only two background choices at a level higher, or just one at *two* levels higher.

* Multiplied for self-control number; see p. B120.

Customization Notes

This template omits traits that rely on *campaign-level* decisions: Immunity to Zombie Plague, Social Disease (Carrier), Flashbacks (or Stress Atavism) for ex-zombies, the Hidden Lore (Zombies) skill, anything connected with the supernatural, and zombie templates. If the GM opts to allow such options, add them to the appropriate lists.

Here, too, disadvantages are pivotal. Unlike many 150-point character templates in *GURPS*, this one doesn't have -50 points of disadvantages, but sticks to -35 points on the grounds that problem-laden people won't survive. The first list addresses the mark made on the hero by the coming of the zombies – the situation has left him crazy, determined, disfigured, starving, twitchy, or filled with guilt or rage over those who didn't make it. The second defines his attitude toward survival; he might be self-centered (Callous, Loner, and/or Selfish), group-oriented (Chummy and a Sense of Duty to friends), or trying to save the world (Charitable, Obsession with a cure, Selfless, or even a global Sense of Duty). It's possible to be *all* scars, though!

As for advantages and skills, it's reasonable to be an action-oriented fighter with improved DX and Basic Move; Combat Reflexes; a careful balance of ranged, melee weapon, and unarmed skills; dynamic secondary skills like Acrobatics, Climbing, Fast-Draw, Forced Entry, Running, and further combat training; and all background points in even *more* fighting skills. Then again, you could be a medic with a thoughtful take on evasion (Area Knowledge, Camouflage, Cartography, Navigation, and Observation), good work habits (Hazardous Materials, Housekeeping, and NBC Suit), and Diagnosis, Pharmacy, Physician, and Surgery kicked up to respectable levels by a maxed-out Healer advantage. And the survivor rebuilding the future stocks up on Artificer, using it to boost Carpentry, Machinist, Masonry, Smith, and diverse Armoury, Electronics Repair, and Mechanic specialties – and doubtless adds Guns and Soldier from that militia training.

In an apocalypse, choose capabilities that suit available resources. If the zombies *just* showed up, and you're a cop or a biker holed up in a mall with a shotgun, it makes sense to focus on here-and-now stuff like DX, Combat Reflexes, Enhanced Dodge, and High Pain Threshold; it's worthwhile to sacrifice a secondary skill for more Scrounging; and, in a TL6+ setting, weapons and transportation will be plentiful enough to support a dependency on Armoury, Guns, Mechanic, and vehicle skills. After the apocalypse, it's more useful to have Rapid Healing, Reduced Consumption, or Resistant to Disease for one's own survival, along with Artificer, Green Thumb, or Healer for humanity's – and some of Bow, Fishing, Spear, and Tracking for catching food, Farming for growing it, Carpentry for shelter, and Smith for metalwork.

Slayers

A “slayer” is a survivor who focuses on zombie-killing – a zombie-hunter. To create one, start with *Hardened Survivor* (above) and add enough of the lenses below to reach points and effectiveness that suit the campaign. These lenses can work on templates from other **GURPS** books, too; many a slayer is superhuman, like the fantasy RPG paladin (use **GURPS Fantasy** or **Dungeon Fantasy**), or Alice from the *Resident Evil* movies (**GURPS Bio-Tech**, **Psis**, and/or **Supers** would fit). For a set of 10 templates for career monster exterminators, see the **GURPS Monster Hunters** series.

In all cases, if zombie-ism is contagious, the GM should consider permitting slayers to buy Immunity to Zombie Plague [5] or Immunity to Zombie Curse [5] – as applicable – using advantage points.

Nothing is impossible to kill. It's just that sometimes after you kill something, you have to keep shooting it until it stops moving.

– Mira Grant, *Feed*

Born Zombie-Killer (BZK)

+50 points

You didn't know what to do with your life until *they* appeared. Now you do: kill 'em all. Go as light as possible on noncombat traits such as the Green Thumb and Healer advantages, and Housekeeping, craft, and scientific skills. Then add the stuff below. In a lighthearted campaign reminiscent of *Juan de los Muertos* or *Zombieland*, this lens might even modify *Screaming Victim* (pp. 37-38)!

Advantages: SOP (Check the Bodies) [1] and Higher Purpose (Kill Zombies)* [5]. • 30 points of hardened survivor advantages chosen from among ST, DX, HT, HP, Per, Basic Speed, Basic Move, Combat Reflexes, Danger Sense, Enhanced Dodge, Fearlessness or Unfazeable, Fit or Very Fit, Hard to Kill, Hard to Subdue, High Pain Threshold, Luck, Night Vision, Peripheral Vision, or Rapid or Very Rapid Healing. • You may also use these advantage points or those on the

template to buy Ambidexterity [5] and up to Enhanced Dodge 3 [15/level], Extra Attack 1 [25], or Ridiculous Luck [60].

Skills and Techniques: 14 points to improve existing combat skills, buy new ones, or add Beheading Blow and/or Headshot (see *Techniques*, p. 36). • You *must* use some of these points to acquire Hidden Lore (Zombies) (A) IQ [2]-12, if that skill is known in the campaign – that's how you know their weaknesses!

* Gives +1 on all rolls to attack, defend against, damage, resist, and otherwise thwart zombies! The catch is that you *must* fight any zombie you meet, or lose the benefit until you kill a few hordes to get your mojo back.

Combat Monster

+50 points

This is a less over-the-top version of *Born Zombie-Killer* (above) – although an over-the-top BZK could have *both* lenses! A non-BZK combat monster might be just an extra-hardened survivor, and won't necessarily avoid the template's noncombat traits.

Advantages: 40 points on the hardened survivor advantages noted for the BZK. • You may also use these advantage points or those on the template to buy Ambidexterity [5] or Extra Attack 1 [25].

Skills: 10 points to improve existing combat skills or to buy new ones.

Holy Warrior

+50 points

You have divine support and enlightenment in your battle against the zombies. This is most useful if the zombies are supernatural and undead – but several of these abilities are valuable regardless.

Holy warriors are often TL2-4 fantasy heroes. These should avoid the template's high-tech skills (Driving, Electrician, Electronics Repair, Guns, Machinist, Mechanic, NBC Suit, and Piloting), pick scientific skills only if the GM says that they exist (affects Bioengineering, Biology, Chemistry, Epidemiology, and Physics), and stick to primitive Engineering specialties and the “Herbal” specialty of Pharmacy.

Advantages: Rest in Pieces [1] and Won't Rise [1]. • 30 points in Blessed (Heroic Feats) [10], Danger Sense [15], Higher Purpose (Kill Undead)* [5], Intuition [15], or True Faith [15] or True Faith (Turning, +65%) [25]. • You may also use these advantage points or those on the template to purchase up to Ridiculous Luck [60] or Serendipity 4 [60].

Skills and Techniques: Three of Hidden Lore (Demons, Spirits, or Zombies), Occultism, or Professional Skill (Mortician), all (A) IQ+1 [4]-13; Religious Ritual (any) or Theology (any), both (H) IQ [4]-12; Exorcism (H) Will [4]-12; or Esoteric Medicine (H) Per [4]-12. • 6 points to improve existing combat skills, buy new ones, or add Beheading Blow and/or Headshot (see *Techniques*, p. 36).

* Works like the BZK's Higher Purpose, but applies to all undead (zombies or not) instead of to all zombies (undead

or not). Someone with both Higher Purposes gets +2 vs. undead zombies.

Magician

+50 points

You wield magic in the service of zombie-slaying, with spells for detecting, repelling, inhuming, and cremating the undead, and for preventing the dead from reanimating. Be this thaumaturgy or theurgy, it's no mere sideline – you've learned occult skills to match. Magicians are often low-tech fantasy characters to whom the notes on high-tech skills under *Holy Warrior* (pp. 40-41) apply.

Advantages: *Either* Magery 2 [25] *or* Power Investiture 2 [20] and 5 points of extra template advantages. • Those who have such advantages may buy more template advantages instead, and any magician may put template advantage points toward higher levels of these traits.

Skills: Hidden Lore (Demons, Spirits, *or* Zombies) (A) IQ [2]-12; Occultism (A) IQ-1 [1]-11; Thaumatology (VH) IQ [2]-12*.

Spells†: Create Fire, Death Vision, Fear, Final Rest, Ignite Fire, Lend Energy, Lend Vitality, Magic Resistance, Pentagram, Scryguard, Seek Earth, Sense Emotion, Sense Foes, Sense Spirit, Shape Earth, Spell Shield, Summon Spirit, Turn Spirit, Turn Zombie, and Zombie, all (H) IQ [1]-12*.

* Thaumatology and spells get +2 from Magery. Theurgists enjoy +2 to *spells* from Power Investiture, but have Thaumatology (VH) IQ-2 [2]-10.

† These spells assume standard prerequisites. Theurgists may use alternative ones that omit certain spells, especially Zombie. Use any leftover points for more occult skills, Exorcism (Will/H), Religious Ritual (IQ/H), or Theology (IQ/H).

Superhuman

+50 points

Odds are good that you were created by whatever caused the zombies. True or not, you're clearly more than human!

Advantages: 50 points in exotic advantages attributable to your origin – and you may use points from the template to buy more. Some examples:

Bio-Tech Combat Mutant (TL9): Claws (Blunt or Sharp) [3 or 5], Catfall [10], Damage Resistance 1-3 (Tough Skin, -40%) [3/level], Striking ST 1-3 [5/level], and further *physical* advantages from the template (ST, DX, HT, HP, FP, Basic Speed, Basic Move, Fit or Very Fit, Hard to Kill, Hard to Subdue, High Pain Threshold, Night Vision, Perfect Balance, Peripheral Vision, or Rapid or Very Rapid Healing).

Bio-Tech Combat Mutant (TL10): As above, plus Chameleon 1 or 2 [5/level], Claws (Talons or Long Talons) [8 or 11], Clinging [20], Constriction Attack [15], Damage Resistance 4-6 (Tough Skin, -40%) [3/level], Enhanced Time Sense [45], Extra Attack 1 [25], Infravision [10], Recovery [10], Regeneration (Slow) [10], Striking ST 4-6 [5/level], or Vibration Sense [10].

Bio-Tech Combat Mutant (TL11): As above, plus Chameleon 3 or 4 [5/level], Doesn't Sleep [20], Extra Attack 2 [50], Regeneration (Regular) [25], Striking ST 7-10 [5/level], or Super Jump 1 [10].

Esper: Clairsentience (ESP, -10%) [45], Danger Sense (ESP, -10%) [14] *or* Precognition (ESP, -10%) [23], Detect (Zombies; ESP, -10%) [5], ESP Talent 1-4 [5/level], *or* Para-Radar (ESP, -10%) [36].

Psychokinetic: Crushing Attack (Malediction 2, +150%; No Signature, +20%; PK, -10%) [13/level], Damage Resistance (Force Field, +20%; PK, -10%) [5.5/level*], Flight (PK, -10%) [36], PK Talent 1-4 [5/level], *or* Telekinesis (PK, -10%) [4.5/level*].

* Multiply by level and round up at the end.

Gamers with **GURPS Bio-Tech**, **Psionic Powers**, or **Psis** can use the abilities there instead of those above.

This is the part in the movie where that guy says, "Zombies? What zombies?" just before they eat his brains. I don't want to be that guy.

– Holly Black, **Kin**

ZOMBIE-MASTER

150 points

People who create and control zombies tend to be powerful. They're often unsuitable as PCs even in a high-powered game, however – perhaps because the GM believes that zombie-making is for bad guys, or doesn't want PCs unleashing armies or plagues on his game world, or considers the logistics of legions and new inventions to be an unwelcome burden. Still, a 150-point zombie-master who isn't so competent that he's likely to start with many minions or be attempting much invention *might* fit into a long-term campaign.

Attributes: ST 10 [0]; DX 10 [0]; IQ 15 [100]; HT 10 [0].

Secondary Characteristics: Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 15 [0]; Per 15 [0]; FP 10 [0]; Basic Speed 5.00 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].

Advantages: 50 points chosen from among Allies (Zombies) [Varies], Artificer 1-4 [10/level], Gadgeteer (Unspecialized, Specialized, *or* Doubly Specialized) [25, 13, or 5] *or* Quick Gadgeteer (Unspecialized, Specialized, *or* Doubly Specialized) [50, 25, or 10], Good with Zombies [1], High TL 1 [5], Horde-Walker [1], Magery 2, 3, or 4 [25, 35, or 45], Mind Control (with Zombie Command, -25% and other modifiers) [Varies], *or* Power Investiture 2-5 [10/level]. • Another 20 points chosen from the previous list *or* ST *or* HT +1 *or* +2 [10/level], DX *or* IQ +1 [20], Charisma 1 or 2 [5 or 10], Fearlessness [2/level] *or* Unfazeable [15], Healer 1 or 2 [10 or 20], Less Sleep 1-4 [2/level], Luck [15], Resistant to Disease (+3) *or* (+8) [3 or 5], Resistant to Poison (+3) [5], Single-Minded [5], Spirit Empathy [10], Tenure [5], Versatile [5], Wealth (Comfortable *or* Wealthy) [10 or 20], *or* the perks on pp. 31-32.

Disadvantages: -10 points chosen from among Delusions (anything zombie-related) [-5 to -15], Curious [-5*], Impulsiveness [-10*], Megalomania [-10], Obsession (anything zombie-related) [-5* or -10*], Overconfidence [-5*], Secret [Varies], or Xenophilia [-10*].

- Another -40 points chosen from the previous list or ST or HT -1 or -2 [-10 or -20], DX -1 [-20], HP -1 to -3 [-2/level], Will or Per -1 to -3 [-5/level], FP -1 to -3 [-3/level], Basic Speed -1 [-20], Basic Move -1 to -3 [-5/level], Absent-Mindedness [-15], Appearance [-4 to -16], Bad Sight (Mitigator, Glasses or Contacts, -60%) [-10], Bad Temper [-10*], Callous [-5], Clueless [-10], Disturbing Voice [-10], Hunchback [-10], Intolerance (Anyone with IQ 10 or less) [-5], Jealousy [-10], Loner [-5*], Oblivious [-5], Odious Personal Habits [-5 to -15], Reputation [Varies], Skinny [-5], Stubbornness [-5], or Workaholic [-5].

Primary Skills: *Four* of Hidden Lore (Demons, Spirits, or Zombies), Occultism, or Professional Skill (Mortician), all (A) IQ+1 [4]-16; Bioengineering (Genetic Engineering or Tissue Engineering), Brainwashing, Chemistry, Engineer (any), Expert Skill (Epidemiology or Memetics), Pharmacy (any), Physician, Physiology, Psychology, Religious Ritual (any), or Theology (any), all (H) IQ [4]-15; Alchemy, Biology, Herb Lore, Physics, Ritual Magic (any), Surgery, Thaumatology, or Weird Science, all (VH) IQ-1 [4]-14; Esoteric Medicine (H) Per [4]-15; or 4 points to raise one of those skills by one level. • Those with Magery or Power Investiture may

trade *two* primary choices for these spells: Zombie (H) IQ-1 [2]-14, and Control Zombie, Death Vision, Lend Energy, Lend Vitality, Summon Spirit, and Zombie Summoning, all (H) IQ-2 [1]-13. Remember to add the Magery or Power Investiture bonus.

Secondary Skills: *Five* of NBC Suit (A) DX [2]-10; Armoury (any), Electrician, Electronics Operation (usually Medical or Scientific), Electronics Repair (any), Hazardous Materials (any), Hidden Lore (any), Mechanic (any), Research, Speed-Reading, Teaching, or Writing, all (A) IQ [2]-15; Diagnosis, Hypnotism, or Veterinary, all (H) IQ-1 [2]-14; Scrounging (E) Per+1 [2]-16; 2 points to raise one of those skills by one level; or 2 points to buy any unselected primary skill (*not* spell) at one level lower.

Background Skills: 1 point in each of *four* skills chosen from among unselected primary skills (*not* spells) at two levels lower, or unselected secondary skills at one level lower.

* Multiplied for self-control number; see p. B120.

Customization Notes

The player *must* ask the GM what's allowed and available. Not all possibilities suit every campaign, and it's conceivable that there's just one path! Also, while this template omits traits such as Immunity to Zombie Plague and Social Disease (Carrier), these are fitting options if the GM permits them.

Creepy Assistants

Zombie-masters from necromancers to mad scientists often employ at least one assistant (not always named "Igor") to exhume corpses, grab test subjects, or *be* a test subject. In older movies, this figure is often naïve, even innocent, and sometimes turns out to be good. In recent fiction, he's usually a heartless stooge of *The Corporation* (p. 23).

A creepy assistant needn't be less able than a true zombie-master. In Terry Pratchett's *Discworld* novels, for instance, Igors are considerably more capable than dark lords. In high bio-tech stories, the "master" may be a bureaucrat whose assistants are the *real* brains. To create a competent assistant, use *Zombie-Master* (pp. 41-43), omitting the 50 points of special zombie-related abilities (Allies, Gadgeteer, Magery, Mind Control, etc.) if he's meant to play second fiddle.

For a total stereotype – strong, menacing, and no rocket scientist – use the template below.

Creepy Assistant

75 points

Attributes: ST 13 [30]; DX 11 [20]; IQ 10 [0]; HT 11 [10].

Secondary Characteristics: Damage 1d/2d-1; BL 34 lbs.; HP 13 [0]; Will 10 [0]; Per 10 [0]; FP 11 [0]; Basic Speed 5.50 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].

Advantages: 25 points chosen from ST or HT +1 or +2 [10 or 20], HP +1 to +3 [2/level], Will or Per +1 to +3

[5/level], Fearlessness [2/level] or Unfazeable [15], Hard to Subdue [2/level], Hard to Kill [2/level], High Pain Threshold [10], Horde-Walker [1], Less Sleep 1-4 [2/level], Night Vision 1-9 [1/level], Pitiable [5], Rapid or Very Rapid Healing [5 or 15], Resistant to Disease (+3) or (+8) [3 or 5], SOP (Check the Bodies) [1], or Tastes Bad [1].

Disadvantages: Duty (To boss; 15 or less) [-15].

- Another -25 points chosen from IQ -1 [-20], Appearance [-4 to -16], Bad Smell [-10], Bloodlust [-10*], Bully [-10*], Disturbing Voice [-10], Hidebound [-5], Hunchback [-10], Incurious [-5*], Mute [-25], Odious Personal Habits [-5 to -15], Short Attention Span [-10*], or Xenophilia [-10*].

Primary Skills: *Two* of Two-Handed Axe/Mace or Wrestling, both (A) DX+2 [8]-13; Lifting (A) HT+2 [8]-13; or Intimidation (A) Will+2 [8]-12.

Secondary Skills: *Three* of Savoir-Faire (Servant) (E) IQ+2 [4]-12; Driving (any), NBC Suit, or Stealth, all (A) DX+1 [4]-12; Electronics Operation (Scientific), Freight Handling, Hazardous Materials (any), Packing, Professional Skill (Mortician), or Teamster (any), all (A) IQ+1 [4]-11; Scrounging (E) Per+2 [4]-12; 4 points to raise one of those skills by one level; or 4 points for an unselected primary skill at one level lower.

Background Skills: Brawling (E) DX+1 [2]-12.

After those matters, the most important consideration when creating a zombie-master is his combination of skills and advantages. Generally, supernatural advantages such as Magery and Power Investiture should accompany occult skills and spells, while most of the other advantages need the Weird Science skill above all else. Moreover, skill sets should fit a theme: biological, chemical, magical, etc. Still, zombies are weird enough that there will always be exceptions. Some examples:

Classic Necromancer: Allies (10 superior zombies; 25% of own points; 12 or less; Summonable, +100%) [24], Charisma 2 [10] (for eventual Mass Zombie), Magery 2 [25], Rule of 15 [1], and Spirit Empathy [10], with skill at Alchemy, Esoteric Medicine, Hazardous Materials (Magical), Hidden Lore (Zombies), Occultism, Professional Skill (Mortician), Thaumatology, and spells.

Steampunk Reanimator: Artificer 2 [20], High TL 1 [5], Quick Gadgeteer (Zombies, -50%) [25], Single-Minded [5], Versatile [5], and Wealth (Comfortable) [10] (but they laughed at him at the University, so *not* Tenure), with skill at Biology, Chemistry, Electrician, Engineer (Electrical), Physician, Physiology, Scrounging, Surgery, Veterinary, and Weird Science.

Zombie Whisperer: Charisma 2 [10], Gadgeteer (Memetic Zombies, -80%) [5], Good with Zombies [1], High TL 1 [5], Horde-Walker [1], Mind Control (Hearing-Based, -20%; Independent, +70%; Suggestion, -40%; Zombie Command, -25%) [43], and Versatile [5], with skill at Brainwashing, Expert Skill (Memetics), Hypnotism, Psychology, Research, Speed-Reading, Teaching, Weird Science, and Writing.

Pick disadvantages to fit personality, not expertise. The first list hints at motivations: madness (Delusions, Megalomania, and Obsession), *making* friends (Xenophilia), ruling the world (see “madness”), scientific curiosity (Curious), “it seemed like a good idea at the time” (Impulsiveness), etc. The second is about the stereotype . . . anything from a nervous, bespectacled scientist (low ST, Absent-Mindedness, Bad Sight, and Oblivious) to a disfigured, gravel-throated black magician (low Appearance, Callous, Disturbing Voice, Loner, and Odious Personal Habits).

This template *omits* anything not to do with the zombie-master’s work – most such figures are monomaniacal, regardless of whether they have an Obsession. In a campaign where survival matters, consider using the 5 points that quirks give to buy practical adventuring skills.

ZOMBIE-FIGHTING GEAR

Kit that might help when you’re facing zombies would – and does – fill books! Shop **GURPS Low-Tech** and **Low-Tech Companion 2: Weapons and Warriors** for TL0-4 hardware; browse **GURPS High-Tech** for TL5-8 firearms and survival gear, and **Gun Fu** and **Tactical Shooting** for even *more* guns and ammo; and see **GURPS Ultra-Tech** for all your TL9-12 needs. And don’t overlook **GURPS Loadouts: Monster Hunters**, which was written with activities like zombie-killing in mind. What follows is less a catalog than a guide to picking the right stuff.

WEAPONS

What weapons are best for zombie-fighting depends on what’s available to choose from, how much time you have to prepare, and the zombies’ strengths and weaknesses. The latter *might* be common knowledge; e.g., the GM might declare, “Zombies in this campaign are Unliving, with a Vulnerability to headshots.” If not, *Discovering Zombie Flaws* (p. 35) comes into play.

Killing Living Zombies

Drug fiends, the infected, constructs given life by weird science, Vodou slaves, etc. are no less vulnerable than ordinary humans. You can use almost any weapon against them, but consider the following:

Contagion: If zombification is contagious, you want to stop zombies as far from you as possible. A missile weapon offers the greatest range, followed by a thrown weapon, and finally a melee weapon. In a melee, longer Reach is better. Once the zombies get close, remember that *crushing*

attacks are least likely to splatter you or nearby allies with infectious matter, so prioritize blunt instruments over blades and bullets. And you really don’t want to use explosives when transmission is a risk!

Hordes: If zombies attack in hordes, you probably won’t stop them all before they get close. Pack a Bulk -1 to -3 missile weapon (a pistol is grand) as backup for a Bulk -4 or worse one like a bow, crossbow, rifle, or shotgun. Carry a melee weapon to supplement a ranged one. Bring a close-combat (Reach C) melee weapon – e.g., brass knuckles, a knife, or a short baton – to back up a longer one.

Survivalism: In a zombie apocalypse, everything will be in short supply, enhancing the value of anything *reusable* – arrows, thrown weapons, and especially melee weapons. If you’re dead set on guns and can prepare in advance, select something that allows you to afford and carry lots of ammo. For instance, an M16 that consumes 5.56×45mm NATO at 0.027 lb. and \$0.50 per shot, or an AK-74 that eats 5.45×39mm at 0.023 lb. and \$0.40 per round, is better than a battle rifle that uses 7.62×51mm NATO at 0.056 lb. and \$0.80 a pop. Don’t ignore the worth of *common* ammo, which you’re more likely to scrounge. For much of TL7-8, this means 9×19mm Parabellum, .38 Special, or .45 ACP in pistol calibers; 5.56×45mm NATO, 7.62×39mm, 7.62×51mm NATO (.308 Winchester), or .30-06 Springfield for rifles; and 12-gauge or 20-gauge for shotguns. In all cases, remember that full-automatic fire will burn through your stockpile in no time, so use single, well-placed shots.

Vital Spots: Living zombies have vulnerable neck, skull, and vitals locations, and can be crippled by limb hits. If you have a combat skill high enough to reliably target these bits, choose a weapon to go with it.

This pays big dividends if you've mastered a cheap, infinitely reusable melee weapon such as a baton – or if you're such a crack shot that you need only light, low-cost rounds like .22 Long Rifle (a mere 0.0077 lb. and \$0.10 a pop) to do the job.

Relative priorities here aren't fixed. Well-supplied troops facing zombies trapped in a holding pen needn't worry about ammo counts or careful aim – they can blaze away with full-automatic rifles, or toss grenades. Take away the pen and make those zombies contagious, and the soldiers would do well to avoid grenades, and to back up rifles with riot sticks. And unsupplied survivors would be better off

using bows (or even slingshots) against isolated groups of zombies, saving precious cartridges for hordes, but would *still* want bludgeons for low-splatter backup.

Making Undead Zombies Just Plain Dead

Undead zombies – including B-movie ghouls, fantasy monsters, and more golem-like constructs – change the picture. The points made for living zombies regarding contagion, hordes, and survivalism remain true, but must be weighed against new challenges:

Chainsaws and Zombies

Preparation is sometimes a luxury – often, zombie victims must make do with whatever comes to hand.

The terms and notation below are as per the tables on pp. B271-274.

Weapon	Damage	Reach	Parry	Weight	ST	Notes
AXE/MACE (DX-5, Flail-4, or Two-Handed Axe/Mace-3)						
Baseball Bat	sw+1 cr	1	0	2	8	[1]
Cast-Iron Skillet	sw+2 cr	1	0U	5	12	-2 to hit
Cricket Bat	sw+1 cr	1	0	2.5	9	[1]
or	sw+1(0.5) cr	1	0	–	9	[1, 2]
Crowbar	sw+2 cr	1	0U	3	10	-1 to hit
Hammer	sw+2 cr	1	0U	3	10	
Tire Iron	sw+1 cr	1	0	2	10	-2 to hit

KNIFE (DX-4, Force Sword-3, Main-Gauche-3, or Shortsword-3)

Machete	sw-1 cut	C, 1	0	1.5	7	
or	thr-1 imp	C	0	–	7	

SHIELD (DX-4)

Lawnmower	Special	1	No	25	10†	[3]
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TWO-HANDED AXE/MACE (DX-5, Axe/Mace-3, Polearm-4, or Two-Handed Flail-4)

Chainsaw	sw+1d cut	1	0U	25	11‡	[4]
Fire Axe	sw+3 cut	1, 2*	0U	8	12‡	[5]
or	sw+3 imp	1, 2*	0U	–	12‡	[5]
Golf Club, Nine Iron	sw+1 cr	1, 2	0U	1.5	10†	[6]
Golf Club, Putter	sw cr	1, 2	0U	1	10†	[6]
Shovel	sw+3 cut	1, 2*	0U	6	12‡	-2 to hit; cheap
Sledgehammer	sw+4 cr	1, 2*	0U	15	13‡	-2 to hit

Notes

[1] Can be swung two-handed for +1 to damage, and at *full* Sports (Baseball or Cricket) skill.

[2] Using the flat of the bat doubles DR vs. the damage *and* doubles the damage used to determine knock-back (only).

[3] Held in front of you, running. Uses Shield skill at -2, giving -2 to hit and -1 to Block. Counts as a medium shield: DB 2 and +2 to damage in a shield rush. Shield-rush damage determines who falls, but the *target* suffers another 1d cutting damage no matter who falls. If you fall while wielding a lawnmower, roll 1d; on a 1, it lands on you, doing 2d+1 cutting to a random body part! Provides DR 4 from the front.

[4] Use Two-Handed Axe/Mace-2 to hit. Has armor divisor (0.5) when striking or parrying anything *hard* – not flesh, wood, plaster, etc. Crippling damage to a limb amputates it! If it fails to penetrate DR, roll 1d: on 1-2, nothing happens; on 3-5, it stalls and must be restarted; on 6, the chain snaps, doing 1d cutting damage to the wielder (at TL7) or simply breaking the saw (at TL8). \$150, 25 lbs. (13 lbs. at TL8). Runs for two hours on a tank of gas.

[5] Takes a Ready maneuver to switch from blade (cutting) to spike (impaling), or vice versa. Spike may get *stuck* (p. B405).

[6] Can be swung at *full* Sports (Golf) skill.

Injury Tolerance: Such zombies are Unliving or Homogenous, which makes impaling attacks (e.g., arrows, spears, and Ice Dagger spells) and piercing attacks (like bullets from slings or guns) considerably less effective; see *Wounding Modifiers and Zombies* (p. 110). If you must use such a weapon, imp and pi++ outdo pi+, which is better than pi, which is superior to pi-, and high basic damage can compensate for injury being divided by 2-10. For instance, against Homogenous zombies that enjoy a wounding modifier of 1/5 against pi and 1/3 against pi+, a .444 Marlin round (7d-1 pi+, 0.052 lb., and \$1.50) is about 2.2 times as effective as 5.56x45mm NATO (5d pi, 0.027 lb., and \$0.50), making it the winner by weight (150 HP/lb. vs. 130 HP/lb.) if not by cost (5.2 HP/\$ vs. 7 HP/\$). Crushing and cutting attacks are even more attractive – and it's worth considering specialized weapons that inflict burning or possibly corrosion damage, such as liquid projectors (which also avoid the splatter risk of cutting weapons and big-bore guns).

Vital Spots: Classic zombies have a vulnerability to headshots that can circumvent Injury Tolerance. This allows bows and guns to be effective *if you're a good shot*. When you have time to aim, Accuracy trumps damage. When you don't, a rapid-fire bonus can compensate if you can afford the ammo, and shotguns shine because shotshells get this bonus innately; a 12-gauge shell is as good as a RoF 9-12 burst (+2). Other zombies have *no* vital areas, making careful aim less important than lots of hits. Again, rapid fire is nice if you have the option – but in melee combat, this means Rapid Strike, and as that gives -6 to hit (compared to -5 to attack the face or neck), high skill becomes *more* important.

Special Weapons and Tactics

A few notes on other hardware that zombie-killers might consider:

- **Armor-piercing** ammo is especially weak against undead zombies, as it worsens damage type from pi++ to pi+, pi+ to pi, or pi to pi-, exaggerating the effect of Injury Tolerance. *Multi-flechette* is appallingly bad, as it always gives pi- damage.

- Conversely, *hollow-point* or *frangible* ammo is great against undead zombies, as it improves damage type from pi- to pi, pi to pi+, or pi+ to pi++, reducing the effectiveness of Injury Tolerance.

- Specialized *baton*, *beanbag*, and *rubber shot* rounds enable firearms to do crushing damage, while *flame-jet*, *illumination*, *thermobaric*, and *white phosphorus* rounds grant burning damage; **GURPS High-Tech** offers numerous examples. At lower TLs, certain missile weapons can achieve similar results by lobbing rocks (crushing) or fire arrows (burning) instead of standard bullets (piercing) or darts (impaling); see **GURPS Low-Tech**.

- **Sound suppressors** (silencers) are a good idea against zombies that come in hordes. The zombies can't rush a shooter they can't locate.

- **Targeting lasers** (p. B412) grant the usual +1 to hit but don't give zombies with the Automaton meta-trait, or racial average IQ 5 or worse, the standard +1 to Dodge. Such creatures aren't clever enough to deduce that the little dot means trouble.

- **Fire** is always effective, and destroys infectious matter to boot. This makes Fireball spells, oil flasks (TL2), Greek fire flasks, fire-siphons, incendiary blowpipes, and fire lances (all TL3), flamethrowers and Molotov cocktails (both TL6), and similar attacks valuable against undead or contagious zombies – the undead *and* contagious kind in particular.

- **Explosives** do full damage to all kinds of zombies, but they'll also scatter contagion.

- **Drugs** and **poisons** are rarely worth the hassle against the undead, as their Immunity to Metabolic Hazards grants near-invulnerability, and traits such as Doesn't Breathe and Injury Tolerance (No Blood) fill in the gaps. When fighting living zombies, these agents are sometimes effective – but against tranquilizer darts, knockout gas, etc., such creatures often get bonuses from Hard to Subdue, and may be immune thanks to Doesn't Sleep.

- **Electric stun weapons** aren't worthwhile. Most zombies have High Pain Threshold, giving +3 to HT here; Hard to Subdue is common as well, and also grants a bonus; and Immunity to Metabolic Hazards renders the issue moot.

Specific vulnerabilities might involve more exotic stuff, from holy water and blessed weapons against the evil dead to bio-tech serums against infected and mutant zombies. Where these involve liquids, otherwise-ineffective weaponry – such as darts that do pi- damage and inject chemicals – becomes worth considering. For dart guns and poisoned ammo, see pp. 88-89 and p. 167 of **GURPS High-Tech**, respectively.

PERSONAL PROTECTION

If zombification isn't contagious, "personal protection" means body armor. If it *is* contagious, bites are the easy part – any armor that offers enough DR to stop the bite's damage (crushing for former humans, but often cutting or impaling for zombie animals or mutant zombies) can prevent a HT roll for infection. Many forms of contagion are more insidious, however! At a minimum, fighters should wear *gloves* and *boots* if they're likely to punch, kick, or grapple. Dedicated biohazard gear is preferable, and begins to appear at TL5.

For the items below, details such as cost, weight, and DR appear on the *Armor Table* (p. 46) The effects, if any, on HT rolls for infection depend on the GM's decisions about the zombie plague, and are discussed under *Preventing Exposure* (pp. 119-120).

Gas Masks (TL5)

These protect from respiratory hazards; protection increases with TL. They take three seconds to put on, one second to remove. Weight includes a replaceable filter (\$25, 0.5 lb.).

Survivors who don't require (or can't obtain!) full face protection may opt for a lighter mask. The following do *not* form a full seal with environment suits, and provide neither DR nor eye protection:

Dust Mask (TL6): Lasts indefinitely, but needs cleaning. \$20, 0.25 lb.

Armor Table

See *Armor Tables* (p. B282) for an explanation of the notation and abbreviations used on this table.

TL	Armor	Location	DR	Cost	Weight	Notes
5	Gas Mask	eyes, face	2	\$100	8	[1, 2, 3]
6	Gas Mask	eyes, face	2	\$100	4	[1, 2, 4]
6	Goggles, Glass	eyes	1	\$20	neg.	
7	Biohazard Suit	full suit	1*	\$500	8	[5]
7	Clean Suit	full suit	0	\$100	1	[6]
7	Gas Mask	eyes, face	2	\$200	3.5	[1, 2, 4]
7	NBC Suit	full suit	1*	\$150	3.5	[5]
7	SCBA Mask	eyes, face	2	\$200	5	[2, 4, 7]
8	Anti-Stab Vest	torso	5F*	\$300	4	
8	Face Shield	eyes, face	1	\$50	0.5	
8	Gas Mask	eyes, face	2	\$250	2	[1, 2, 4]
8	Goggles, Plastic	eyes	5	\$100	neg.	
8	SCBA Mask	eyes, face	2	\$400	4	[2, 4, 7]
8	Sharp-Protective Gloves	hands	3/1*	\$30	1	[8]
8	Sharp-Protective Leggings	legs	3/1*	\$100	4	[8]
8	Sharp-Protective Sleeves	arms	3/1*	\$100	2	[8]

Notes

[1] Gives Filter Lungs.

[2] Gives Immunity to Eye and Nose Irritants and No Sense of Smell/Taste.

[3] Gives Tunnel Vision.

[4] Gives No Peripheral Vision.

[5] Uses NBC Suit skill. Provides the Sealed advantage if worn with gas mask or SCBA mask. Suit's DR applies only against *burning* or *corrosion* damage.

[6] Gives +4 HT when dealing with disease-ridden victims; see *Contagion* (p. B443).

[7] Gives Doesn't Breathe while air tank holds out.

[8] Split DR: use the first, higher DR against *impaling* attacks, *cutting* attacks, and all *bites*; use the second, lower DR against *everything else*.

Surgical Mask, Disposable (TL7): Come in boxes of 50, 100, or more (1 lb. per 100 masks). Last one day. Each: \$0.25, neg.

Goggles (TL6)

These protect against infected gunk in the eyes.

Glass Goggles (TL6): Give Nictitating Membrane 1. Anything that pierces their DR 1 shatters them (+1 to penetrating injury)!

Plastic Goggles (TL8): Give Nictitating Membrane 5, and won't shatter.

Environment Suits (TL7)

Full-body suits require the NBC Suit skill (p. B192) to use properly.

Biohazard Suit (TL7): A hot, bulky, hermetically sealed suit, worn with a gas mask (pp. 45-46) or an SCBA (p. 46), which fits completely under the suit. *Triple* FP losses while suited up.

Clean Suit (TL7): A *disposable* paper suit (booties, gloves, and hood), often combined with a surgical mask or a gas mask (pp. 45-46).

NBC Suit (TL7). A *disposable* quilted suit with a charcoal lining. Quickly loses its seal in a wet environment, and must be stored in an airtight container. After 72 hours at most, it's no longer reliable protection.

SCBA Masks (TL7)

Self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) uses "positive pressure": it expels air from a tank, keeping contaminants from entering the mask. At TL8, such gear is enhanced with a spare hose for a second mask, an air gauge, an alarm that sounds five minutes before the air tank expires, and a voice amplifier. Also requires an air tank:

Small Tank: Duration is 22 minutes (TL7) or 45 minutes (TL8). \$200, 15 lbs.

Medium Tank: Duration is 45 minutes (TL7) or 90 minutes (TL8). \$400, 25 lbs.

Large Tank: Duration is 90 minutes (TL7) or 3 hours (TL8). \$600, 35 lbs.

Bite-Resistant Armor (TL8)

At TL8, high-tech materials make possible light armor that's specifically resistant to punctures from bites, needles, and so on. Examples include the *anti-stab vest* and *sharp-protective gloves, leggings, and sleeves*.

Face Shield (TL8)

This polycarbonate face visor completely protects the face against splatter, doesn't obstruct vision, and can be worn over other face protection (goggles, gas masks, etc.) without DX penalties.

Armor and Clothing Modifications

Two modifications are sometimes useful when zombies enter the picture:

Sealed/Waterproof (TL1): Any armor (garment with DR 1+) can be made sealed, while ordinary DR 0 clothing can be bought as waterproof. This involves a generous layer of paraffin, tar, etc. at lower TLs, or use of impervious materials at higher ones. The benefit against *zombies* is that splashes of blood and guts on that body part won't soak in and trigger contagion rolls. +1 CF; weight is unchanged.

Scent Masking (TL8): Any clothing (including that worn under armor) can be treated with chemicals that give -4 to all attempts to find the wearer by scent, which is valuable against zombies that hunt that way. +2 CF; weight is unchanged.

SURVIVAL GEAR

While *Miscellaneous Equipment* (pp. B288-289) is a good start, **GURPS Low-Tech** (TL0-4), **High-Tech** (TL5-8), and **Ultra-Tech** (TL9+) are stuffed with survival gear. An apocalyptic **GURPS Zombies** campaign will benefit not only from the catalog for the setting's highest TL, but also from those for *earlier* TLs. Those books are where to turn for details, but here are some shopping tips.

Personal basics (p. B288) are the *bare minimum* for survival – all Survival rolls are at -2 without them. However, a real survival kit must take into account many needs.

Water: You'll need at least a gallon per person per day. You can bring clean water in a suitable container, but you'll eventually run out. Then water-purification tablets, a few drops of household bleach, or some way to boil water (fire) is vital.

Food: Short-term, a stockpile is good. Something that requires minimal water is best. In modern times, don't overlook military rations (e.g., MREs) – or a can opener! Once supplies run out, fishhooks and snares are valuable, as are hunting weapons.

Clothing: In cool climates (*Cold*, p. B430), warm garments are essential. In hotter ones (*Heat*, p. B434), something that will keep the sun off is important. In either, rain gear is advisable. Whatever you wear, add heavy gloves and footwear (at least DR 1). Finally, never forget that a simple bandana or scarf (or towel) has endless uses.

Environmental Protection: Sunscreen, insect repellent, and masks (dust or surgical) can be lifesavers. The last two can help against zombie plagues, too.

Shelter: Something to sleep in (furs, blanket, or sleeping bag), plus a tent if you can carry it. Modern survivors can get surprisingly far with plastic sheeting and duct tape.

Fire: A way to make it, preferably several – flint and steel, lighter, magnifying lens, matches, etc.

Medicine: A first aid kit (p. B289) is vital! Survivors with allergies, prescriptions, or similar special needs should make a list of those *and* bring along any drugs they require. More advanced medical gear is only as useful as your training.

Enchanted Gear

Most fantasy games lack modern zombie-fighting gear (pp. 43-48) but feature enchanted items that serve similar purposes. Consider grabbing artifacts based on these **GURPS Magic** spells.

Weapons: Cornucopia avoids arrow (or bullet!) shortages, while Accuracy makes headshots easier. Flaming Weapon and Flaming Missiles are your friends; other Fire enchantments are great, though most of the *fun* ones are mage-only. Turn Zombie is amazing . . . *if* the GM lets non-saints use it.

Personal Protection: Fortify and Deflect give DR and DB vs. bites and claws (and other attacks), but neither is a sealed force field. No-Smell outperforms scent masking, while Hold Breath replaces gas masks (but *not* goggles, environment suits, etc.). All Healing items are useful, though see *Reverse the Curse* (pp. 131-132); e.g., Remove Contagion and Resist Disease affect only zombie plagues that are susceptible to Cure Disease. Suspended Animation isn't a cure for an infected victim but will pause the zombification process.

Survival Gear: Items with Ignite Fire, Purify Water or Create Water, or Create Food are *invaluable* in a survival-focused game. A Sense Danger wand is great for the nightly watch – though the GM must decide if zombies are *intentionally* hostile enough to trigger Sense Foes and Watchdog. Other useful enchantments include Coolness, Hawk Vision, Hideaway, Light or Continual Light, Lighten Burden, Night Vision or Dark Vision, Preserve Food, Purify Food, Shade, Umbrella, and Warmth.

Hygiene: Soap and maybe hand sanitizer – especially if zombie plague spreads like ordinary contagion. Modern-day people will want to stock up on toilet paper, toothpaste, feminine supplies, etc.

Signaling: Think about both hailing for help (flares, mirrors, rescue beacons, strobe markers, whistles, etc.) and receiving hails (e.g., shortwave radio). High-tech survivors should definitely bring cell phones and walkie-talkies; they just shouldn't rely on them.

Light: At any TL, fire can double as light! At higher TLs, there's no downside to *also* having a flashlight, at least until the batteries run out (or afterward, if it's hand-cranked).

Containers: Buckets or plastic bags for water or sanitation, packs to carry things you need right now, and large sacks or duffels for supplies you'll drag from hideout to hideout.

Tools: A pocket knife (better yet, a multi-tool), an axe or a machete, and anything else your skills need – be that a crowbar for breaking in, hammer and nails for carpentry, or a shovel for burying the dead or planting food (that's *two* shovels).

Optics: If your TL allows, a long-distance means of spotting game – and zombies and vicious gangs – is valuable. Rugged binoculars and telescopes are best. Battery-powered cameras aren't as good.

Weapons: Survival weapons are for hunting, and most useful if you have stalking skills such as Stealth and Tracking. As with anti-zombie weapons (see *Weapons*, pp. 43-45), if you choose a firearm, pick one that eats light, cheap ammo. A no-frills shotgun or hunting rifle that uses ubiquitous ammo is more useful than a “tacticool” assault weapon; even survivors who have the latter should pack the former.

Information: Survivors at any TL will want maps. Modern-day folk should also bring important personal documents, vital phone numbers, and guides to tasks like first aid and fire-making (a pocket reference giving +1 to *default* skill is \$5, with negligible weight). Photos of loved ones are worthwhile if being reunited is a possibility.

Personal Items: Eyeglasses, keys to home and vehicle, etc.

Cash: If the disaster hasn’t wiped out the economic system! After that, barter with food and ammo. Low-tech survivors have an edge; history has shown that even starving people will often accept gold and silver.

99% Zombie-Proof

With zombies becoming a pop-culture craze, manufacturers of everything that could conceivably be useful in a zombie disaster have started marketing “zombie survival” (ZS) versions of their wares: flashlights, first aid kits, energy drinks, T-shirts . . . even guns, ammunition, and anti-stab (“anti-bite”) armor. Mostly, this means the gear comes in a fluorescent color – customarily green, but possibly yellow, orange, or red – and sports “Biohazard” decals. It also costs more: +1 CF (it’s at the high end of the price range, while **GURPS** prices are averages).

In a realistic campaign, ZS styling might give +1 to rolls to spot the item in a dark trunk or closet – but also +1 to the *zombies’* Vision rolls to notice *you*. And that’s it. In a less-serious campaign, the GM may feel generous and use one or more of these options:

Durability: The manufacturers chose good stuff for ZS gear. The +1 CF buys +1 to the object’s HT and 50% more DR protecting its HP, cumulative with such modifiers as “expensive,” “fine,” and “rugged.”

Effectiveness: The makers *knew* what was coming, and ZS gear is somehow more effective against zombies: ammo and melee weapons do +1 damage to zombies, antiseptic gives +1 to HT rolls vs. zombie infection, body armor has +1 DR vs. zombie bites, energy drinks grant +1 to rolls to escape or evade zombies for an hour, first aid kits give an extra +1 to treat zombie bites, guns or sights remove -1 from the penalty to target a zombie’s face or brain, etc.

Morale: The colorful styling is a call to valor! While wielding the ZS item against zombies – shooting them with ZS ammo, whacking them with a ZS axe, etc. – the owner gets +2 to all zombie-related Fright Checks and rolls to resist Combat Paralysis, Cowardice, Phobias, etc., but -2 to self-control rolls for Impulsiveness, On the Edge, or Overconfidence. He need merely wear ZS clothing to get these modifiers, and a ZS meal or energy drink gives this effect for an hour after consumption.

Solidarity: The ZS logo is the universal symbol of human resistance. If the GM assesses a reaction bonus for helping a survivor, add another +1 if the assistance relied on ZS gear. If it involved *giving* the other person ZS gear, this becomes +2. For instance, +2 for helping someone fight off zombies would be +3 if you used a ZS shotgun – or +4 if you tossed him the gun for keeps! Wearing *all* ZS clothing (no exceptions!) gives a full-time +1 to survivor reactions.

Keeping It Clean

Apocalypse or not, if zombification is transmissible, then dealing with splatters, bites, and so on is vital to survival. Several items hinted at above – and more besides – might be useful . . . *might*. Brief notes appear below. Detailed effects, if any, are discussed in *Biohazard!* (pp. 119-120).

Surgical Tools (TL1): The basic surgical equipment on p. B289 is vital for cutting away infected flesh. \$300, 15 lbs.

Cautery (TL2): *Burn* away that infected flesh. Requires a source of fire. \$50, 0.5 lb.

Soap (TL2-4): One month’s supply: \$27, 1 lb.

Antiseptic (TL5): For washing wounds. 10-dose bottle: \$5, 1 lb.

Soap (TL5): One month’s supply: \$1, 0.25 lb.

Antibiotic (TL6): A *typical* drug is \$10, neg. for a two-week course. Zombie bacteria may require powerful drugs that cost \$100+ per course, if they respond at all.

Decontamination Shower (TL6). A semi-portable one-person shower that catches contaminants and pumps them into drums. Requires a water source. \$600, 150 lbs.

Decontamination Sprayer (TL6). Has enough decontaminant for 10 people or two vehicles. Halve weight at TL8. \$500, 35 lbs.

Insect Repellent (TL6): May repel infected biting bugs. 10-use bottle: \$2, 0.25 lb.

Antibiotic Ointment (TL7): For infected wounds. 10-dose tube: \$5, neg.

Antiviral (TL8): A *typical* drug is \$100, neg. for a course. Zombie virus may require specific drugs that cost \$1,000+ per course, if treatment even exists.

Hand Sanitizer (TL8): One week’s supply: \$1, neg.

Testing Equipment (TL8)

If the zombie plague was a *deliberate* creation and somebody planned ahead, or if it’s sufficiently slow-moving that the apocalypse leaves time for research, the following gear might exist.

Blood Test (TL8): A one-use kit for testing blood (just a few drops). Requires no special skill – a color change means you’re infected. \$5, 0.1 lb.

Handheld Detector (TL8): An experimental sensor that warns of the presence of zombie plague in time to avoid it. Use Electronics Operation (Scientific) or Hazardous Materials (Biological) to take readings. May rely on hard-to-find batteries. \$60,000, 6 lbs.

Test Strips (TL8): Worn outside protective gear for confirmation that yes, the area is biologically “hot.” Sealed tube of 50 one-use strips: \$25, 0.5 lb.

CHAPTER THREE

ZOMBIES!

Every dead body that is not exterminated becomes one of them. It gets up and kills! The people it kills get up and kill!

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

As Chapter 1 makes clear, zombiedom offers endless possibilities. Zombies might be undead or alive, possibly infectious, the product of weird science or the supernatural, and a dozen other things. Complete stats for every possible variant would fill a shelf full of books! A kit for creating almost any kind of zombie is more practical. For worked examples, turn directly to *Instant Zombies* (pp. 90-107).

These rules treat each zombie type as a racial template (see pp. B260-262, B450-454), even though most zombies are created from subjects who *already* have a race, making “zombie” something closer to a medical condition or a mutation. Zombification might even be temporary, curable by magic or medicine. The point value of such a template is useful for evaluating zombie Allies (and PCs, if the GM allows them) and determining the cost of Shapeshifting to zombie form, but is superfluous when zombie-ism isn’t permanent or for zombies intended solely as monsters. In those cases, simply skip point costs and note traits.

ZOMBIE TRAITS

Many of the building blocks used to create zombie templates work as usual, but some require comment or expansion.

ZOMBIE ATTRIBUTES

While the GM can give a zombie template whatever attribute modifiers he likes, the source fiction suggests a few tendencies. High ST is widespread, with drugs, rage, and *being dead* pushing human limits. Such tough, implacable zombies often get bonuses to HT and HP, too – although *rotten* zombies may suffer penalties. Conversely, IQ tends to be low, with IQ-2 or worse being commonplace. Slow and shambling zombies might have DX or Basic Move penalties; fast zombies and skeletons, bonuses. For a systematic discussion, see *Zombie-Maker* (pp. 70-89), but two slightly complicated options merit mention here.

Horde Intelligence

A recurring theme in zombie fiction is that while zombies are *stupid* individually, hordes of them can figure stuff out. This is a “hive mind” of sorts, but an emergent one. It depends on brute force: enough zombies trying, failing, and observing will eventually find a solution. It isn’t a true telepathic consciousness that signals allies and shares thoughts (compare *Telecommunication*, p. 55, and see *Brains of the Mob*, p. 88).

Represent this by giving the zombie template a racial IQ penalty with the Mitigator limitation (p. B112). “A horde of zombies” is worth -60%, because while individual zombies may be tough, the mob is ephemeral. When using this limitation,

the horde’s *density* is what matters. Two zombies or more per square yard is a true *mob*, and needed to erase the full penalty. For a less-dense horde (0.3 people per square yard is the average on a city sidewalk outside of rush hour, while one person per square yard is a visible crowd), multiply the IQ penalty by $[1 - (\text{crowd density}/2)]$ and round against the zombie to find the current penalty.

Remember that IQ penalties lower Will and Per, and skills based on IQ, Will, or Per. Thus, each -1 to IQ mitigated gives +1 to all these things.



In all cases, an actual horde is needed – no tossing two zombies in a closet to make them smarter. If there are fewer zombies than the point value of the IQ penalty, the Mitigator doesn't kick in.

Example: People infected by the Legion-Z virus have IQ-4 (Mitigator, Horde, -60%) [-32]. In hordes of at least 32 zombies – whether they're crammed into a small room or spread over a parking lot – their IQ may increase. Packed at densities of 2 zombies/square yard, they function at IQ 10. Down to 1.5 zombie/square yard, they have IQ 9. Below that, to 1 zombie/square yard, they have IQ 8. Until 0.5 zombies/square yard, they get IQ 7. And at lower densities, they're IQ 6.

Borrowed Brains

Some zombies temporarily grow smarter when they eat brains. Represent this by taking a racial IQ penalty but accompanying it with an IQ bonus that partly or entirely offsets that penalty, bought with Trigger, Brains, -60%. The Trigger is priced for a "Rare" item that can't be bought, must be found, and is dangerous to obtain. Such a bonus costs 8 points/level – so if it precisely offsets the penalty, the penalty's net value becomes -12 points/level. The effect is that each brain consumed negates -1 to IQ for one minute. Cinematic zombies might even obtain a net bonus this way!

ZOMBIE ADVANTAGES

Some advantages work *differently* for zombies. In the absence of enhancements or limitations, such a distinction is a zero-cost feature, and the variant trait can coexist with the "normal" form in the campaign.

Rules-Breakers: Fictional zombies sometimes break the rules in clearly advantageous ways. When building such zombies on points, consider buying the nearest advantage and adding one instance of Cosmic (p. B103) per broken rule. For an example, see No Onset Time under *Dominance* (p. 51); for detailed pricing guidelines, consult **GURPS Power-Ups 4**.

Affliction

see p. B35

Zombies often inflict unpleasant physical effects on people they encounter. This is an advantage for the zombie only if the victim falls ill rapidly enough to influence combat. In most cases, if the zombie causes *ordinary* disease in those it contacts – the kind of sickness that kicks in well after the violence is resolved – it has the Pestilent perk (p. 56), not a costly Affliction. Similarly, the overwhelming majority of communicable zombie plagues call for the Dominance advantage (p. 51), Infectious Attack disadvantage (pp. 61-62), or Infectious feature (p. 67) – not Affliction. For exceptional cases where Affliction *would* be a fair requirement, see *Pestilence and Affliction* (p. 56).

Still, some zombies do cause fast-acting reactions in their victims. The most suitable effects are Attribute Penalty, Disadvantage, Nauseated, Negated Advantage, Paralysis, and Retching. Such attacks traditionally take one of two forms:

- A foul cloud surrounding the zombie. Modifiers are Always On, -10% (it's mainly a "social" inconvenience for the zombie); Area Effect, +50%/level (typically melee range, or two yards, for +50%); Emanation, -20% (it isn't ranged, but engulfs the zombie); and Respiratory Agent, +50% (it affects anyone who must breathe). For instance:

Nauseating Cloud: Affliction 1 (Always On, -10%; Area Effect, 2 yards, +50%; Emanation, -20%; Nauseated, +30%; Respiratory Agent, +50%) [20]. *Notes:* Anyone within two yards of the zombie must roll vs. HT each second. Failure means -2 to all attribute and skill rolls, and -1 to active defense rolls, for minutes equal to margin of failure (see p. B428). 20 points.

- A dire scratch or bite. Construct this with Follow-Up, +0% (usually carried on Claws or Teeth). For example:

Paralyzing Scratch: Affliction 1 (Follow-Up, Claws, +0%; Paralysis, +150%) [25]. *Notes:* Anyone the zombie scratches must roll vs. HT. Failure means instant paralysis for minutes equal to margin of failure. After that time, he's stunned until he can make a HT roll (roll once per turn). 25 points.

Such effects might be unusually hard to resist (higher Affliction level), longer-lasting (add Extended Duration), or more severe (e.g., Nauseating Cloud might add Secondary Retching, +10%, for +1 point, or replace Nauseated with Retching, +50%, for +2 points). This should be rare, though. Zombies often occur in hordes and are meant to be *minor* monsters individually.

Allies

see p. B36

Zombies that can "turn" victims to gain allies possess modified Dominance (p. 51). Others merely create neutral zombies via Infectious (p. 67) – or even rivals no thanks to Infectious Attack (pp. 61-62). And some carry parasites that boil out and attack, which is the Swarm perk (pp. 56-57). None of these situations rate as having Allies.

A special case sometimes appears in video games, though: a greater zombie gives off some sort of signal that draws lesser zombies to its side! These minions seem to come out of nowhere, dashing from hiding or even emerging from the ground. This ability is considered a modified form of Allies, suitable for NPCs by dint of being supernatural:

Zombie Conjuring: Allies (Zombie; Up to 25% of summoner's points; 15 or less; Conjured, +100%; Minion, +50%) [8]. *Notes:* The user must take a second to call for aid – such as by shrieking, or vomiting on the ground – and then roll 3d. On 15 or less, this brings a random zombie worth up to 25% of his points (for important notes on this, see *Summoner*, p. 107). This arrival isn't automatically loyal but will behave as usual for that kind of zombie, which typically means it will attack non-zombies. Each use of this ability brings a new zombie; that is, an expendable Minion. This ability works once a day. Some zombies can call several friends: 8 points for one zombie, 15 points for two, 23 points for three, 30 points for four, 38 points for five, or 45 points for 10.

Arm ST

see p. B40

Constructs often have sewn-on, extra-beefy arms. This may involve one arm (3 points per +1 ST) or both (5 points per +1 ST). If both are stronger than the body but not equal, buy the two-armed version up to the lower ST, and then add enough of the one-armed kind to reach the higher ST.

Claws

see p. B42

Beast zombies have whatever claws they had prior to zombification, but human (or similar) zombies might acquire this advantage. Bony fingertips or long fingernails in leathery flesh count as Blunt Claws. Only constructs or mutated zombies would boast Sharp Claws, Talons, or Long Talons.

Damage Resistance

see p. B46

Remarkably tough zombies often have this advantage. Unmodified DR is only likely for a supernatural defense granted by reanimating magic, or armor added to a construct. Otherwise, apply Tough Skin, -40%.

Danger Sense

see p. B47

Some zombies have vague recollections of life before zombiedom, or even share the memories of every previous zombie of their kind, which confers a disturbing kind of insight. While this has aspects of Intuition and Racial Memory, it comes closest to Danger Sense with a special limitation.

New Special Limitation

Twice Shy: You have a sixth sense for ambushes, barricades, traps, and other tactical measures deliberately positioned in your path. Whenever you approach such a thing, roll as for Danger Sense. Success warns you before you pass the point of no return, allowing you to seek a safer route. Critical success means you spot such a path! This capability is useless if the threat is natural (meteor, quicksand, etc.), accidental (e.g., an unexploded aircraft bomb), or extremely distant (like inbound artillery). -20%.

Doesn't Breathe

see p. B49

While most zombies have this trait, *living* ones (drugged, infected, etc.) never do. Constructs might lack it, too, if they're alive rather than merely animated.

Doesn't Eat or Drink

see p. B50

This advantage only suits zombies that require *no* material sustenance. Ghouls that eat flesh, brains, etc. shouldn't have it, and may even qualify for Dependency (pp. 59-60) if undead or Restricted Diet (p. 63) if alive. See also *Reduced Consumption* (p. 54).

Dominance

see p. B50

Having zombies create lesser zombies as servitors isn't a good match to most zombie fiction. Somebody who tangles with a zombie might risk contracting the zombie curse or plague, but this rarely benefits the original zombie. Thus, such considerations shouldn't cost the *zombie* points. Handle such cases using the Infectious feature (p. 67) or even the Infectious Attack disadvantage (pp. 61-62).

Still, some zombies *can* create new allies – equals, not servants – quickly enough to gain a tactical advantage. There are many possible game-mechanical ways to handle this. Allies with Summonable and the requirement to have a victim could be made to work, as could an Affliction modified with an Advantage enhancement that inflicts the effects of Alternate Form. These approaches have problems, however. For one thing, pricing them depends on the subject's point value; "flat" or "universal" valuation is impossible. They also raise the specter of recursive pricing, with Affliction or Allies raising the template cost, and this in turn increasing the Affliction or Allies cost. And an afflicted Alternate Form faces the extra hurdle that a zombie template goes on top of a true racial template rather than replacing it.

The simplest and fairest way to accomplish this is using Dominance, which is expressly designed to cover contagious racial templates. This approach calls for some new special modifiers.

New Special Enhancements

No Injury Required: The attacker doesn't need to injure the victim at all, but merely has to touch, speak to, or otherwise interact with the subject, who must then roll vs. Will or HT to resist (specify this detail when selecting the enhancement). Success means the subject can't be affected by *that* attacker for one day. Failure has the usual effects of Dominance. This is worth +300% plus the value of any modifiers for range, reach, area, and/or penetration required for an Affliction or Innate Attack that functions the same way; see *Examples* (p. 52) for how this works.

No Onset Time: Waiving the usual 2d days of onset time for Dominance is effectively a form of Cosmic (p. B103) that removes a standard restriction. +50%.

New Special Limitations

Fatal Beating: Mutually exclusive with No Injury Required. The attacker must *kill* his victim with *unarmed* attacks to "turn" him – neither lesser injury nor armed attacks will do. -40%.

Horde: Requires No Onset Time. The attacker doesn't dominate those he "turns." He merely creates allies of convenience that join in *that one combat*. He, these new recruits, and *their* converts are equals – there's no "chain of command." Once all viable victims have fled the battle, died, or turned, all links within the horde end. Individuals might loiter in a pack, become lone wolves, or wander off, but whether some or all of them join in the *next* fight depends entirely on Sense rolls, mental disadvantages, etc., as with any group of combatants. -80%.

Examples

Horde is *mandatory* for zombie Dominance, which means that No Onset Time is also required. Here are a few examples from fiction:

Cloud of Infection: Dominance (Area Effect, 2 yards, +50%; Emanation, -20%; Horde, -80%; No Injury Required, +300%; No Onset Time, +50%; Respiratory Agent, +50%) [90]. *Notes:* Anybody who breathes within two yards of the zombie must make a HT roll. Failure means the victim is infected, acquiring the same zombie template immediately and joining the attack next turn. Left uncontained, zombies with this trait could wipe out human life in short order. *90 points.*

Fast Reanimation: Dominance (Fatal Beating, -40%; Horde, -80%; No Onset Time, +50%) [6]. *Notes:* If the zombie beats a target to death, roll vs. HP of injury as usual. In most cases, this will fail only on 17 or 18! Success means the victim “turns” where he lies. A second later, he’ll acquire the same template as the zombie that killed him, stand up, and join the attack. *6 points.*

Infected Touch: Dominance (Contact Agent, -30%; Horde, -80%; Melee Attack, Reach C, Cannot Parry, -35%; No Injury Required, +300%; No Onset Time, +50%) [61]. *Notes:* Anybody the zombie touches on the skin must roll vs. HT. Failure means the victim “turns,” acquiring the same zombie template immediately and joining the attack a second later. *61 points.*

Memetic Zombification: Dominance (Area Effect, 2 yards, +50%; Emanation, -20%; Hearing-Based, -20%; Horde, -80%; No Injury Required, +300%; No Onset Time, +50%) [76]. *Notes:* Anyone who is capable of hearing and gets within two yards of this zombie will hear it babbling. He must roll vs. Will or be neurolinguistically programmed into becoming such a zombie himself! He “turns” the very next second. *76 points.*

Common Zombie Advantages

Several advantages are common among zombies and on zombie meta-traits (pp. 68-70), but merit little comment beyond “If you aren’t using the meta-traits, don’t overlook these.” Most notable are Doesn’t Sleep (p. B50), High Pain Threshold (p. B59), Indomitable (p. B60), Single-Minded (p. B85), and Temperature Tolerance (p. B93).

And Really Unlikely Ones

On the other hand, many advantages are particularly inappropriate for zombie templates: beneficial Reputation, Status, and Wealth, as well as any trait labeled as “social”; abilities that aid social interaction, especially Charisma, Cultural Adaptability, Empathy, Rapier Wit, Social Chameleon, Voice, and positive Appearance; Animal Empathy and Speak With Animals (zombies generally freak out beasts); and most Talents.

Extra Life

see p. B55

Some sorts of living zombies always return as undead. These have Extra Life with the special limitation below (compare Reincarnation for Unkillable, p. B95). In an

apocalypse where everyone is doomed to turn upon death, Extra Life (Reanimation) is a 0-point campaign feature for ordinary people.

New Special Limitation

Reanimation: When you die, you’re *guaranteed* to rise as undead. The exact form is up to the GM, and may well be disadvantageous, even mindless. -20%.

Injury Tolerance

see p. B60

Drugged, infected, or reprogrammed zombies with ordinary living bodies don’t have this trait. Undead ones possess Unliving and No Blood – and No Brain, No Eyes, and/or No Vitals, if those organs have withered or been removed. Solidified spirits should have Homogenous and No Blood (and are *very* hard to damage). Constructs might use *any* of these models; treat them as living if the creation process grants life, Unliving if made in the human image but given only unlifelike, or as Homogenous if they’re “golems” of solid flesh or bone.

Some horrific constructs and undead zombies have a new and utterly weird form of this advantage.

Independent Body Parts

35 points

Your limbs and extremities are separate entities. When struck there, don’t apply injury to your HP. Instead, apply it to that body part’s HP score: your HP/3 for an extremity or HP/2 for a limb (round up).

Attacks injure body parts normally with one exception: a *cutting* attack that would cripple a limb or an extremity costs you the use of that part (see p. B421) but inflicts no injury on you or it. Instead, it severs the body part, which falls to the ground and crawls around, fighting as your ally! An extremity separates from its limb, while a limb separates from the torso.

Body parts have your HT. Size Modifier is your own, adjusted by the part’s hit location modifier. Other abilities are as follows:

Arms: An arm has your DX, a Move of your ST/4, and a Dodge of DX/2 + 3. It uses your ST for striking or strangling, ST/2 for grappling or dragging things. If it has a hand, it can punch or grapple (but only the feet or legs of a standing foe), or wield a one-handed weapon at -2 to damage. If it lacks a hand, it can club for punching damage.

Leg: A leg with a foot has DX equal to your DX-2. Move is your Basic Move-3, while Dodge is your DX/2 + 3. It can

leap up and kick foes for full damage. Treat a leg without a foot as an arm without a hand, but at -2 DX.

Hand: A severed hand has your DX, Move equal to DX/2, and a Dodge of DX/2 + 3. Its only effective attack is to crawl up someone’s body (treat this as a grapple) and strangle – see p. B370. The hand has your *full* ST for this purpose only.

Foot: A foot has DX equal to your DX-2, Move 1, and Dodge 4. Its only useful combat ability is to trip those who try to pass it. A fighter who tries to run past the foot must evade (see p. B368), and *falls down* if the foot wins.

Round fractional ST and Move *up*. Where combat skills would matter, apply your relative skill level to the body part's DX.

Once severed, a body part suffers injury normally (the blow that severed it is a unique exception). At 0 or fewer HP, it's crippled and can't act. Make the usual HT roll to learn whether this is permanent (see p. B422).

You may reattach body parts by holding them in place for a minute. You can reattach crippled body parts if the injury is temporary or lasting, but they remain crippled. Permanently crippled body parts are destroyed.

One final perk: should you die, the severed part lives on, and continues to attack your enemies!

Special Enhancements

Detachable Head: Your *head* uses these rules, too. A cutting attack to the neck that inflicts full HP or more decapitates you without injury. Your head has your DX and HT, HP/2, and Move and Dodge 0. It can bite at full ST in close combat. If your head is your seat of consciousness, your body fights as its ally. If it isn't (for instance, if you have No Brain), it fights as an ally of your body. +15%.

Instant Reattachment: You only have to hold body parts in place for a *second* to reattach them. +50%.

Special Limitations

No Reattachment: Your severed body parts are animated, but you can't reattach them. You can't combine this with Instant Reattachment. -60%.

Reattachment Only: Your body parts are inert when severed. Severing them causes you no injury, and you can reattach them, but they can't fight for you. You can't combine this with No Reattachment. -50%.

Innate Attack

see p. B61

Fantasy and sci-fi zombies occasionally possess exotic damaging attacks. Most have a limitation that greatly restricts range (Emanation if just being near the zombie is harmful, Jet for goo or vomit, or Melee Attack for a touch), and often one of Blood Agent, Contact Agent, Follow-Up, or Respiratory Agent. The nasty effects are usually metabolic hazards, suggesting modifiers like Cyclic, Onset, Resistible, and Symptoms, as well as Damage Modifiers such as Hazard and Radiation.

Some examples:

Acidic Vomit: Corrosion Attack 1 point (Cyclic, 1 second, 5 cycles, +400%; Increased 1/2D, 2x, +5%; Jet, +0%; Limited Use, 3/day, Slow Reload, -15%) [15]. *Notes:* The zombie can puke flesh-dissolving stomach acid up to 10 yards away. Anyone hit takes 1 point of corrosion damage instantly and 1 point/second for the next four seconds unless washed off. A full run of 5 points will destroy DR 1. The zombie can do this three times before it must "refuel" by eating flesh. 15 points.

Background Radiation: Toxic Attack 1d (Always On, -20%; Area Effect, 2 yards, +50%; Emanation, -20%; Radiation, +25%) [6]. *Notes:* The zombie was animated by radiation, which it constantly emits. Anyone within two yards of it receives 1d rads per second. 6 points.

Deadly Cloud: Toxic Attack 1d (Always On, -20%; Area Effect, 2 yards, +50%; Emanation, -20%; Resistible, HT, -30%; Respiratory Agent, +50%) [6]. *Notes:* The zombie is a source of fast-acting microbes, nanomachines, or toxins that harm the living. Anyone who breathes must roll vs. HT each second he remains within two yards (roll just once in a horde). Failure means 1d toxic damage. 6 points.

Plague Bite: Toxic Attack 1d or 2d (Cyclic, 1 hour, 4 cycles, Resistible, +30%; Follow-Up, Bite, +0%; Resistible, HT-4, -10%; Symptoms, 2/3 HP, -3 ST, DX, IQ, and HT, +90%) [9 or 17]. *Notes:* The victim must make a HT-4 roll after being bitten, and then hourly for three hours. Each failure inflicts 1d or 2d injury. Those who lose 2/3 HP or more become seriously ill: -3 to all attributes until healed. 9 points for 1d, 17 points for 2d.

The Glow: Burning Attack 1d (Area Effect, 2 yards, +50%; Emanation, -20%; Radiation, +100%) [12]. *Notes:* The zombie was animated by radiation, and can release this in an active burst. Anyone within two yards when this is triggered takes 1d burning damage – and regardless of whether DR stops this, he also receives rads equal to the damage roll. 12 points.

The GM can adjust these examples to taste, modifying base damage, area of effect, number of cycles, and resistance rolls, as applicable. Stats scarier than those above will probably destroy PCs who are caught without suitable protective gear, or by a horde, but such extremes might be necessary to challenge a squad of survivors in environment suits.

The lack of anything resembling a long-term plague is intentional. Such effects are of little value to the zombie – who will end up chopped to bits long before the first cough or buboes – and so not worth significant points as attacks. Ordinary, slow-acting disease is best represented with Pestilent (p. 56), except as noted in *Pestilence and Affliction* (p. 56).

Lifting ST

see p. B65

Zombies often have a nigh-inescapable grasp. To represent this, give them Lifting ST, which adds to ST for grappling and choking. However, these selfsame zombies are often thwarted by trivial obstacles despite their advantage. The following modifier models this.

New Special Limitation

Grip ST: Your Lifting ST applies only to close-combat grappling. It has no effect on Basic Lift, and never benefits carrying, lifting, pulling, pushing, shoving, etc. -30%.

Mind Control

see p. B68

Few zombies can control human minds – except by turning them into zombies with a similar mindset – but some can control *other zombies*. Two common versions of this:

Target Marking: Mind Control (Accessibility, Only to designate target, -30%; Area Effect, 4 yards, +100%; Based on HT, +20%; Emanation, -20%; Independent, +70%; Suggestion, -40%; Zombie Command, -25%) [88]. *Notes:* The user may attempt to designate *one* target for all zombies within four yards that have a less-costly zombie template than his own. The target needn't be that close, merely detectable by the zombies. This requires a Concentrate maneuver and a Quick Contest of HT vs. the Will of each zombie. Victory means the affected zombie attacks the marked subject, without further guidance, for minutes equal to margin of victory – or until this ability is triggered again to change targets. A tie or a loss means that particular zombie can't be controlled for 24 hours. 88 points.

Zombie Pheromones: Mind Control (Accessibility, Only for vague loyalty, -30%; Area Effect, 2 yards, +50%; Based on HT, +20%; Emanation, -20%; Emotion Control, -50%; Independent, +70%; Scent-Based, -20%; Zombie Command, -25%) [48]. *Notes:* The zombie may take a Concentrate maneuver and roll a Quick Contest of HT vs. the Will of every zombie within two yards that has a cheaper template *and* a sense of smell. Victory instills the affected zombie with a sense of loyalty to the controller, lasting for minutes equal to margin of victory. The master cannot give orders, but his servants will remain within two yards and fight to support him. A tie or a loss means that particular zombie can't be controlled for 24 hours. 48 points.

Morph

see p. B84

This isn't a common zombie capability. However, the traditional *ghul* can assume the appearance of those it eats, which would be a creepy and unexpected trick for B-movie-style ghouls. Such an ability calls for Cosmetic, -50% and the new limitation below, for a final cost of 20 points.

New Special Limitation

Needs Sample: You must *eat* the person whose outward form you wish to assume. This requires a fresh corpse – a rotting one is useless to you. -50%.

Reduced Consumption

see p. B80

Eating something nasty – brains, corpses, etc. – *instead* of ordinary food is generally a disadvantage (see *Dependency*, pp. 59-60, and *Restricted Diet*, p. 63). However, living ghouls that can consume such things *as well as* normal food have this advantage with the Cast-Iron Stomach limitation.

Weird constructs that run on batteries or fuel sometimes have Reduced Consumption, too. For details, see *Internal Energies* (p. 80).

Resistant

see p. B80

Two forms of this advantage are especially common among zombies:

Metabolic Hazards: Assists against the effects of altitude, disease, poison, pressure, radiation, and temperature if DR

doesn't protect *and* there's a HT roll to resist, whether failure means injury or affliction (attribute penalty, disadvantage, nausea, etc.). Any zombie might have this trait at the +3 level (10 points) or even the +8 level (15 points), but only undead, unliving constructs, and solidified spirits can possess Immunity (30 points). Immunity doesn't shield the zombie's *structure* from pressure, radiation, or temperature, which can cause brittleness and cracks. When a HT roll is required for such a hazard, roll at +15 and apply modifiers for intensity (only). Even critical failure means no damage or affliction, but any failure costs the zombie one level of HT permanently. To reduce this risk, add Pressure Support, Radiation Tolerance, and/or Temperature Tolerance.

Mind Control: Some zombies are absolutely immune to all attempts at direct mental control. Such Immunity totally blocks Mind Control, Mind Probe, and Mind Reading; Illusion (**GURPS Powers**, p. 94) enhanced with Mental; Possession modified with Mind Swap or Telecontrol; and any advantage limited with Glamour (**Powers**, p. 111). Anything producing effects that resemble these abilities also fails, notably the Hypnotism, Invisibility Art, and Enthrallment skills; spells such as Loyalty and Charm, and any similar magic-working; and psychotronic mind disruptors and related superscience. These things are collectively "Very Common," so such Immunity costs 30 points. It *doesn't* preclude the zombie being controlled by its creator or – if Reprogrammable – by a designated proxy. However, this is the sole means of control that functions in such cases; the zombie can never be "stolen" from its creator.

*They're not dead exactly,
they're just . . . sort of rotting.*
– Lionel, in **Braindead**

Striking ST

see p. B88

While unusually strong zombies are more often grapplers than strikers (see *Lifting ST*, p. 53), there are exceptions – notably ghouls that can bite through your skull to eat your brains. For these, an enhancement is in order.

New Special Limitation

One Attack Only: The Striking ST benefits only one specific natural attack. This is almost always a *bite* for zombies, but constructs and mutants with Claws, Strikers, etc. may specify those things instead. -60%.

Supernatural Durability

see p. B89

This advantage is too potent for zombies that attack in hordes (unless the GM *wants* the PCs to lose), but loners of the *Silent Rage* variety may have it. It's the only physical trait that a living zombie needs to be scary, though extra ST is common. Select a suitable mentality meta-trait (pp. 69-70) and you're done. The usual "fatal flaw" is a headshot.

Teeth

see p. B91

Zombies normally keep the teeth they had before turning. For human (or similar) zombies – even flesh-eating ghouls – this means 0-point blunt teeth. Sharp Teeth would require mutation or deliberate construction, and Fangs simply wouldn't fit into a human-style mouth.

Telecommunication

see p. B91

Fictional zombies sometimes exhibit the ability to assemble into a horde in response to a stimulus (an attack on a fellow zombie, tasty brains, etc.). This might be due to any number of superhuman capabilities, most of which resemble Telesend (Broadcast, +50%; Racial, -20%; Vague, -50%) [24]. A zombie with this gift can transmit a broad concept like "Food!" or "Help!" to all similar zombies by making an IQ roll, at -4 for Broadcast and further modified by *Long-Distance Modifiers* (p. B241). For this to be effective, most zombies will need the Reliable enhancement (**GURPS Powers**, p. 109), which costs +5% per +1 to the roll.

Example: The GM wants his zombies to call the horde from a mile around. With the base -4 and another -2 for a range of one mile, that's -6. As the zombies have IQ 8, this is unlikely to work without help. Thus, the GM adds Reliable 8, for +8 to the roll, making the final roll 10 or less – even odds. The result is Telesend (Broadcast, +50%; Racial, -20%; Reliable 8, +40%; Vague, -50%) [36].

If the same zombies use *Horde Intelligence* (pp. 49-50), there's an effective boost to this roll when enough are gathered in one place to offset their IQ penalty. In effect, it's easier for *lots* of zombies to summon yet more zombies.

Terror

see p. B93

While zombies are often the cause of Fright Checks (p. 109), only those that actively emanate *supernatural* dread possess Terror. This advantage implies something like black magic, restless spirits, or the powers of Hell. In that case, Always On, -20% is required. If every zombie in a horde has Terror, victims roll once for the encounter. Use the penalty for the highest level of Terror in the mob plus the standard -1 to -5 for a horde (see *Fright Check Modifiers*, p. B360).

Unaging

see p. B95

This advantage befits living dead made from preserved corpses (e.g., mummies, or zombie Pope John XXIII or Eva Perón), ones whose means of reanimation halts decay (a plausible effect of radiation or toxic chemicals), and those capable of functioning after soft tissues rot off. This last class also has the Will Become a Skeleton feature (p. 68); the eventual change in meta-trait is considered a special effect, not aging. None of this is mandatory, though; see *Short Lifespan* (pp. 63-64).

New Special Limitation

Attribute Exemption: Unaging doesn't protect all four attributes. This is worth -25% per attribute that can degenerate. For instance, a zombie with a meat body that loses ST, DX, and HT, animated by a spirit that retains IQ, has Unaging (Attribute Exemption, ST, DX, and HT, -75%) [4].

Unfazeable

see p. B95

This widespread zombie trait waives Fright Checks; thus, it precludes Phobias (which trigger Fright Checks) but not Dreads (which don't), making the latter a better choice for zombies. Treat it as Immunity (pp. B80-81) to a "Common" threat: mental stun. Zombies that have it are immune to not only Fright Checks, but also "freezing" due to surprise (p. B393). Not being stunned by surprise doesn't equal immunity to its *tactical* effects – attackers that ambush them still strike first against defenseless targets.

Unkillable

see p. B95

Unkillable 1 suits zombies, living or undead, that simply can't be put down quickly – especially when combined with Injury Tolerance (Unliving) or (Homogenous) to reduce injury, making it hard to wound the zombie to -10xHP. Either way, this ability gives *very* tough zombies. It's best saved for small outbreaks and for zombies intended to menace heroes who wield serious military weaponry.

Higher levels of Unkillable might suit high-powered undead but are a poor fit to most *zombie* lore. No level of Unkillable is compatible with Fragile (Unnatural); the two are mutually exclusive.

ZOMBIE PERKS

Many classic zombie traits amount to mere perks. They're normally available only on a "racial" basis – that is, as part of a zombie template. Most non-zombies would need an Unusual Background to justify such things.

Desecrator

Supernaturally created zombies are often genuinely *unholy*. Holy objects they touch (though not holy weapons used to smite them!) and sacred ground upon which they walk are *desecrated* by the merest contact. Restoring the blessing requires a Concentrate maneuver and a Religious Ritual roll, at a minimum. Until this is done, the power of such desecrated resources cannot be drawn upon for any reason – for instance, to fight the zombies or their master.

Living zombies and those created by weird science almost never have this perk. Undead animated by mana alone – not by magically summoned evil spirits – frequently lack it, too. And the same goes for zombies sent by the gods, which are unlikely to be imbued with a power inimical to their creators.

Desecrator regularly accompanies the Can Be Turned By True Faith quirk (p. 66), and may require the Functions and Detects as Evil feature (p. 67) as a prerequisite in some game worlds.

Pestilent

The zombie carries an *ordinary* pathogen (not zombie plague). Unlike Infectious (p. 67), which is a 0-point feature, this trait costs points because it can eventually weaken or kill opponents who escape, which is valuable to the zombie if it strikes again or wants to eat the victim's corpse. It's a mere perk because the operative word is "eventually." Such pestilence runs its usual course, and symptoms can take a long time to present, even for a serious disease: one to three weeks for tetanus, two to 12 weeks for rabies, and so on. If the disease progresses on a speedier, cinematic timescale, see *Affliction* (p. 50) or *Innate Attack* (p. 53); if it's an evil zombie-master's secret weapon, see *Pestilence and Affliction* (below).

There are several distinct forms, and a zombie archetype may have more than one of these:

Pestilent Ability: The zombie has a ranged superhuman ability – usually an Affliction or an Innate Attack – that conveys disease to those it affects. Anybody who suffers injury or affliction caused by the ability is subject to *Contagion* (p. B443). Such exposure counts as "prolonged contact," making the roll HT-2. Any failure means the victim contracts the disease.

Pestilent Presence: The zombie harbors a disease to which it isn't susceptible. Unlike Pestilent Ability, this isn't carried by an attack that can be dodged or resisted; thus, it's easier to shrug off (it isn't forcefully delivered) but harder to see coming. Merely being in the zombie's presence requires a roll

as for *Contagion*. This is typically at HT+1 for "brief" contact, but even being in the same room calls for a HT+4 roll. Any failure means the victim contracts the disease.

Pestilent Wounds: The zombie causes infection in those it wounds through biting, or with barehanded *cutting* or *impaling* attacks (such as Claws). This calls for at least 1 HP of injury to the victim. If the target has an open wound, then 1 HP from *any* unarmed attack that brings the zombie's bare, unarmored flesh into contact with the target's body will do. If left untreated, the subject must check for infection (p. B444) afterward. The base roll is HT+3, as usual, but the -3 for a locale with a special infection always applies, for a net HT roll. Any failure means the victim suffers an ordinary infection.

These perks cause specific diseases. Each disease requires a separate perk. The nonspecific infection on p. B444 is one *possible* choice for Pestilent Wounds.

Swarm

Some undead zombies are vermin-infested, while living ones might spread via unusually large parasites. This trait can represent either situation. The zombie contains a swarm of vicious little creatures (making this perk functionally identical to Payload 1, dedicated to housing the nest).

On any turn when the zombie suffers a major wound or knockback, or is knocked down, roll 3d. A 12 or less means the swarm boils out. If the zombie is *destroyed*, the swarm appears automatically.

Pestilence and Affliction

It is possible to build scary Afflictions (p. 50) that cause fatal illnesses. These cost far more points than the Pestilent perk (above). A pair of "generic" examples should cover most cases:

Airborne Disease: Affliction 1 (Always On, -40%; Area Effect, 2 yards, +50%; Disadvantage, Terminally Ill, One Month, +100%; Emanation, -20%; Extended Duration, Permanent, +150%; No Signature, +20%; Respiratory Agent, +50%) [41]. *Notes:* Anyone who breathes unfiltered air within two yards of the zombie must roll vs. HT or contract a potentially fatal infectious disease. This runs its usual course (typically taking weeks to manifest and up to a month to kill), can spread, and responds normally to whatever treatments affect it. The contagion is invisible and not under the carrier's control – it will almost certainly infect allies. 41 points.

Contact Disease: Affliction 1 (Always On, -40%; Contact Agent, -30%; Disadvantage, Terminally Ill, One Month, +100%; Extended Duration, Permanent, +150%; Melee Attack, Reach C, Cannot Parry, -35%; No Signature, +20%) [27]. *Notes:* As Airborne Disease, except that it requires a touch on bare skin to spread – a given for any allies living in close quarters. 27 points.

The one-two punch of Disadvantage, Terminally Ill and Extended Duration, Permanent encapsulates the

disease's specific effects, which could include all manner of injury and affliction. At +250% all in, these cost the same as Coma, which inflicts comparable failure and death. If victims go on to rise as zombies after they die, tack on Advantage, Extra Life (Reanimation, -20%), +200%; see *Extra Life* (p. 52). This raises either cost by 20 points.

The problem with giving *zombies* these attacks is that they'll end up paying many points for little to no benefit – avoiding this situation is the logic behind why Social Disease (pp. 33-34) is a disadvantage, not an attack, for ordinary human carriers. Evil wizards and sinister supers might purchase such abilities for assassination (the victim dies when his killer is well out of the picture), or perhaps for perpetrating mass murder. However, such social, even political goals are of no value to a zombie.

There's one exception, though. When a zombie-master specifically creates zombies to spread lethal disease – or more zombies – as a kind of weapon, he shouldn't be able to weasel out of paying for his schemes! In that specific case, replace Pestilent with a suitable Affliction, raising the zombie's point value and thus increasing its cost as an Ally, the energy needed to raise it using magic, and so on.

The swarm fills one hex on a combat map and uses *Swarm Attacks* (p. B461). It is *not* under the zombie's control, but fights because it regards the zombie as its nest. While the zombie is moving, the swarm stays with it, preferentially attacking non-zombies in close combat with its carrier. If there's no one there, it will travel up to one yard away to a target – and if there's nobody there, either, it will return to the zombie's hex until a target presents itself. However, it will only settle down once the zombie stops fighting. If the zombie is destroyed, the swarm becomes a free-roaming monster.

There are two varieties of swarm. Either moves with its host (use the zombie's Move) until the zombie is destroyed; then it uses the listed Move. Bigger, stronger zombies with more HP have room inside for larger, tougher swarms.

Crawlers: Crawling bugs, snakes, rats, or something else that moves along the ground (including exotic “tomb worms”). Scuttles or slithers at Move 4. Inflicts cutting damage equal to the *lower* of 1d or the zombie's thrust; armor protects normally. Dispersed after losing HP equal to *half* the zombie's (round up).

Flyers: Small flying bugs, realistic or fantastic. Flies at Move 6. Stings for 1 HP of injury per turn unless the victim is *completely* protected. Dispersed after losing HP equal to the zombie's.

Don't use Swarm for zombies that can spew or emanate vermin at will. Build that as an attack in the spirit of Acidic Vomit or Deadly Cloud (see *Innate Attack*, p. 53), with a suitably grotesque “special effect.”

Toxic

The zombie – usually one created by toxic waste or a serum – is poisonous. It can't necessarily attack using poison (if it can, see *Innate Attack*, p. 53), but it's unsafe to eat and produces dangerous gases when burned in open air. In most fiction where this is true and the result of exposure isn't “you become a zombie,” the effects are potentially lethal.

If the GM doesn't feel like inventing poisons, here's a “generic” interpretation: As a digestive agent, there's a 15-minute delay and the HT roll to resist takes a penalty equal in size to the zombie's HT/2, rounded down. As a respiratory agent, there's *no* delay but the penalty is -3 less severe (thus, a HT 11 zombie that gives a HT-5 roll if eaten causes a HT-2 roll if cremated and the smoke or ashes are inhaled). Either way, it inflicts 1d toxic damage repeating at hourly intervals for six cycles.

Even more so than Pestilent (p. 56), this perk does little to benefit the zombie, which must be consumed – by fire or enemies – before the ability matters. It still costs a point for the reason that it's a disincentive to hunters who would turn flame or vicious dogs on the zombie, and might make survivors rethink destroying it if there's a risk that its body could fall into the water supply or its blood may be splattered across their food cache.

Unaffected by (Spell)

In a setting that uses **GURPS Magic**, undead zombies are assumed to be immune to Death Vision (they're

already dead!), Sense Life (they aren't alive), and Soul Jar (they might have an evil spirit, but they have no soul), and also to Steal (Attribute) and Steal Energy, which are assumed to drain vital essence that the undead no longer possess. This is considered a feature – Affected as Dead (p. 67) – because the same zombies can be detected by Sense Spirit, manipulated by Control Zombie and Zombie Summoning, repelled by Pentagram, and harmed by Turn Zombie. They simply trade vulnerability to one small assemblage of spells for susceptibility to another.

Certain zombies enjoy immunity to spells from *both* lists, however. Given that there are 800+ spells in **Magic**, either set of five spells would be collectively “Rare” for the purpose of Resistant (p. B80), making total Immunity worth a mere 5 points. Zombies that are immune to one set *and* specific spells from the other must buy each additional immunity at 1/5 of this cost – that is, as a perk for each spell.

Other sorts of zombies might have similar immunities in settings where spells exist, at the cost of 1 point per specific spell.

ZOMBIE DISADVANTAGES

Being a zombie is mostly about the disadvantages, which are horrible in many cases. Several of these come in forms especially suited to zombies, or merit a few words on how they work for zombies.

Addiction

see p. B122

While this problem is only rarely appropriate for racial templates, zombie templates are closer to strange afflictions. Ones intended for living zombies might even be *caused* by drugs, making Addiction fitting. There are countless possibilities for zombie drugs, but two generic approaches can handle the most common situations:

Mind-Control Drug: Addiction (Very Expensive; Hallucinogenic; Totally Addictive; Illegal) [-40]. *Notes:* This drug is considered “Very Expensive” not because it's genuinely costly but because the *only* source is the zombie's creator (perhaps a Vodou *bokor*), who uses it to control the zombie. “Hallucinogenic” is an approximation, too – the actual effects are the mental disadvantages on the zombie template, which represent the subject living in a psychological space where all he can do is mindlessly obey his master's orders. The zombie almost certainly has no interest in using the drug, but that's irrelevant; it induces *physiological* dependency, and the victim withdraws at -10. Deprived of it, he's likely to die. Inasmuch as the zombie-master gives his thrall a choice, it's “Be my slave or die.” -40 points.

Psycho Drug: Addiction (Cheap; Hallucinogenic; Totally Addictive; Illegal) [-25]. *Notes:* This is a cheap street drug – perhaps a cinematic version of MDPV (see *Zombies in the News: Zombie Drugs*, p. 22). Here, too, “Hallucinogenic” means “enslaved by all the other disadvantages on the zombie template.” The difference is that the zombie *does* want to use the drug. If forced to withdraw, he does so at -10.

Whether dependency is physiological or psychological depends on the substance (MDPV produces a mixture of both); the former means that deprivation may lead to death, while the latter is likely to make the zombie even crazier, worsening the level or self-control roll of existing mental disadvantages, starting with the most antisocial ones. -25 points.

If a zombie needs something to avoid becoming simply *dead*, no withdrawal allowed – as is often the case for undead and constructs – then use Dependency (pp. 59-60) instead. Zombies almost never have both traits.

Common Zombie Disadvantages

Many disadvantages are widespread among zombies – and on zombie meta-traits (pp. 68-70) – but don't rate lengthy notes. Don't forget to consider them when *not* using meta-traits, however! These include Bad Smell (p. B124), Bad Temper (p. B124), Bloodlust (p. B125), Disturbing Voice (p. B132), Frightens Animals (p. B137), Hidebound (p. B138), Incurious (p. B140), Lifebane (p. B142), Low Empathy (p. B142), No Sense of Humor (p. B146), Neutered/Sexless (p. B165), Numb (p. B146), nasty Appearance (p. B21) as severe as Horrific, and reduced literacy (p. B24).

Somebody Else's Problems

Other disadvantages rarely suit zombies, particularly Curious, Greed, Guilt Complex, Miserliness, almost all "virtuous" traits (Charitable, Code of Honor, Disciplines of Faith, Honesty, Pacifism, Sense of Duty, Selfless, Truthfulness, and Vow), and anything with a social context that isn't flatly negative (notably Dependents). Anything the zombie's advantages oppose is likewise off-limits; e.g., many zombies have Doesn't Sleep, which precludes Insomniac, Light Sleeper, Nightmares, Sleepwalker, Sleepy, Slow Riser, etc.

Berserk

see p. B124

This disadvantage is common among raging, violent zombies – especially living ones. Above-average HT and advantages such as Hard to Kill, High Pain Threshold, and even Supernatural Durability befit slow, inexorable zombies and necromantic reanimates that obey their master in combat . . . but bargain-basement zombies from B movies and video games often seem to have Berserk *instead*. This, too, can enable unpenalized combat down to -5xHP (if only once). It typically has a self-control number of 9 or 6, and flesh-eating zombies often have a new modifier.

New Special Modifier

Vicious: Where a standard berserker must attempt a self-control roll if he or a loved one is harmed, and goes berserk automatically upon failing a self-control roll for Bad Temper, *you* have to roll if you so much as *see* anyone who isn't an ally (for a zombie, that means any non-zombie), and immediately go berserk if you fail a self-control

roll for Bloodlust or Uncontrollable Appetite. Consequently, you'll be berserk far more often! A major benefit offsets this downside: your frenzy ends if you lose sight of enemies, so you'll never attack allies. Mutually exclusive with Battle Rage. +0%.

Bestial

see p. B124

A Bestial zombie has lost the basic lessons of civilization. Unlike a beast, though, it wasn't trained as a pet or raised as a wild animal, so it lacks *those* lessons, too. Thus, it exhibits atavistic or at best childish behavior. In game terms, whatever its skills before becoming a zombie, and regardless of its IQ:

- It has no concept of cooperation beyond mob behavior. At best, it might attack the same person as another zombie, or surmount a wall by clambering over the backs of its fallen companions.
- It has no skills or skill defaults for anything not directly concerned with survival. This definitely rules out artistic skills, social skills, and all Hard skills based on IQ or Will. Even attempts to use weapons are clumsy: -4 to hit.
- It only understands *visible* strength. If it's predatory and not outnumbered, and its prey doesn't have a higher SM, it won't feel threatened. It won't recognize weapons that haven't hurt it, or grasp "force multipliers." The same thinking goes for environmental dangers, like being swept away in a swift river.
- It's incapable of planning or indirect action. If it wants to get from A to B, it does so in a predictable straight line, only detouring to avoid obstacles or things that have injured it in the past.

When in doubt, assume that it reacts like a selfish baby – but an adult-sized baby that, when it throws a tantrum, fights like an angry ape (if it was formerly human; lizard-man zombies are free to fight like angry crocs). It isn't automatically *vicious*, though. That's a function of mental problems like Berserk and Bloodlust. A Bestial zombie without such urges might flee everyone and everything strange, though that wouldn't be very fun.

Cannot Learn

see p. B125

Some zombie aficionados regard this trait as mandatory, but the source fiction begs to differ. The titular character of *Fido* clearly *doesn't* have this disadvantage – and in *Day of the Dead* and again in *Land of the Dead*, even traditionalist George A. Romero hints that zombies can learn. Fantasy RPG zombies are often Reprogrammable, which is just a kind of learning. A possible compromise is to let zombies earn character points through training or long service (both of which would be exceptional situations in most settings), and after they save up 30 points, have them buy off Cannot Learn and go on to learn new things.

Sci-fi settings, especially, occasionally include efforts to "reeducate" zombies. The technology to accomplish this would count as a Mitigator limitation – probably a daily treatment with a unique experimental procedure, for -50%.

In that case, the zombie can learn at standard rates (pp. B292-294) while in the program. Should the treatments end, the zombie retains what it learned but cannot learn anything new.

Cannot Speak

see p. B125

Technically, if a zombie can moan or say “Braaaains!”, then it can make vocal sounds and should have Cannot Speak [-15] rather than Mute [-25]. This is fair for zombies that can vocalize well enough to convey basic information (“Moan once for ‘yes’ or twice for ‘no.’”) – Cannot Speak allows verbal communication, just not spoken language.

However, if the zombie can *only* make pointless noises – blurting them out at random when questioned or trying to speak – then requiring Cannot Speak instead of Mute amounts to charging 10 points for the capacity to repeat one useless word! As a compromise, a Mute zombie may have *one* trademark sound which is worthless for communication. If it’s compelled to repeat this even when attempting stealth, add Involuntary Utterance (p. 66).

Compulsive Behavior

see p. B128

Some zombies are bound to repeat specific actions, much like haunting ghosts. Those created deliberately – most often with magic, but perhaps via drugs or mind control – might have hard-wired orders, such as patrolling a particular area, turning a capstan or a mill forever, or never straying more than 10 yards from a specific doorway. Ones driven by unfinished business may follow a routine associated with that business. And zombies motivated by vengeance could perpetually seek some enemy or resolution. These sorts of things constitute Compulsive Behavior or Obsession (p. B146), which may take a special form for zombies.

Zombie Motivation

The zombie has programming or a supernatural drive that runs far deeper than a mere bad habit. It never gets a self-control roll to resist this, but because it could be physically or supernaturally diverted from its task, *No Self-Control* (p. 60) isn’t entirely appropriate. Instead, point value is based solely on how strict the compulsion is:

-1 point: A motivation so trivial as to be a quirk. *Example:* “Say ‘Braaaains!’ every 10 seconds.”

-5 points: A broad motivation that leaves much room for discrimination. This is suitable for servitors with a “default” set of orders that allows reasonable modification, or for zombies tied to a relatively large area. *Examples:* “Guard the city of Cisca” or “Haunt the lands of Tarchna.”

-10 points: A narrow motivation that leaves some room for discrimination. *Examples:* “Guard this door at all times” (which allows the zombie to be given a ranged weapon and ordered to defend the portal from 50 or even 500 yards away, or to be told to buttress the door rather than attack those who approach it) or “Pursue my killer, pausing only to find ways around obstacles.”

-15 points: A narrow and completely prescribed motivation that’s easily exploited by enemies. *Examples:* “Stay

within 10 yards of this door at all times, attacking any strangers who approach” or “Pursue my killer in a straight line, surmounting obstacles with brute force alone.”

If the zombie can’t carry out its task, for whatever reason, it suffers from a disadvantage of equal value until the situation is remedied. For a supernaturally cursed zombie, this problem is often Unluckiness – the curse finds an alternative outlet. If the blocked compulsion signifies orders, Confused is the standard outcome. And if it represents vengeance, Berserk usually results! The GM may specify other cases, or vary the consequences to suit the circumstances.

A zombie can’t get points for both Zombie Motivation and another disadvantage that amounts to the same thing; e.g., Duty (15 or less) to a city-state’s ruler, for -15 points, would preclude another -5 points from a Zombie Motivation to protect that city-state. Zombie Motivation *can* accompany Reprogrammable (p. 63), but the latter cannot revise the former; see *Programming and Precedence* (p. 63). The zombie-master who wants guards that won’t stray from his fortress gates can build in a Zombie Motivation to that effect, with Reprogrammable to let his lieutenant command the zombies – but if he ever needs those zombies for anything else, they’ll stand around Confused.

Confused

see p. B129

This difficulty suits “shufflers”: zombies that don’t merely react instinctively, stupidly, or viciously, but mostly not at all. When a template for zombies that assemble in a horde includes Confused, read “in the peace and quiet of your own home” as “in the company of the horde” – because while the disadvantage text notes that two friends chatting quietly in a familiar room would trigger a self-control roll, two, 20, or even 200 zombies who *all* suffer from Confused and spend all day shambling won’t offer much stimulation. Similarly, a Vodou slave needn’t roll to labor mindlessly, even alongside dozens of others noisily swinging picks or machetes. In these cases, it’s *breaks from routine* that trigger rolls.

Really worthless shufflers have Slave Mentality (p. 64) – or the Automaton meta-trait (p. 69), which includes that disadvantage – without Duty (p. 61) and/or Reprogrammable (p. 63) to give them meaning. This is *instead* of Confused.

Dependency

see p. B130

Undead zombies and constructs often depend on regular infusions of something weird or supernatural in order to avoid becoming simply dead. Some common situations:

Flesh: Undead that must consume *people* don’t qualify for Doesn’t Eat or Drink or Reduced Consumption – but because the undead have No Fatigue (pp. 67-68), they cannot pay the standard FP penalty for starvation and don’t qualify for Restricted Diet, either. Treat the grisly diet of such monsters as Dependency (Human Flesh; Common; Illegal; Daily) [-45]. Truly ravenous ghouls might rate Dependency (Human Flesh; Common; Illegal; Hourly) [-60]! Don’t adjust rarity if the zombie needs some specific part (e.g., brains), but feel free to add Slow Eater [-10] (p. B155) if extracting that morsel takes extra time.

Zombies and Self-Control

Zombies have limited minds by definition. This is mostly trivial to arrange: Give the zombie template an IQ penalty, which will also lower Will, Per, and skills based on all three scores. Then add appropriate mental disadvantages (Cannot Learn, Confused, Hidebound, Incurious, etc.) or the Automaton meta-trait (p. 69).

However, many mental disadvantages rely on failed self-control rolls to take effect, and it can seem inconsistent if a zombie rolls against IQ 8 to figure things out but a self-control number of 12 to avoid Confused. To prevent this, pick the self-control number that comes closest to racial average Will. For instance, for zombies that have IQ-2 and no Will modifier, Will is 8, so a self-control number of 9 will produce the most consistent behavior.

No Self-Control

Some zombies are *completely* at the mercy of their mental limitations. There's no question of this with disadvantages such as Hidebound and Slave Mentality, which offer no self-control roll. But sometimes a problem that has a self-control roll is the best fit, and due to the zombie's neurology or psychology, even a self-control number of 9 or 6 won't do – the zombie's nature is full-time, not something it can resist if it gets lucky. In those cases, it's desirable for traits that permit rolls to work like ones that don't.

The solution is a self-control value of "N/A" – that is, no roll allowed, ever. This multiplies the disadvantage's base value by 2.5 (drop fractions), and means that its effects always apply. For instance, a zombie with Bloodlust (N/A) [-25] *never* hesitates to attack someone whose brains it wants to eat, and never moves to a new victim until it has killed (and most likely eaten the brains of) its current one.

Appropriate zombie disadvantages for this treatment include Bad Temper (the zombie is constantly enraged – if it sees you, it attacks), Bloodlust (the zombie thoroughly slaughters one target at any cost), Incurious (anything that isn't food, however obvious, is ignored), and Uncontrollable Appetite (anything that *is* food is immediately set upon). The GM may add others. However, Berserk isn't suitable, as combat rarely lasts long enough for this to be balanced.

Mana: Magically animated zombies usually need constant exposure to mana to avoid destruction. In most settings, at least *some* mana permeates the whole world but for a few small areas, making it "Very Common"; this gives Dependency (Mana; Very Common; Constantly) [-25]. In a secret-magic or world-jumping campaign, mana might not be as easy to find, but it's still a near-ubiquitous field where it *does* show up; use Dependency (Mana; Common; Constantly) [-50]. Zombies like this typically *run* on mana, almost as if it were fuel, and have Doesn't Eat or Drink – and probably Doesn't Breathe.

Sanctity: Zombies that depend on the sanctity of a deity use the rules for mana. Due to considerations such as divine rivalry, and mortal priests having the power to bless or ritually desecrate areas at will, the "Common" price (-50 points) is fairest. Zombies in the last temple of some forgotten god, or lurking in an ancient tomb consecrated to such a divinity, might have Dependency (Sanctity; Rare; Constantly) [-150], rendering them functionally incapable of leaving.

Serum: Plenty of weird-science undead and constructs – including alchemical ones in fantasy – need regular doses of some secret formula to avoid rapid disintegration. Such preparations almost always need to be made, usually by one reanimator, and are "Rare." Injections are typically daily, weekly, or monthly: Dependency (Serum; Rare; Daily) [-90], Dependency (Serum; Rare; Weekly) [-60], or Dependency (Serum; Rare; Monthly) [-30]. It's worth more points if the concoction is made from murder victims, plutonium, or anything else that might be cut off because lawmen showed an interest not in zombies but in illegal substances: Dependency (Serum; Rare; Illegal; Daily) [-105], Dependency (Serum; Rare; Illegal; Weekly) [-70], or Dependency (Serum; Rare; Illegal; Monthly) [-35]. A serum needn't provide vital energy – and if it doesn't, the zombie won't have Doesn't Eat or Drink and might even suffer from Restricted Diet (p. 63).

Weirder Science: Technologically created zombies sometimes draw their power from strange fields; if cut off, the mechanisms that preserve them shut down almost immediately. Experimental broadcast power rates as "Occasional" (it isn't any more common than a rare serum, but the zombie needn't return to the lab to get it), while in a world where everything runs on it, it's found in all civilized parts and therefore "Common": Dependency (Broadcast Power; Occasional; Constantly) [-100] or Dependency (Broadcast Power; Common; Constantly) [-50]. Etheric and Odic energy fields are mana by another name, and use the values given for it (typically -25 points).

Undead and constructs that slip into a slow decline without the regular attentions of a wizard, mad scientist, etc. have Maintenance (p. 62). This doesn't preclude Dependency on another item. Living zombies controlled through drugs have Addiction (pp. 57-58), not Dependency – even when death would result if the drugs were withheld – except in cases where withdrawal is flatly impossible, by any means.

Destiny

see p. B131

A zombie's behavior is more often programmed into it at creation than a consequence of complex *external* laws governing its actions. One notable exception is the situation of solidified spirits and corporeal undead zombified as a consequence of an ill-conceived vow of vengeance, a broken oath, or an affront to a deity. Such creatures may be cursed by higher powers to wander until they discharge a duty or make amends.

Being fated to die – or in this case, to become restfully dead rather than a zombie – is a bit like Terminally Ill.

However, that disadvantage isn't worth points for a doom more than two years distant, while cursed zombies sometimes linger for *millennia*. A -15-point Destiny, the sort that fates its possessor to die, comes closer. For advice on adjusting this point value, see *Fulfilling the Mission* (pp. 81-82).

Such a Destiny counts as a disadvantage even for zombies that are vaguely aware of their fate and would *want* to be laid to rest if they had a say in the matter. This is for the same reason why Dependency and Weakness are considered disadvantages: it's a failing that zombie-killers can exploit. If hunters manage to manipulate events so that the curse ends – e.g., by killing the sole surviving descendent of the individual who wronged the zombies, or by propitiating the god who cursed the zombies – then they can defeat the zombies without a battle. This might thrill the people the zombies once were, but it's a fatal flaw for the monsters they've become.

Dread

see p. B132

Any number of things might repel zombies, particularly supernaturally animated ones. A few items are especially likely:

Rare (x1/2 point value): One specific kind of holy symbol*, de-zombification ritual, spell, or other sacred or magical countermeasure.

Occasional (x1): Any ordinary religious symbol*; the sound of spoken prayer*.

Common (x2): Fire.

Very Common (x3): Sunlight.

* True Faith (p. B94) repels some undead and solidified spirits, but that advantage is sufficiently rare that being influenced by it is considered a mere quirk (Can Be Turned By True Faith, p. 66). However, a zombie can get further points for a general Dread of holy symbols or prayer. When these things are presented as part of a show of True Faith, and that ability would also affect the zombie, add True Faith's one-yard standoff distance to the Dread's radius.

Zombies rarely have the Cannot Be Trapped limitation – they lack the will. Still, if *most* zombies can be trapped, a variant that can't be would make for an interesting surprise!

A zombie without Unfazeable may have Phobias (pp. 62-63) instead of Dreads. These are often more suitable when the supernatural isn't involved.

Duty

see p. B133

Mad scientists, necromancers, and so on often program zombie servitors with Duties, the power-hungry standard being “almost all the time” (15 or less), for -15 points. Such a Duty might be Involuntary (giving another -5 points) if the zombie is a living victim who could attempt to resist his master's orders at some dire cost – usually death or (in settings where it matters) eternal damnation. He's compelled to behave like a zombie out of fear. Far more often, however, a zombie's Duty stems from brute-force mental programming and/or removing the subject's will to break free. That's Reprogrammable (p. 63) or Slave Mentality

(p. 64), and a zombie with either trait cannot get extra points from Involuntary, as these disadvantages already cover similar ground.

A zombie with Duty (Involuntary) or any combination of Duty with Reprogrammable or Slave Mentality – in practice, almost any zombie that has a Duty – cannot be given the Nonhazardous qualifier. Such a zombie is *required* to risk its life if its master so commands.

Electrical

see p. B134

Galvanically animated undead and constructs usually have this disadvantage, as do those that run on batteries (see *Internal Energies*, p. 80) – it's a major part of what sets such beings apart from other sorts of weird-science zombies.

Epilepsy

see p. B136

Zombies created through mad-science surgery or powerful drugs might suffer from this problem. Use the guidelines under *Confused* (p. 59) to assess “a stressful situation.” Don't give zombies *both* disadvantages – they're different ways to represent similar downsides of brain-altering zombification.

Zombies with Epilepsy can't induce seizures deliberately.

Fragile

see p. B136

Living zombies rarely have this disadvantage, but it's otherwise extremely common. Most zombies that aren't genuinely alive have *Fragile (Unnatural)* to represent the lack of biological self-repair mechanisms, will to live, and so forth; for solidified spirits and supernaturally animated corpses with this trait, reduction to -HP (total 2xHP injury) breaks whatever curse, spell, etc. animates them. *Fragile (Brittle)* suits skeletal and extremely rotten zombies. *Fragile (Combustible)* is standard for dried-out mummies, while *Fragile (Flammable)* befits weird constructs that run on a volatile fuel such as gasoline. And use *Fragile (Explosive)* for fantasy zombies made from corpses that remain permanently bloated, just waiting for some clueless hero to hit them hard enough . . .

Infectious Attack

see p. B140

While zombies often spread through contagion, they should have Infectious Attack on their template only if creating a new zombie is an uncontrollable potential side effect of attacking a non-zombie *and* the convert would be aggressively inimical to its creator. This typically means that such zombies compete as a “race,” though it's possible that the new zombie poses a direct, personal threat to its maker (see the special enhancements). This trait is rare in zombie fiction – the majority of infectious zombies are mindlessly indifferent toward their creators and have the Infectious feature (p. 67), while most of the rest exhibit a horde mentality, their strength in numbers best represented using heavily modified Dominance (p. 51).

New Special Enhancements

The default assumption for Infectious Attack is that zombies of this kind have mental disadvantages – Bestial, Loner, Uncontrollable Appetite, etc. – that cause them compete for resources (perhaps brains or other flesh) in such a way that they end up bickering like wild animals. Things can be more severe, however:

Instant Karma: Requires Fatal Beating *and* Survival of the Fittest. The dead victim “turns” a second after being killed (exactly as for the No Onset Time enhancement on Dominance), not after the usual 2d days. +40%.

Serial Curse: Each instance of the zombie curse can afflict but one zombie at a time. As soon as the new zombie comes into being, its creator drops dead, wherever he may be! +300%.

Survival of the Fittest: Mutually exclusive with Serial Curse. The new zombie obsessively seeks out its creator for a showdown. It will settle for nothing less than total victory or utter defeat. In effect, it’s driven by a temporary Zombie Motivation (p. 59). +100%.

New Special Limitation

Fatal Beating: The attacker must *kill* his victim with *unarmed* attacks to “turn” him. This is a limitation, reducing the disadvantage’s size, because it’s harder to create a new zombie rival accidentally. -40%.

Example

Fast Foes: Infectious Attack (Fatal Beating, -40%; Instant Karma, +40%; Survival of the Fittest, +100%) [-10]. *Notes:* If the zombie beats a target to death, roll vs. HP of injury as usual. Success means the victim “turns” where he lies. A second later, he’ll acquire the same template as his killer, get up, and seek bloody vengeance! -10 points.

Intolerance

see p. B140

The living might technically be just one specific group, but they’re an overwhelming majority in most settings; thus, Intolerance (The Living) is worth -10 points. Treat this as a thorough hatred of anyone not of the same meta-physical class. This disadvantage is common for “evil dead” spat up from Hell or denied entry to the afterlife, and for zombie servants created by truly evil masters (demons, devil-worshippers, greater undead, etc.).

Maintenance

see p. B143

Many zombies – such as constructs whose bits keep falling off, and mechanically or electrically reanimated corpses – work well enough if created and left alone, but won’t last especially long without regular care. The majority of such creatures require upkeep from one person (the classic mad wizard or scientist), but those created by sinister high-tech agencies or corporations might need a “pit crew” of up to 10 experts, while guards or servants raised by covens and cults could rely on dozens or hundreds of crazies. The maintenance interval is typically somewhere between daily and monthly.

The skills required are the interesting part. The go-to skill for zombies created using bizarre technology is Weird Science. However, that might be used only to *make* zombies, with maintenance involving Physician or Surgery for straightforward repairs to meat, Bioengineering for injections of cells or mutant DNA, Chemistry or Pharmacy for chemical infusions, or even Electrician or Mechanic (Robotics) if the thing has *inorganic* parts that require care. Supernaturally powered zombies could call for preservation with Alchemy, magical fine-tuning through Ritual Magic or Thaumatology, or prayers offered to the Death God, led using Religious Ritual. And any *undead* zombie might periodically need its embalming freshened up with Professional Skill (Mortician).

Many of the above could also provide grounds for Dependency (pp. 59-60). That’s fine – just remember that the two aren’t the same. Dependency specifies a substance, energy, or environment needed to avoid injury and rapid destruction. Maintenance defines skill rolls required to prevent HT loss and slow decline.

On a failed HT roll for missed maintenance, the zombie should lose a special ability from its template first; e.g., a construct with Arm ST may find its arms limited by its body strength. This should never be something associated with a meta-trait or the zombie’s fundamental nature, though – poorly maintained undead won’t suddenly lose Doesn’t Breathe and start needing air! If nothing seems to fit, roll on the *Hit Location Tables* (pp. B552-554) to learn what body part stopped working, with anything in the head (skull or face) indicating a lost level of IQ as well as HT, and locations in the torso meaning a lost level of ST.

*I’m going to eat your brains
and gain your knowledge.*

– Dr. William Block,
in *Planet Terror*

Odious Racial Habits

see p. B22

Zombies of all kinds are likely to be malodorous (Bad Smell), and many are decayed, emaciated, or otherwise horrible to look at (negative Appearance). Moreover, a zombie might *act* in a way that makes it unpleasant to be around. This counts as an Odious Racial Habit. The most common such habit is “Eats Humans,” worth -15 points. Templates for ghouls can’t include both this *and* Social Stigma (Monster), though – the overlap is too great. Pick one.

Phobias

see p. B148

Living zombies sometimes suffer from a fear of dogs (Cynophobia [-5*]), fire (Pyrophobia [-5*]), loud noises (Brontophobia [-10*]), or sunlight (Heliophobia [-15*]).

Programming and Precedence

Zombies, especially deliberate creations, often have built-in “programming” in the form of Duty (p. 61), Reprogrammable (below), Slave Mentality (p. 64), and/or Zombie Motivation (p. 59). A zombie with more than one of these traits is bound to obey them *all* as much as possible. But should motivations conflict, they have the following precedence, regardless of relative point value:

1. *Zombie Motivation*. The zombie will strive to honor this basic programming above all else.

2. *Reprogrammable*. The zombie will prefer masters designated via this trait to those to whom it has a general Duty, or to someone who happens along and tries to take advantage of Slave Mentality. Reprogrammable can be exploited to alter a Duty but not a Zombie Motivation – if a newly designated master is incompatible with a Zombie Motivation, the programming won’t “take” and the zombie will revert to its old master.

3. *Duty*. The zombie will place anyone to whom it has a Duty above someone who’s merely exploiting Slave Mentality. A Duty cannot lead a zombie to deviate from a Zombie Motivation, however – and if the zombie is Reprogrammable, its master can invoke that trait to exchange one Duty for another of the same point value.

4. *Slave Mentality*. Random people who come along and tell the zombie what to do will be obeyed only if their requests don’t contravene deep programming (Zombie Motivation) or the commands of the zombie’s current master (whether designated temporarily via Reprogrammable or permanently as Duty).

Designers of zombie templates should review this list before assigning two or more of these disadvantages. If one trait would *never* come into play because of another, the permanently overridden one isn’t a valid disadvantage – choose just one to keep.

Rather than use the detailed rules for Phobias whenever someone confronts a zombie with its fear, make a simple self-control roll. Failure means the zombie runs away, while success indicates that it fights at the penalty on p. B149.

Supernatural zombies, particularly undead, might have Phobias, but Dread (p. 61) is more fitting. Dread is the *only* option for zombies with Unfazeable.

Reprogrammable

see p. B150

This disadvantage is almost universal among zombies created to serve. Other varieties rarely have it. The “starting” master for such a zombie is its creator, who can transfer the power of command – or even ownership – by designating a temporary commander (who *cannot* reassign control or mastery) or a permanent owner (who can). He must do so in a way that makes this unambiguously clear *to the zombie*; in person is best, but TV, exotic telepathy, etc. will work if the zombie can perceive it.

Reprogrammable concerns masters, not standard operating procedures, never mind specific orders. Thus, it can be invoked to alter the subject of the zombie’s Duty, if any, but *cannot* alter a Zombie Motivation (p. 59). For further details, see *Programming and Precedence* (above).

New Special Enhancement

Symbol of Authority: You obey whoever is clearly displaying some specific, portable physical artifact: crown, scepter, remote-control unit, weird-science gadget, or similar. This automatically reprograms you to regard that individual as your master. If someone else snatches the symbol, you’ll instantly switch loyalties, even if you were previously ordered to attack the usurper! If the symbol is *destroyed*, replace Reprogrammable (Symbol of Authority, +50%) [-15] with another -15-point disadvantage – roll 1d. On 1-5, this is Confused (9) [-15], and you mostly stand

around uselessly; on 6, it’s Berserk (9) [-15], and you go haywire! +50%.

Restricted Diet

see p. B151

Ghouls often have to eat some specific unpleasant thing to survive. A few examples from fiction:

Occasional: Human brains, skin, spleens, or some other specific organ. -30 points.

Common: Any human flesh. -20 points.

Very Common: Any meat. -10 points.

Requiring specific organs results in a more severe disadvantage because of the longer feeding times – the zombie must crack the skull, skin its victim, or similar. Think of the extra -10 points relative to “any human flesh” as equivalent to Slow Eater (p. B155). Just about any form of Restricted Diet appropriate for zombies may be cause for an Odious Racial Habit (p. 62).

Living ghouls that can subsist on ordinary food don’t qualify for Restricted Diet, and might even enjoy Reduced Consumption (p. 54) with Cast-Iron Stomach. Zombies with Doesn’t Eat or Drink *can’t* have Restricted Diet. Neither situation prevents consuming brains or other flesh preferentially or unnecessarily, on a twisted impulse. Such behavior still qualifies for that Odious Racial Habit!

Finally, constructs that run on batteries or fuel nearly always have this disadvantage. Use the standard rarities that the **Basic Set** gives for Restricted Diet power sources. See also *Internal Energies* (p. 80).

Short Lifespan

see p. B154

In the absence of magic or mundane preservation, undead zombies decompose. *Age and Aging* (p. B444) applies, with attribute losses simulating structural decay.

A zombie is considered “mature” when zombified and marks time from there. However, an unpreserved corpse, walking or not, probably won’t last the human-normal 32 years between maturity and the first set of aging rolls; Short Lifespan 4 (giving two years) is likely.

Constructs often suffer from design flaws that give Short Lifespan 1-4 and possibly Self-Destruct (p. B153). Infected *living* zombies are customarily Terminally Ill (below).

Slave Mentality

see p. B154

Only zombies created as servants or whose brains have been thoroughly destroyed by drugs, fungus, etc. should have this disadvantage. Since a zombie with Slave Mentality is making IQ-8 rolls to do *anything* but obey orders, it effectively suffers from a variant of Confused (p. 59) and can’t get points for that condition, too. Also, the Automaton meta-trait (p. 69) already includes Slave Mentality – don’t take both.

For interactions between Slave Mentality and other disadvantages that circumscribe free will, see *Programming and Precedence* (p. 63).

Social Stigma

see p. B155

Believe it or not, zombies don’t *automatically* receive Social Stigmas. Templates for those that can pass as living people – if crazy or filthy ones – shouldn’t normally include this trait. Such zombies may suffer reaction penalties, perhaps severe ones, but these are incidental to the mental and/or physical disadvantages caused by their condition. They aren’t the result of an explicit Social Stigma.

If a zombie is visibly unnatural and unable to pass as an ordinary person – living *or* dead – then it should have Social Stigma (Monster) [-15]. This is the case for mutated infection victims, twisted constructs (alive, undead, or otherwise), or undead so warped in death that they’re widely assumed to be distinct humanoid “monster races.” They’ll be feared much like dangerous animals.

And a zombie that’s unquestionably a dead *person* walking around has a special Social Stigma that cannot be taken alongside any other version of the disadvantage:

Dead: You’re a walking stiff. You suffer all the negative effects of Monster, notably -3 to reactions. However, where a monster might be feared but mostly avoided (or even conserved, like a lion, tiger, or bear, or an infected human), society has specific designs on you – in effect, you belong to a Subjugated group. Just to begin with, because you’re already dead, it isn’t murder to “kill” you! Additional obstacles can by turns resemble those given for Criminal Record, Disowned, Excommunicated, or Minor. Details vary by setting, but examples include being the chattel of your reanimator; receiving none of the courtesies, rights, or privileges that a living person of your former social background would enjoy at your apparent age; and suffering the best efforts of holy folk to put you to rest. *-20 points.*

Zombies openly kept as slaves in backgrounds where the practice is widely accepted should have Valuable Property. This is *instead* of Monster or Dead, even if such a zombie is visibly inhuman or undead – though the zombie will still

suffer reaction penalties from low Appearance, Bad Smell, and other disadvantages. Such an approach suits Vodou-style zombies in some times and places, and “pet” zombies such as those in the movie *Fido*, but not reanimated servitors in general. In traditional fantasy worlds, for instance, necromantic zombies are illegal, immoral, and best treated as Dead.

For further discussion of these themes, see *Social Traits for Zombies* (p. 89).

Supernatural Features

see p. B157

Only *undead* zombies that could pass as living may be given this disadvantage. Use it to represent the telltale symptoms of death: No Body Heat [-5], No Pulse [-5], and Pallor [-10]. These almost always occur as a -20-point set, giving a net -4 to reactions from living people who realize what they’re facing, and +4 to all rolls to identify the zombie for what it is.

Fouler zombies that have begun to decay *replace* the above package with Appearance (Monstrous; Universal, +25%) [-25] or Appearance (Horrific; Universal, +25%) [-30]. These give -5 and -6 to reactions, respectively. All rolls to identify the zombie as such, should that somehow be in doubt, get a bonus of equal magnitude (+5 or +6).

Terminally Ill

see p. B158

Most zombie plagues are fatal for the living, with zombification being a symptom. Thus, Terminally Ill is common on templates for the living infected. In a one-shot survival-horror adventure, this disadvantage isn’t worth points for the same reason that it gives no points in any one-shot game . . . but in a scenario like that, zombies are simply monsters with blocks of stats, not built on points. Just note the trait and move on!

Living zombies that are *guaranteed* to rise as undead after death – like the infected of *Gotha-Z* (see **GURPS Infinite Worlds: Worlds of Horror**) – do *not* qualify for Terminally Ill. They might even rate an Extra Life (p. 52).

Uncontrollable Appetite

see p. B159

A zombie with this trait is prone to flying into a “feeding frenzy” at the expense of everything else. When it sees someone it wants to eat (in whole or in part), it must make a self-control roll or attack. If that victim or other potential prey falls down, for whatever reason, the zombie must make *another* self-control roll or descend upon its meal, biting with All-Out Attacks and ignoring opponents who aren’t trying to pull it off or steal its dinner.

This disadvantage doesn’t require Restricted Diet (p. 63). For instance, a ghoul that can eat ordinary food might still have Uncontrollable Appetite (Brains). It also doesn’t preclude Doesn’t Eat or Drink (p. 51). A classic feature of solidified spirits is that they crave the blood or flesh of the living, and although this doesn’t sate their hunger, they never perish from starvation – their *real* curse is the suffering they wreak in the world.

Uncontrollable Appetite overlaps Bad Temper and Bloodlust, so it's best to pick just one: enraged infected that attack to spread plague possess Bad Temper; "evil dead" that hate life and just want to *kill* exhibit Bloodlust; and "hungry dead" that desire to eat have Uncontrollable Appetite. Any of the three might have Berserk as well!

Unhealing

see p. B160

Undead zombies and solidified spirits are almost always Unhealing. Constructs, too, often suffer from this complication. It's rare among living zombies, but a zombie plague could conceivably cause it (or nearly any other weird effect!). In all cases, this nearly always means the *Total* form. *Partial* rarely fits because few zombies are vampiric; those that eat their victims do so for sustenance, not unnatural healing.

Unhealing only prevents *natural* healing and *conventional* medicine from working. It doesn't preclude HP recovery in unnatural or weird ways. Healing spells generally work; so does brute-force surgery to stitch the zombie back together.

*You have no pulse, your blood
pressure's zero-over-zero, you have
no pupillary response, no reflexes,
and your temperature is 70 degrees.*

– Paramedic,
*in The Return of
the Living Dead*

Unnatural Features

see p. B22

Only *living* zombies can get points for this trait. Use it to represent eyes that have red irises (or gone black), bizarre skin colors, etc. The main effect is +1 per level (maximum five levels) to rolls to identify the zombie for what it is. Other sorts of zombies – like the undead – can't have this disadvantage, but anyone trying to recognize them gets a bonus equal in size to any applicable reaction penalty on their template; e.g., Appearance (Monstrous) would give +5 to rolls to distinguish such zombies by sight.

Vulnerability

see p. B161

Like many fictional monsters, zombies have their share of unusual vulnerabilities to injury. Some classics:

Rare: Blessed weapons (for the "evil dead"); magic weapons (for some fantasy zombies); specialized biological or chemical weapon (for weird-science zombies).

Occasional: Cutting damage to the neck (for some B-movie zombies).

Common: Crushing damage (for skeletons); electricity (for galvanic zombies); fire (for dried-out mummies); headshots (for *most* B-movie zombies).

Very Common: All magic (for other fantasy zombies); all physical blows (for zombies so rotten that bits fall off as they walk).

The multiple might be $\times 2$, $\times 3$, or $\times 4$, depending on whether such injury is intended to be merely "extra-effective" (typical of magic vs. fantasy undead) or "instantly fatal" (like headshots for B-movie ghouls). As regular wounding modifiers *also* multiply injury, this is often chosen to offset the zombie's Injury Tolerance (Unliving) or (Homogenous). For help with this, see *Wounding Modifiers and Zombies* (p. 110).

Example: While *skull* blows to living and Unliving beings inflict $\times 4$ injury regardless of damage type, *face* hits don't (see p. B399). Piercing attacks – including the majority of bullets – striking an Unliving zombie's face result in only $\times 1/3$ injury (see p. B380). To fix this problem for classic cinematic zombies that can be dropped with shotgun blasts, add Vulnerability (Headshots $\times 3$). Now skull hits will deal $\times 12$ injury and be reliable kills, cricket bats and golf clubs to the face will cause a satisfying $\times 3$ injury, and even bullets to the face will do $\times 1$ (compared to a mere $\times 1/3$ for the torso).

If the zombie is *really* easy to put down, combine a sizeable multiplier with modest HP and a suitable form of Fragile (p. 61). For instance, a horribly rotten zombie with 10 HP, Fragile (Unnatural), and Vulnerability (All physical blows $\times 4$) will be blown apart by one good swing from a ST 10 man with a melee weapon. This suits the zombies that video-game heroes dispatch by the dozen.

Weakness

see p. B161

Weaknesses are less common than Vulnerabilities for zombies, which customarily fall into the "destroyed in combat" category, rendering injury that accrues over many minutes somewhat irrelevant. Still, some zombies *do* have odd flaws that work best when treated this way:

Rare ($\times 1/2$ point value): A specific acoustic frequency, chemical, kind of radiation, etc. (for weird-science zombies); one particular de-zombification ritual, spell, or other sacred or magical countermeasure, or True Faith (for fantasy zombies).

Occasional ($\times 1$): Holy water (for "evil dead" and many fantasy zombies); salt (for Vodou zombies); strong electromagnetic fields (for galvanic constructs).

Common ($\times 2$): Running water (for "traditional" undead affected by symbolic cleansing).

Very Common ($\times 3$): Sunlight or *any* water (again, for undead affected by cleansing).

Rarity is subjective! If the item is one of the first things that the average person would try, treat it as a step more common; e.g., while holy water isn't nearly as common as salt in most places, it's easy to obtain and anybody facing the undead is likely to try it, so it's bumped up from "Rare" (like other sacred countermeasures) to "Occasional."

Many substances toward which zombies have Weaknesses occur in doses. These do their usual injury upon exposure, but can only cause *further* injury after the Weakness' full damage interval has passed. For instance, a zombie with Weakness (Holy Water; 1d/minute) takes 1d injury when first splashed with holy water, but can't be hurt that way again for a minute, however many vials of the stuff are tossed at it in the interim.

Zombies rarely have the Fatigue Only limitation, and those with the No Fatigue feature (pp. 67-68) – including most undead – *can't* have that modifier. On the other hand, the Variable limitation often fits. At the GM's option, any Weakness that involves doses might have Variable to reflect the fact that injury, whatever its frequency, is proportional to quantity; e.g., holy water might call for at least a pint to cause 1d injury, with a smaller splash causing just 1d-2 but being pushed into a font of the stuff inflicting 2d.

If a zombie is hurt by the *removal* of something, see *Dependency* (pp. 59-60).

New Special Enhancement

Irreversible: Exposure to the substance or condition is a slow death sentence. Injury continues even if it's removed, barring a rare and miraculous cure. Mutually exclusive with Fatigue Only. +100%.

New Special Limitation

Difficult to Administer: Weakness normally assumes at least minimal contact between subject and substance: energy has to impinge on him, gases must touch him, liquids have to wet him, supernatural effects (such as spells and True Faith) must be directed at him or an area that includes him, and so on. At most, his enemies might have to shine a light on him, smash a vial on him, or similar – and unless his Weakness has Variable, clothing or armor will have *no effect* on this. Some Weaknesses require more work, though. If the Weakness works like a blood or contact agent, and demands something like bare skin or injection, it has a -50% limitation; this is typical of weird-science serums. If it's actually a digestive agent or similar ingested substance (like salt for traditional Vodou zombies), the limitation is -100%; the GM may forbid it on the grounds that Weakness specifically excludes ordinary food items, but this sort of thing is a credible threat when combined with Irreversible.

ZOMBIE QUIRKS

The most appropriate quirks for zombie templates are minor disadvantages, such as Cannot Float for skeletal undead and Sexless for shambling corpses who've had bits rot off. Quirks that call for roleplaying or decision-making rarely suit the mindless.

Can Be Turned By True Faith

In many settings, zombies – most often corporeal undead and solidified spirits – are abominations against the gods or the natural order, enabling people with the True Faith advantage to “turn” them. This can have

major drawbacks when it happens, but True Faith is a rare gift that requires its user to do little in combat but pray; invoking it effectively takes him out of the fight while denying the zombies that one target. Thus, this is treated as quirk-level Dread (p. 61) of an extremely rare thing within one yard.

This quirk *doesn't* impose special susceptibility to ordinary prayer, religious symbols, holy water, etc. For that, give the zombie disadvantages like full-strength Dread and Weakness (pp. 65-66). If True Faith actually *harms* the zombie, that's a Weakness, too.

Living and weird-science zombies essentially never have this quirk. Undead animated directly by sheer force of magic rather than by summoned spirits usually lack it as well. The same goes for zombies raised by the gods as punishment.

Can Be Turned By True Faith often accompanies the Desecrator perk (p. 55), and has the Functions and Detects as Evil feature (p. 67) as a prerequisite in some settings.

Glimpses of Clarity

On occasion, the zombie recalls snippets of its life prior to zombification – and not in a helpful way (for that, buy Danger Sense with Twice Shy, p. 51, or put a Mitigator on Cannot Learn, pp. 58-59). These recollections are too rare and minor to qualify as Flashbacks (p. B136), but use similar rules. Whenever the zombie encounters a strong reminder of its previous existence – its erstwhile home or workplace, a loved one (alive, dead, or zombified), a photograph of such things (or its former self), its name shouted aloud, etc. – the GM will roll 3d. On a 6 or less, the zombie is distracted and at -1 on all rolls to do anything (including DX, IQ, skill, and active defense rolls) for the next 1d seconds.

This quirk is rare among the corporeal undead. However, it often afflicts the feverish infected who aren't entirely gone in the head. Solidified spirits sent back to haunt former loved ones frequently suffer from it, too.

Involuntary Utterance

Moaning or saying “Braaaains!” (or “Skinnnn!”, “Spleen!”, etc.) is typically just a side effect of suffering from a version of Mute that robs the zombie of verbal communication without silencing it – see *Cannot Speak* (p. 59). A zombie might be *compelled* to make such noises, though. This is a quirk-level Zombie Motivation (p. 59), and treated like a “half-level” of Noisy (p. B146) or an audible variety of Distinctive Features (p. B165): +1 to rolls to hear the zombie, follow it, or identify it as such, and -1 to its Shadowing and Stealth attempts.

ZOMBIE FEATURES

From the *zombie's* viewpoint, many definitive zombie traits amount to tradeoffs – the upsides and downsides cancel out. When recording these on templates, note cost as 0 points. However, the GM is welcome to charge a premium (in \$, energy points, or character points, as applicable) to zombie-makers who want to give their creations such features.

Affected as Dead

In settings where magic exists, undead zombies are by default immune to the spells Death Vision, Sense Life, Soul Jar, Steal (Attribute), and Steal Energy, but vulnerable to Control Zombie, Pentagram, Sense Spirit, Turn Zombie, and Zombie Summoning. This tradeoff is a 0-point feature. If a walking corpse is immune to the first list of spells *and* some from the second list, combine Affected as Dead with suitable Unaffected by (Spell) perks (p. 57).

Affected as Living

Supernatural abilities – especially spells – affect living zombies exactly as they do anything else alive. Affected as Living is a feature intended to remind the GM that a given zombie is *not* undead, and thus isn't susceptible to Control Zombie, Pentagram, Sense Spirit, Turn Zombie, or Zombie Summoning. It is affected by Death Vision, Sense Life, Soul Jar, Steal (Attribute), and Steal Energy, though. If it's immune to some of these latter spells *and* undead-affecting spells, combine Affected as Living with relevant Unaffected by (Spell) perks (p. 57).

Extra Effort Costs HT

Prerequisite: No Fatigue (below).

Rarely, a construct or an undead zombie without an FP score can still “redline” itself, pushing past its normal limits at the cost of structural integrity. This feature allows such creatures to use extra effort by spending HT instead of FP. Lost HT can only be restored via *Repairs* (p. B484); each HT point restored is a separate major repair. For appropriate repair skills, see *Maintenance* (p. 62).

Functions and Detects as Evil

In some settings – fantasy worlds in particular – Good and Evil are objective, tangible forces. They can serve as triggers or filters for exotic advantages and disadvantages (e.g., DR with Limited, Evil, or a Weakness to the mere presence of Evil), spells (such classics as Detect Evil and Protection from Evil), supernaturally imbued artifacts (whether “Only Evil people may wield the power of the Dark Crown!” or “+5 damage against Evil”), and so on. A common trait of the undead and conceivably *all* zombies in such backgrounds is that they count as Evil in this sense. It doesn't matter who created them, what cause they serve, or how they behave . . . they're *canonically* Evil.

This is considered a feature because it helps as often as it hinders. On one hand, the zombie can freely enter Dark Places where Evil damages those who don't serve it, and can be equipped with Evil items. On the other, it takes

harm from the powers of Good even though it has no special Weakness or Vulnerability.

At the GM's option, this feature can be a prerequisite for both Desecrator (p. 55) and Can Be Turned By True Faith (p. 66), or even automatically imply both.

Infectious

Many zombies can transmit their “racial” template to anybody who isn't already the same kind of creature. If the original gains allies – however fleeting – then that's a clear advantage for the zombie;

see *Dominance* (p. 51). If it creates new slaves for its master, then that's cause to raise the template's point total to keep the zombie-lord honest; add an Affliction as explained in *Pestilence and Affliction* (p. 56). And if the result is rivals who seek to compete with or even exact vengeance on the particular zombie that created them, that's a disadvantage; see *Infectious Attack* (pp. 61-62).

In most zombie fiction, however, transmissible zombification results in *none* of these outcomes! Zombie attacks simply generate more mindless zombies, who exhibit no special loyalty or antipathy toward their maker. At best, they might offer zombie-

hunters additional targets,

taking a little heat off; at worst, they might get in the way or overtax the local supply of tasty brains. Thus, as terrifying as this effect is, it shouldn't affect the *zombie's* point value.

For an extensive discussion of how zombification might spread, see *Spreading the Fun* (pp. 124-129).

No Fatigue

Prerequisites: At least two of Doesn't Breathe, Doesn't Eat or Drink, Doesn't Sleep, and Immunity to Metabolic Hazards, *or* meeting the conditions under *Internal Energies* (p. 80).

Most supernatural zombies never tire or weaken, and thus don't lose FP. This could be seen as a side effect of such creatures' typical advantages – Doesn't Breathe, Doesn't Eat or Drink, Doesn't Sleep, Immunity to Metabolic Hazards, and so on – except that there are effects that cause FP losses that these things can't prevent, such as attacks that inflict fatigue rather than injury. Being exempt from all involuntary FP drains would be an advantage, something like Immunity to a “Very Common” hazard, for 30 points.



Balancing this is the fact that such zombies can't *spend* FP, either – even if they want to! Extra effort is off-limits to them; their listed stats (ST, Basic Move, etc.) specify hard maximums. Moreover, they cannot use FP to energize advantages, skills, or spells. While they can theoretically possess such capabilities, powering these gifts calls for an Energy Reserve (*GURPS Powers*, p. 119). A human-scale FP supply would cost 30 points as an Energy Reserve, making lack of such a thing an effective disadvantage worth -30 points.

For zombies, these effects *always* occur together. The combination is a feature worth 0 points. Reflect this by giving zombies who have it an FP score of "N/A." It's up to the GM whether non-zombies can buy the separate parts, and at what costs.

No Mental Skills

Prerequisite: Cannot Learn (pp. 58-59).

Zombies with Cannot Learn are incapable of manipulating or processing knowledge in complex ways. A logical consequence of this is an inability to use any skill based on IQ, Will, or Per. While such a prohibition is a major limitation from the viewpoint of a character who *becomes* a zombie, it's only a minor postscript to Cannot Learn from the perspective of the template, and thus just a feature.

If the GM allows playable zombies and feels generous, he might permit players to use the points from lost mental skills to pay some or all of the template cost (if positive), or to add optional or mutant zombie abilities (if negative).

Taboo Traits (Social Position)

This feature is standard for inanimate objects – and for corpses. Those who possess it cannot have Allies, Claim to Hospitality, Clerical Investment, Contact Group, Contacts, Debt, Dependents, Favor, Legal Enforcement Powers, Legal Immunity, Rank (any kind), Security Clearance, Tenure, or an *individual* Reputation.

Beings with Taboo Traits (Social Position) can possess certain social traits, though – all of them fixed and inalterable by *them*, though perhaps not by external forces. These include Duties that the subject is capable of fulfilling; Enemies or Patrons who've taken a personal interest for some reason; Independent Income, if a "legal person" provides it; any *collective* Reputation, Social Regard, or Social Stigma that's standard for that class of entity; and Wealth, which might exceed the customary Dead Broke in rare cases.

Status is a special case. Treat it as "N/A" most of the time – objects (including dead bodies) hold *no* social rank in most societies. If some formula or rule absolutely requires a number, assume that it's 0.

Will Become a Rotting Corpse

Not all undead zombies are embalmed or otherwise preserved. Those with this feature will eventually stop looking nearly human and start rotting, stinking, and attracting flies.

Will Become a Skeleton

Not all rotting zombies are sufficiently magical or well-preserved to keep their decay from progressing to its

logical conclusion. Those with this feature will eventually lose their fleshy exterior and become skeletons.

ZOMBIE META-TRAITS

Zombies require a lot of advantages, perks, disadvantages, quirks, and features, which can render templates for them cluttered and complicated. Fortunately, zombiedom is rich with recurring archetypes, making it possible to use meta-traits (pp. B262-263) as a shorthand.

West's sole absorbing interest was a secret study of the phenomena of life and its cessation, leading toward the reanimation of the dead through injections of an excitant solution.

– H.P. Lovecraft,
"Herbert West –
Reanimator"

Body Meta-Traits

Living zombies, such as the infected, don't need and rarely have these meta-traits. Other kinds, particularly undead, *must* select one of the mutually exclusive packages below to describe their body's physical condition. These meta-traits address *only* that, and even then avoid being overly prescriptive. They omit numerous advantages and disadvantages that might seem "logical"; e.g., No Sense of Smell/Taste is absent, as lack of nose, tongue, and/or lungs doesn't appear to impede many zombies' ability to smell or taste brains, flesh, and other goodies. Modifiers to ST, DX, HT, HP, Basic Speed, and Basic Move are likewise left to individual templates, because such adjustments are often vital for distinguishing between subclasses of zombies with the same meta-trait.

Intact Corpse

40 points

You *almost* look alive. You have a brain, vital organs, etc., and all of your skin. You might just pass as human from a distance – though up close, your lack of vital signs is evident. This meta-trait suits zombies that turn at or shortly after death.

Advantages: Doesn't Breathe [20]; Doesn't Eat or Drink [10]; Doesn't Sleep [20]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Immunity to Metabolic Hazards [30]; Injury Tolerance (No Blood, Unliving) [25]; Temperature Tolerance 10 [10]; Unaging [15].

Disadvantages: Supernatural Features (No Body Heat, No Pulse, Pallor) [-20]; Fragile (Unnatural) [-50]; Unhealing (Total) [-30].

Features: Affected as Dead; No Fatigue; Sterile; Will Become a Rotting Corpse*.

* Note “Won’t Become a Rotting Corpse” on the template of the rare zombie that won’t ever decompose. Most corpses definitely *will* decay, though.

Mummified Corpse

40 points

You’re clearly dried-out and withered. To facilitate mummification, your juicy vital organs and brain were removed and preserved separately, made into sausage, or similar. This meta-trait characterizes the “zombies” encountered by pulp archaeologists.

Advantages: Doesn’t Breathe [20]; Doesn’t Eat or Drink [10]; Doesn’t Sleep [20]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Immunity to Metabolic Hazards [30]; Injury Tolerance (No Blood, No Brain, No Vitals, Unliving) [35]; Temperature Tolerance 10 [10]; Unaging [15].

Disadvantages: Appearance (Monstrous; Universal, +25%) [-25]; Fragile (Combustible) [-5]; Fragile (Unnatural) [-50]; Unhealing (Total) [-30].

Features: Affected as Dead; No Fatigue; Sterile.

Rotting Corpse

24 points

You have the “classic” zombie body type: rotting flesh hanging from dead bones.

Advantages: Doesn’t Breathe [20]; Doesn’t Eat or Drink [10]; Doesn’t Sleep [20]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Immunity to Metabolic Hazards [30]; Injury Tolerance (No Blood, Unliving) [25]; Temperature Tolerance 10 [10]; Unaging [15].

Disadvantages: Appearance (Monstrous; Universal, +25%) [-25]; Bad Smell [-10]; Fragile (Unnatural) [-50]; Unhealing (Total) [-30].

Quirks: Sexless [-1].

Features: Affected as Dead; No Fatigue; Will Become a Skeleton*.

* For a zombie that somehow stays rotting forever, never losing enough flesh to become a skeleton, note “Won’t Become a Skeleton” on the template.

Skeletal Corpse

13 points

You’re an assemblage of animated bones. In fantasy settings, you’re functionally the same thing as a “classic” zombie – you just look different. Even in backgrounds where skeletons technically aren’t zombies, this meta-trait matters because the Rotting Corpse meta-trait decays into it with time.

Advantages: Damage Resistance 2 (Partial, All but skull*, -5%) [10]; Doesn’t Breathe [20]; Doesn’t Eat or Drink [10]; Doesn’t Sleep [20]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Immunity to Metabolic Hazards [30]; Injury Tolerance (No Blood, No Brain, No Eyes, No Vitals, Unliving)

[40]; Temperature Tolerance 10 [10]; Unaging [15]; Vacuum Support [5].

Disadvantages: Appearance (Monstrous; Universal, +25%) [-25]; Fragile (Brittle) [-15]; Fragile (Unnatural) [-50]; Skinny [-5]; Unhealing (Total) [-30]; Vulnerability (Crushing x2) [-30].

Quirks: Cannot Float [-1]; Sexless [-1].

Features: Affected as Dead; No Fatigue.

* The skull still has DR 2, along with the rest of the body, *not* DR 4.

Solidified Spirit

59 points

You’re a being of ectoplasm or smokeless flame. Your current body *isn’t* the one you had in life – though you’re clearly dead, and look it – but one created (by the gods, your own hatred, or whatever) to let you terrorize the mortal world in material form. Unlike most spirits, you can’t become intangible to avoid harm.

Advantages: Doesn’t Breathe [20]; Doesn’t Eat or Drink [10]; Doesn’t Sleep [20]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Immunity to Metabolic Hazards [30]; Injury Tolerance (Homogenous, No Blood) [45]; Temperature Tolerance 10 [10]; Unaging [15]; Vacuum Support [5].

Disadvantages: Appearance (Monstrous; Universal, +25%) [-25]; Fragile (Unnatural) [-50]; Unhealing (Total) [-30].

Quirks: Sexless [-1].

Features: Affected as Dead*; No Fatigue.

* Some versions may be affected by Bind Spirit, Command Spirit, and Turn Spirit instead of Control Zombie, Turn Zombie, and Zombie Summoning.

Mentality Meta-Traits

Any zombie might have one or two of the following meta-traits to describe its *mental* condition. Not all zombies possess them, although most exhibit some of the constituent traits. Modifiers to IQ, Will, and Per are left to individual templates.

Automaton

-85 points

This meta-trait from p. B263 is repeated here for ease of reference when reading the templates in *Instant Zombies* (pp. 90-107). It reflects a zombie with no self-awareness or creativity. It often accompanies Cannot Learn and Reprogrammable, but some zombies can be trained in new skills, while others can’t be taught to obey a new master.

Automaton is mutually exclusive with Inhuman (p. 70).

Disadvantages: Hidebound [-5]; Incurious (6) [-10]; Low Empathy [-20]; No Sense of Humor [-10]; Slave Mentality [-40].

Inexorable

65 points

You cannot be diverted from your mission – be that serving a necromancer or eating brains – via any distraction, fear, or influence, natural or supernatural.

Once you have a goal in your sights, the only way to stop you is to interpose a barrier and wait for you to fall apart . . . or to destroy you.

Advantages: Immunity to Mind Control [30]; Indomitable [15]; Single-Minded [5]; Unfazeable [15].

Inhuman

-45 points

An Inhuman zombie is as savage as a wild animal and cannot grasp human emotions or motivations. It might *exhibit* emotions, however – often terrific rage. While this meta-trait shares several disadvantages with Automaton (p. 69), with which it's mutually exclusive, it lacks Incurious and Slave Mentality. A predator's curiosity and willful drive to feed are almost universal traits among Inhuman zombies.

Disadvantages: Bestial [-10]; Hidebound [-5]; Low Empathy [-20]; No Sense of Humor [-10].

Social Meta-Trait

All *undead* zombies have the following meta-trait.

Legally Dead

-45 points

You have no position whatsoever in society, and no property (although you may use equipment that was buried with you or provided by a reanimator). If seen walking around, you'll be viewed as an abomination.

Disadvantages: Social Stigma (Dead) [-20]; Wealth (Dead Broke) [-25].

Features: Taboo Traits (Social Position).

ZOMBIE-MAKER

All those traits can make it challenging to decide exactly what goes into a particular zombie. To help with this, here's a handy step-by-step guide – not so much a flowchart as a checklist to remind you of ideas worth considering. Throughout are boxes titled *The Zombie Mind*. These are set aside for two reasons: to avoid giving the impression that specific physical and mental traits are inextricably linked (they *can* be related, but this isn't required) and to isolate disadvantages that might be unsuitable for zombie PCs (if the GM allows them).

1. VITAL SIGNS

Start with the basics: Is the flesh from which the zombie is made living or dead? This says more about its traits than any other decision.

Living

Living zombies – be they human, orc, cat, or space alien – share most or all of their species' usual physical concerns. The means basic needs such as air, water, food, sleep, and warmth, and dangers such as pain, bleeding, disease, poison, sunstroke, and biting insects. Thus, there's no need for *Body Meta-Traits* (pp. 68-69).

Natural Living Being

This doesn't mean that there are no changes in overall mortality. Adding Unkillable 1 [50] gives an ordinary living creature a resilient zombie body – and Supernatural Durability [150] yields a *really* tough zombie. Curses, drugs, mutation, etc. might eliminate certain human weaknesses, granting abilities such as Doesn't Sleep [20], High Pain Threshold [10], Resistant to Metabolic Hazards (+3) or (+8) [10 or 15], and Temperature Tolerance [1/level]. The infected are customarily Terminally Ill [-50, -75, or -100], which doesn't preclude enjoying any of the previous advantages up to the moment of death. Classic signs of these changes are Disturbing Voice [-10] and cosmetic peculiarities (Unnatural Features [-1/level]).

Living Construct

Frankensteinian zombies stitched together from salvaged parts might be given genuine life by unnatural means. They may be indistinguishable from zombified people, but as their life was granted by a fallible wizard or scientist playing God, Fragile (Unnatural) [-50] is likely. On the other hand, they're even more likely to lack human weaknesses. They're also prone to strange surgical alterations, but those come later.

Dead

Most zombies – folkloric and fictional – are made from the dead. When discussing zombies, though, "dead" requires elaboration!

Undead Corpse

The "classic" zombie is a reanimated corpse. Almost all such creatures have one of the options under *Body Meta-Traits* (pp. 68-69): Rotting Corpse [24] is most widespread, but any of Intact Corpse [40], Mummified Corpse [40], or Skeletal Corpse [13] might fit, depending on the state of decay. These meta-traits could work as "racial" templates for zombies all on their own, although they would need some *mental* tweaks to qualify fully. If an undead zombie lacks many components of the meta-trait that would best describe it, it's simpler to add the appropriate individual elements than to select the meta-trait and then exclude large chunks of it.

When choosing a state of decay, also decide precisely what has withered away – and whether this actually affects the zombie's abilities. "Realistic" walking dead can't speak (Mute [-25]) and have No Sense of Smell/Taste [-5], because things like noses, lips, and tongues have rotted, and the dead can't draw breath (all four meta-traits include Doesn't Breathe). They're often Numb [-20], too, as their nerves no longer function. But tales of magic and mad science customarily gloss over such details; after all, eyes rot, yet few zombies seem to suffer Blindness [-50]. Similar judgment calls are needed for the 0-point features Will Become a Rotting Corpse and Will Become a Skeleton.

Solidified Spirit

Zombies in this category always have the Solidified Spirit [59] meta-trait. While there are many *metaphysical* distinctions between these and walking corpses, the most notable *physical* difference is that while they look undead, this is mostly for show; they usually lack the stench (no Bad Smell) and possess even fewer weaknesses (Homogenous vs. Unliving). They generally enjoy the same senses as the living, however rotten their bodies seem to be – indeed, for cursed souls, experiencing sensations is a key element of their torture, as they can smell but not eat, hear music but dread the sound, and so on.

Undead Construct

Stitched-together things made from dead parts but given *unlife* instead of life still use Intact Corpse [40], Mummified Corpse [40], Rotting Corpse [24], or Skeletal Corpse [13]. The important differences come in the various bits and pieces added later on.

2. BRAINS

What makes a person-turned-monster a *zombie* is the way its mind works. As explained in *Mindless, Not Brainless* (p. 6), there's a lot of latitude here. Zombies might be stupid, lack free will, or behave in a basely inhuman fashion despite whatever intelligence and will they possess. Many have multiple issues – often in several categories.

Intelligence

Most zombies are somewhat stupid – in a hurry, assign IQ-2 [-40] and move on – but this doesn't have to be the case. While IQ *bonuses* don't suit zombies at all, it's possible for a template to leave IQ alone, relying on other traits to enforce mindless behavior. Use the following guidelines to help assess the template's IQ modifier:

No Modifier: The zombie's options are limited only by its disadvantages. *Examples:* Solidified spirits, cursed individuals, fantasy undead, and “evil dead” who serve causes (divine will, hate, vengeance, etc.) instead of masters; serum-infused super-soldiers and predatory mutants that employ genuine tactics and planning; constructs with fully intact brains; and the best-preserved mummies.

IQ-1 [-20] or IQ-2 [-40]: The zombie resembles a not-very-smart person, but is still capable of basic tactics and reasoning, disadvantages permitting. *Examples:* Most zombies! This includes servitors, regardless of type, which must be able to figure things out but shouldn't be *too* smart; zombies driven by drugs, infection, infestation, radiation, etc. that alters but largely spares the brain; and

The Zombie Mind: Servitude

One or more of the traits addressed by *Programming and Precedence* (p. 63) – and discussed in detail under separate disadvantage headings – will dominate the personality of a deliberately created zombie servitor. Briefly:

- Duty [Varies] is usually 15 or less [-15], and suits zombies who've been subjected to “programming.” It's common among both brain-washed zombies created by drugs and serum-using super-soldiers. Devoted servants reanimated after death – by their loyalties or their master's machinations – may also have it. Most necromantic thralls have Reprogrammable and Slave Mentality *instead*.

- Reprogrammable [-10] is common among servitors. Omit it only if the original master *can't* assign control to others. Reprogrammable (Symbol of Authority) [-15] suits zombies created by artifacts, magical or technological.

- Slave Mentality [-40] is built into Automaton (p. 69), which is common to most kinds of servitors. When not using that meta-trait, add Slave Mentality to any zombie servant that lacks the will to “go off the reservation” (which is most of them). *Don't* add it to constructs that are prone to going haywire and turning on their master!

- Zombie Motivation (p. 59) [-1 to -15] as a result of *programming* implies powerful occult forces – the will of a god or a high-end sorcerer. In this role, it's clearly supernatural; thus, it rarely befits servitors enslaved by mere weird science.

As well, Addiction (Mind-Control Drug) [-40] is often *effectively* a mental trait that induces servitude. Zombie servitors created via drugs may well serve not out of true duty or programming, but because their master is the easiest or only source of a drug that has “You're my zombie!” as a side effect. This is likely to accompany one or more of the disadvantages above, though rarely Zombie Motivation.

constructs with slightly damaged brains, such as ones jolted into action via galvanism.

IQ-3 [-60] or IQ-4 [-80]: The zombie is stupid to a fault. If it's a servitor, it requires a master to think for it; if it isn't, it behaves like a mentally challenged individual or a three-year-old. *Examples:* The dumbest B-movie zombies; zombies motivated by drugs, infection, radiation, etc. that destroy large swaths of the brain; undead whose brains have rotted away naturally due to the lack of preservatives or magic; and constructs with brains badly damaged by surgery or botched tinkering.

IQ-5 [-100] to IQ-9 [-180]: The zombie is an animal in every respect but physical form, incapable of abstract thought and unable to recognize language or tools. *Examples:* Zombies created by chemicals, disease, electricity, radiation, etc. that completely burn out the brain; serum-injected super-soldiers and predatory mutants that have reverted to base instincts, exhibiting at most low cunning; and constructs with animal brains.

IQ-10 [-200]: The zombie is a vegetable, either reacting only reflexively or requiring possession by an animator. Add Taboo Trait (Fixed IQ) [0] to fix IQ at 0. *Examples:* Constructs without brains.

Matching Traits to Zombies

Zombie-Maker (pp. 70-89) exists specifically to assign traits to zombie types. However, the experienced zombie-master who knows which items overlap or are mutually exclusive may appreciate simple lists of suggestions by zombie archetype, as inspirations and reminders. Except where noted, *nothing* here is required; e.g., not every servitor has Automaton.

Meta-traits, which often overlap other traits, are in **boldface**.

Form

A zombie can belong to only *one* of these classes:

Construct: Increased ST and HT; Arm ST, Claws, DR, High Pain Threshold, Injury Tolerance (any), Lifting ST, Striking ST, Teeth; Bestial, Disturbing Voice, Epilepsy, Fragile (Unnatural), Maintenance, Self-Destruct, Short Lifespan, Social Stigma (Monster), Unhealing; Extra Effort Costs HT, No Fatigue.

Living: Extra Life (Reanimation), Supernatural Durability, Unkillable; Bestial, Disturbing Voice, Phobias, Unnatural Features; Glimpses of Clarity; Affected as Living.

Solidified Spirit (requires **Solidified Spirit**): Terror; Destiny, Frightens Animals, Hidebound, Social Stigma (Dead); Glimpses of Clarity; Affected as Dead, No Fatigue, Taboo Traits (Social Position); **Legally Dead**.

Undead (requires **Intact Corpse, Mummified Corpse, Rotting Corpse, or Skeletal Corpse**): Increased ST and HT; Injury Tolerance (any), Lifting ST (Grip ST); Swarm; Cannot Speak, No Sense of Smell/Taste, Social Stigma (Dead); Affected as Dead, Extra Effort Costs HT, Functions and Detects as Evil, No Fatigue, Taboo Traits (Social Position), Will Become a Rotting Corpse/Skeleton; **Legally Dead**.

Motivation

The zombifying influence is usually (but not always!) unique, and suggests further traits:

Black Magic: Unaffected by (Spell); Dependency (Mana), Vulnerability (anything connected to magic), Weakness (ditto); Functions and Detects as Evil.

Divine Displeasure: Dependency (Sanctity), Destiny, Zombie Motivation.

Galvanism: Dependency (Broadcast Power), Electrical, Maintenance, Vulnerability (Electricity), Weakness (Electromagnetic Fields).

Infection: Affliction (Airborne or Contact Disease, with Extra Life option; see p. 56), Dominance, Innate Attack (Plague Bite); Infectious Attack, Terminally Ill, Vulnerability (any bio-tech); Infectious.

Infestation: Dominance; Swarm; Infectious Attack, Vulnerability (any bio-tech); Infectious.

Mind-Altering Drugs: Doesn't Sleep, High Pain Threshold, Indomitable, Single-Minded, Unfazeable; Addiction (any), Cannot Learn, Confused, Epilepsy, Hidebound, Incurious, Low Empathy, No Sense of Humor; No Mental Skills; **Inhuman**.

Mutation: Add **Construct** advantages, Affliction (any), Innate Attack (any), and Social Stigma (Monster) to **Living** or **Undead** traits.

Radiation: Innate Attack (Background Radiation or The Glow), Radiation Tolerance; Lifebane.

Serums: Increased ST, HT, and Basic Move; Doesn't Sleep, High Pain Threshold, Resistant to Metabolic Hazards, Temperature Tolerance; Toxic; Dependency (Serum), Vulnerability (any bio-tech), Weakness (Antiserum).

Space Dust: As **Infection, Infestation, Radiation, or Toxic Waste**.

Toxic Waste: Affliction (Nauseating Cloud), Innate Attack (Acidic Vomit or Deadly Cloud); Toxic; Lifebane, Vulnerability (any bio-tech).

Unfinished Business: Increased Will; Doesn't Sleep, Immunity to Mind Control, Indomitable, Single-Minded, Supernatural Durability, Unfazeable, Unaging, Unkillable; Cannot Learn, Destiny, Hidebound, Incurious, Zombie Motivation; Functions and Detects as Evil; **Inexorable**.

Unhallowed Ground: Dependency (Sanctity), Destiny, Zombie Motivation; Functions and Detects as Evil.

Vengeance: Increased Will; Indomitable, Lifting ST (Grip ST), Single-Minded, Unfazeable; Destiny, Hidebound, Low Empathy, No Sense of Humor, Zombie Motivation; Functions and Detects as Evil; **Inexorable**.

Variable IQ

Certain zombies can reduce their IQ penalties. One way to accomplish this is through an emergent hive mind, as described in *Horde Intelligence* (pp. 49-50). This adds Mitigator, Horde, -60%, with the net effect of making IQ penalties worth -8 points/level.

Another possibility is brain-eating for improved intelligence, discussed in *Borrowed Brains* (p. 50). This introduces an offsetting IQ bonus with Trigger, Brains, -60%,

which costs 8 points/level and makes the real cost of the IQ penalty -12 points/level.

Zombies that *permanently* grow smarter as they eat brains should simply buy up IQ. Those that have fed well will be worth more points than ones that haven't. If they're PCs, requiring brain-eating to justify spending points on IQ is a 0-point feature – many GMs don't even let *human* PCs raise IQ with points!

Zombies that *permanently* grow dumber in short order should get full points for their endpoint IQ.

Matching Traits to Zombies: Adjectives

A zombie might have several other qualifiers, too:

B-Movie: Restricted Diet (Brains), Vulnerability (Headshots); Involuntary Utterance.

Diseased: Affliction (Airborne or Contact Disease, p. 56, or Nauseating Cloud), Innate Attack (Deadly Cloud or Plague Bite); Pestilent; Lifebane.

Evil: Terror; Desecrator; Bloodlust, Dread (anything holy), Frightens Animals, Intolerance (The Living), Lifebane, Vulnerability (anything holy), Weakness (ditto); Can Be Turned By True Faith; Functions and Detects as Evil.

Extra-Rotten (must be *Undead* with **Rotting Corpse**): Reduced ST, HT, and HP; Affliction (Nauseating Cloud), Innate Attack (Deadly Cloud); Pestilent; Fragile (Brittle or Explosive), Numb, Short Lifespan, Vulnerability (Physical Blows).

Fantasy: Affliction (Paralyzing Scratch), Claws, DR, Innate Attack (Acidic Vomit or Deadly Cloud), Teeth; Unaffected by (Spell); Fragile (Explosive), Social Stigma (Monster), Vulnerability (almost any), Weakness (ditto). Typically *Evil*, *Ghoulish*, and/or *Raging*.

Fast: Increased DX, Basic Speed, and Basic Move; Striking ST.

Ghoulish: Morph (Needs Sample), Reduced Consumption (Cast-Iron Stomach), Striking ST (Bite);

Pestilent; Bad Smell, Berserk (Vicious), Bestial, Dependency (Human Flesh), Odious Racial Habit (Eats Humans), Restricted Diet, Uncontrollable Appetite; **Inhuman**.

Horde: Mitigator on IQ penalty; Danger Sense (Twice Shy), Telecommunication.

Mummified (must be *Undead* with **Mummified Corpse**): DR; Vulnerability (Fire).

Raging: Increased ST, HT, and Basic Move; Indomitable, Striking ST, Unfazeable; Bad Temper, Berserk (Vicious); **Inhuman**.

Servitor: Addiction (Mind-Control Drug), Duty, Reprogrammable, Slave Mentality, Social Stigma (Valuable Property), Zombie Motivation; **Automaton**, **Inexorable**.

Skeletal (must be *Undead* with **Skeletal Corpse**): Reduced ST, increased DX and Basic Move; Claws; Fragile (Brittle).

Slow: Reduced DX, Basic Speed, and Basic Move.

Truly Mindless: Cannot Learn, Cannot Speak, Confused, Epilepsy, Hidebound, Incurious, Low Empathy, No Sense of Humor, Slave Mentality, Zombie Motivation; Involuntary Utterance, No Mental Skills; **Automaton**.

A few days at IQ 10 or even IQ 20 pale against an eternity at IQ 8 or even IQ 1! The GM may wish to phase in the zombie template gradually, adding 20 points of advantages per level of IQ lost, and then implementing anything that's left once the full IQ penalty is reached.

Will

A zombie's Will score typically equals its IQ, with a couple of exceptions:

Cursed Zombies: Zombies motivated by unfinished business, vengeance, etc. tend to be strong-willed – that explains how they became zombies! Templates for such zombies should have Will bonuses [5/level] that offset their IQ penalties; e.g., Will+2 [10] for an IQ-2 zombie. Some undead rise as a result of failing to resist reanimation with a (20 - Will) roll (see *Dead Bodies: Killed by Zombies*, pp. 125-126) or succeeding at a Will roll to return (see *Dead Bodies: Zombifying Forces*, p. 126). If a penalty to the first kind of roll or bonus to the second raises effective Will, consider adding a permanent bonus of this size; e.g., willfully denied funerary rites give Will+3 [15]. Multiple effects stack.

Smart Zombies: Zombies without IQ penalties sometimes lose their willpower and/or sanity (measured by Will) – this is their version of mindlessness. As the Slave Mentality disadvantage gives an effective -6 to Will, intelligent zombies who lack that problem but are nonetheless bereft of personal drive might have Will penalties [-5/level] as severe as Will-6 [-30].

Perception

A zombie's Per score usually equals its IQ, too. The main exceptions are constructs, ghouls, predatory mutants, and serum-infused super-soldiers who've either evolved or been designed to hunt prey. These should have Per bonuses [5/level] that offset their IQ penalties; e.g., an IQ-6 construct with a dog brain, created to track enemies, needs Per+6 [30]. The scariest such zombies have a *net* Per bonus!

Mindset

Zombies can have countless bizarre mental disadvantages – check out *The Zombie Mind* boxes for detailed discussions – but a few touch directly on their freedom to act. *Mentality Meta-Traits* (pp. 69-70) offers bundles covering several common themes:

- **Automaton** [-85] best suits the classic mindless zombie that exists to serve a wizard, mad scientist, or Vodou *bokor*. The zombie lacks interests and emotions, follows predictable patterns, and is unable to understand others' motivations – although if it has a master, then canny orders can generate a semblance of feeling or initiative. If it *doesn't* have a master, it had better have Doesn't Eat or Drink; otherwise, it will perish as its built-in Slave Mentality confronts it with an endless series of IQ-8 and Will-6 rolls to so much as eat.

- **Inexorable** [65] suits dedicated servants, too – many have this *and* Automaton – but it also fits cursed zombies that cannot be driven from missions of hate or vengeance, and just about any zombie with a mania.

Not all “mad,” disease- or drug-crazed zombies have this meta-trait, though. Most such creatures can be startled, bribed with food, and mind-controlled using psi or magic (in settings where such abilities exist). Save Inexorable for zombies that literally cannot be dissuaded by means short of destruction.

- **Inhuman [-45]** shares some traits with Automaton, yet in many ways is its opposite; it cannot occur with that meta-trait (Inexorable is fine). A zombie like this operates on base instincts, using any intelligence it has like an *animal* and showing no empathy for civilized people. Where an Automaton can obey orders, and stands around without

them, an Inhuman follows orders about as well as a wild leopard, and spends most of its time meeting whatever needs it has. This is common for ghouls and raging zombies of all sorts – from abusers of zombifying street drugs to the most feverish infected.

Zombies never *have* to have mentality meta-traits. Many show only aspects of these behaviors: Bestial [-10] if they're savage monsters instead of orderly plantation workers or guards; Reprogrammable [-10] if they're created specifically to obey a master, but not slavishly; or Slave Mentality [-40] instead of a Will penalty if they're grossly devoid of willpower. And a few retain as much of their free will as their template's IQ and Will modifiers permit.

The Zombie Mind: Scrambled Brains

While IQ and Will penalties, Automaton (p. 69), and Inhuman (p. 70) are all straightforward, reliable ways to inflict mindlessness on a zombie, more variety is possible. In particular, several disadvantages can help. To prevent accidental duplication, traits that are part of Automaton are marked †, while those included in Inhuman bear a ‡. As usual, * indicates a point value that varies with self-control roll; see *Zombies and Self-Control* (p. 60).

- **Limited cognition.** Regardless of IQ, many zombies are uninterested in new ideas (Incurious† [-5*]), unable to come up with them (Hidebound†‡ [-5]), and/or incapable of assimilating them (Cannot Learn [-30], typically with No Mental Skills [0]). Walking dead and solidified spirits, whose minds stopped at death and who live in the past, often have these difficulties. Drug- and disease-addled zombies are prime candidates as well. Confused [-10*] falls into the same boat, representing as it does a serious inability to adapt to new situations. While most common among living zombies with brains severely damaged by drugs, prions, radiation, and so on, *any* zombie that would rate Slave Mentality or Automaton might instead be merely Confused if it isn't so far gone that it can't think for itself.

- **Limited expression.** Zombies might *seem* mindless because they don't grasp complex social functions well enough to respond “intelligently.” Low Empathy†‡ [-20] produces a zombie that's as cold as a machine, and is the usual suspect; drugged-up and vengeful zombies often exhibit this disadvantage, even if they lack the rest of Automaton. Bestial‡ [-10] causes animalistic behavior that most humans regard as mindless, and is a traditional flaw of constructs with animal brains – though when it accompanies Berserk or Bloodlust, the savagery of the latter failings is of more immediate concern to civilized folk.

- **Restricted behavior.** Many a zombie is mindless mostly because it's bound to a course of action that pre-empts applying whatever wits it possesses to the situation at hand. This is often a Zombie Motivation [-1 to -15], and a particular ill of zombies who are cursed by gods, unhalloved ground, or their own oaths. If a zombie's freedom is restricted by someone else's will, however, see *The Zombie Mind: Servitude* (p. 71).

3. BRAWN

Some zombies are slow and pathetic, frightening mostly because they offer people a glimpse of their fate. Others . . . aren't. The emphasis in cinema and games has drifted away from the fear of becoming a zombie and toward the fear of zombies (see *Twofold Terror*, p. 7), one sign of which is zombies that are physically superior to their former selves: stronger, tougher, and perhaps even faster.

Strength

It would be fair to say that, *on average*, zombification doesn't change ST much. In a hurry, it's safe to skip assigning a ST modifier – or to use a flat ST-1 [-10] for zombies that aren't meant to be dangerous save for in hordes, and ST+1 [10] for those intended to be individually menacing. There are important exceptions in both directions, however. Some guidelines:

ST+5 [50] or more: The zombie is fiendishly strong!

While there's no hard upper limit, ST+10 [100] *doubles* the average human's ST and HP, which is consistent with a “flawless” transition from living to Unliving, and represents a sensible cap for non-constructs. Constructs built up to SM +1 – like mindless versions of Frankenstein's monster – get 10% off ST costs thanks to size and may have as much as ST+20 (Size, -10%) [180]. *Examples:* Zombies that are technically lesser undead of another type, such as minor vampires in thrall to their sire (ST+6 [60] suits vampires); constructs (human-sized flesh golems have at least ST+5 [50]); and super-soldiers zombified by gross mutation (nominally TL12 ones could justify up to ST+8 [80]).

ST+3 [30] or ST+4 [40]: The zombie's strength boost approaches the plausible constraints of a still-living body, like an average (ST 10, Will 10) human pushing the limits of extra effort – many zombies are already “redlined” and incapable of further extra effort. This is a fair maximum for *living* zombies. *Examples:* The most powerful zombies sent into a rage by disease or drugs (similar to rabies victims or MDPV abusers), the strongest “bulk rate” undead animated by curses or standard necromantic spells, and the most successful super-soldiers zombified by serums.

ST+1 [10] or ST+2 [20]: The zombie is somewhat stronger than its former self. Most zombies intended as monsters or servitors fall into this category. *Examples:* Typical zombies raging from disease or drugs, most undead animated by spells and curses, and super-soldiers zombified using serums that add muscle bulk about as effectively as TL7-8 anabolic steroids.

No Modifier: The zombie's capabilities are unchanged by zombification. *Examples:* Almost any zombie that *doesn't* qualify for a ST bonus would fit here, particularly living ones created by ordinary infection or infestation that doesn't precipitate a blind rage, and most ordinary drug-controlled zombies (like Vodou slaves, who may well be strong workers, but as a result of selection rather than transformation).

ST-1 [-10] or ST-2 [-20]: The zombie is somewhat weakened by zombification or its consequences. *Examples:* Skeletal undead relying on magic, not muscle, for strength; rotten undead that have lost significant mass; living zombies slightly sickened by disease, drugs, parasites, radiation, or toxic waste; and servitors which have been deliberately weakened to minimize the danger of keeping them around, but not so badly that they can't labor.

ST-3 [-30] or ST-4 [-40]: The zombie is seriously weakened by zombification or its consequences. *Examples:* Exaggeratedly rotten undead, living zombies ravaged by whatever noxious influence created them, and child-sized constructs.

ST-5 [-50] or worse: The zombie is barely animate. *Examples:* Few come to mind, but zombies sickened to the verge of collapse – like an ordinary person with almost no FP left (p. B426) – would have half ST, which for average humans translates to ST-5.

Strength in Numbers: One *dramatic* concern is as important as form and motivation when setting a zombie template's ST modifier: "How many zombies will each PC face?" Once you have an answer, adjusting ST to match is a matter of becoming familiar with *Multiple Close Combat* (p. B392), as zombie action tends to be up-close and personal. For a lone, super-powerful zombie intended to challenge a whole group of PCs in a semi-realistic campaign, understand that an athletic hero (ST 11-13) with a couple of ordinary helpers (ST 10) could dogpile a ST 15-17 foe, so a modifier of least ST+8 is advisable. On the other hand, for a *horde* of zombies that attack two or three to a victim, adjust ST downward enough that the zombie squad has the desired ST; e.g., if two zombies can grapple about as well as an ordinary man, make the modifier ST-1, as two ST 9 zombies function as ST 10 for grappling. To emulate video games in which zombie-hunters can push aside four or five zombies, set the modifier as low as ST-4.

Specialized Strength

Not all zombies are uniformly strong! Several special cases appear in zombie lore:

Arm ST [3 or 5/level]: This primarily suits constructs given an outsized arm or pair of arms. Look up the SM of the donor and the zombie on the *Size Modifier Table* (p. B19), find "Longest Dimension" in yards in each case, take the difference, and multiply by 5 to set a plausible

upper limit on Arm ST. For instance, arms from an SM +1 gorilla (3 yards) attached to an SM 0 zombie (2 yards) could easily justify up to Arm ST 5. Where the graft is thanks to mad science or magic, this is just a vague guideline. In a quasi-realistic setting, huge arms may rip right off, so Arm ST plus overall ST bonus shouldn't exceed the limits suggested for overall ST bonus. Such arms should also have matching reach; Long Arms costs 10 points *per arm* per +1 to SM and +1 per die to swing damage (see p. B53).

Lifting ST [3/level]: Constructs can be built to have unmodified Lifting ST. The iron grip of the dead and the hateful is a classic horror bit, so Lifting ST (Grip ST, -30%), for a nominal 2.1 points/level, suits undead and vengeance-driven zombies. In either case, a fair limit, if one is desired, is levels of Lifting ST equal to the overall ST bonus recommended for that zombie type; e.g., a powerful cursed zombie that could justify up to ST+4 might get Lifting ST 4 instead *or as well*. Remember that Lifting ST aids grappling, so take *total* ST (overall, Arm, and Lifting) into account when setting dramatic limits.

Striking ST [5/level]: Constructs often have Striking ST, as do fast or raging zombies that hit hard thanks to great speed rather than overall power. Again, levels equal to the overall ST bonus recommended for that kind of zombie is a fair limit. Ghouls are a special case. They're prime candidates for Striking ST (One Attack Only, Bite, -60%) [2/level], and the level is best set by starting with average ST prior to zombification (10 for humans), adding any overall ST bonus, and then stacking on enough Striking ST to get to at least ST 15, where biting damage (thrust-1, or 1d) can reliably pierce bone (DR 2). For instance, ghouls that have ST+1 would get Striking ST 4 (One Attack Only, Bite, -60%) [8].

ST without HP [8/level]: Skeletal and extra-rotten undead occasionally have greater power (from hatred, divine will, magic, or similar) than their mass would suggest. For these, ignore the recommended ST-1 or ST-2 for form and go with a ST bonus that suits motivation; e.g., a typical necromantic slave might get ST+1. Instead of giving the template an overall ST bonus, though, buy ST+1 [10] with HP-1 [-2] – or Lifting ST 1 [3] with Striking ST 1 [5], if you prefer – for each +1 to ST. Either way, this costs 8 points/level, each level giving +1 to ST without the mass-related ability to absorb damage and make slams that this normally implies.

Dexterity

Zombie templates generally don't require DX modifiers, but there are a few notable exceptions:

DX+3 [60] or DX+4 [80]: The recent crop of agile, vicious "fast zombies" in film and video games – whether those creatures are the fruits of experimentation to engineer warriors (almost invariably involving mutation or serums) or people infected with something that drives them into a frenzy – exhibit the agility of predatory beasts. Pick DX+3, like a tiger, for lone hunters that spring, climb, and pounce (*Left 4 Dead* fans will be all too familiar with this). Save DX+4 for one-off monsters meant to challenge karate champs (shades of *Silent Rage*) or whole groups of heroes.

DX+1 [20] or DX+2 [40]: Skeletal zombies might receive +1 or +2 to DX as a nod to having no pesky flesh in the way. Fast zombies that hunt in hordes and/or behave like bestial humans might also have DX+2, like wolves or chimps. Makers of constructs, reanimators of corpses, and other zombie-masters may be able to tweak the processes that yield average-DX zombies to swing such a bonus for their unnatural armies.

No Modifier: Unmodified DX suits any zombie type not called out for a bonus (above) or a penalty (below).

DX-1 [-20]: This befits the classic, shambling “slow zombies” of B movies – whatever reanimates them – as well as Vodou slaves with their minds clouded by drugs.

DX-2 [-40] or worse: DX-2 is consistent with drunkenness, hallucinations, or being half asleep; DX-3 [-60], with total euphoria (see pp. B428-429). Zombies created by drugs *might* have such severe penalties, but then they’re unlikely to be credible threats or effective laborers. It’s often better to use Klutz [-5] – even Total Klutz [-15] – to represent such things.

A Thousand Grasping Hands: Like ST bonuses, DX bonuses may need to be lower for zombies that strike in hordes. No one trait influences combat as much as DX – and a big bonus will give the zombies excellent odds of grabbing or biting PCs, especially in mobs. This isn’t a good idea for “fodder” monsters that appear by the thousands in an apocalypse. It’s a particularly serious concern if the zombie condition is contagious and a sustainable long-term campaign is desired; in that case, it may be best to go with DX-1 or even DX-2 for the standard zombie.

Toughness

Zombies are often remarkably tough – although when they aren’t, they’re liable to be downright *rotten*. There are many aspects to this, which fall into a few basic categories.

Health

Living zombies mostly retain whatever HT they had before being turned, though there are many special cases worth noting. For Unliving and Homogenous zombies, HT means what it does for artifacts, and rates structural integrity rather than vitality.

- *Raging zombies.* Savage zombies that shrug off injuries often have Berserk, and rely on the +4 this gives to HT rolls to stay in the fight. For those that lack this disadvantage, a bonus of up to HT+4 [40] may be warranted – but this means the zombie will take forever to go down. Like ST and DX, then, HT is best kept modest for “fodder” that attack in hordes. Alternatively, give the zombie Fragile (Unnatural) [-50], which will drop it at -HP, and balance this with up to HT+5 [50].

- *Sick living zombies.* Zombies created by drugs, radiation, toxic chemicals, and so on are sometimes realistically sickly, giving modifiers ranging from HT-1 [-10] (a bit pale) down to HT-5 [-50] (ravaged by radiation; see p. B436).

- *Weird-science zombies.* Zombies deliberately created as super-soldiers often have a small edge in physical vigor (at the cost of free will and *mental* health), and enjoy HT+1 [10] or HT+2 [20].

- *Zombies with Injury Tolerance (Homogenous).* Both solidified spirits and constructs in the “flesh golem” mode are essentially Homogenous artifacts, and should have HT to match. As *Damage to Objects* (p. B483) explains, this is HT 12 on average, but could be anything from HT 9 for temperamental examples to HT 14 for rugged ones. Homogenous constructs can thus justify from HT-1 [-10] to HT+4 [40]. Solidified spirits rarely vary; HT+2 [20] suits them best.

- *Zombies with Injury Tolerance (Unliving).* Just about all undead – and constructs with something like organs inside – are Unliving. Again, treat such things as artifacts. The HT range here is 7 (“poorly maintained”) to 12 (“rugged”). Use HT-1 [-10], HT-2 [-20], or HT-3 [-30] for mushy, rotten zombies that disintegrate easily – but give well-preserved examples, or those created as warriors, HT+1 [10] or HT+2 [20].

Hit Points

In a hurry, leave HP equal to ST. However, this isn’t the best fit for all zombies. A zombie might draw physical power (ST) from a force like hatred, rage, galvanism, or magic – or suffer weakness due to drugs or sickness – and such things rarely influence material bulk enough to change HP. (They unquestionably affect *survival*, but that’s a HT modifier.)

If fine detail is desired, then for *any* kind of zombie, start with a HP modifier that negates its ST modifier, at the usual ± 2 points per ± 1 HP; e.g., a zombie with ST+8 gets HP-8 [-16]. Then adjust as follows:

- *Living zombies.* Zombies without Injury Tolerance (Unliving) or (Homogenous) – the infected, face-eating drug abusers, and so on – don’t need further adjustment unless they have ST modifiers explained by bulking up (as with many serum-infused zombies) or emaciation (as for wasted Vodou slaves). In those cases, simply leave HP at ST; that is, forget about the HP modifier.

- *Unliving zombies.* Zombies with Injury Tolerance (Unliving) – including just about all undead ones – can theoretically possess up to twice the HP of living beings of similar mass. For typical humans who had 10 HP in life, this means up to 20 HP and a bonus of up to HP+10 [20]; for SM +1 constructs the size of living things that would have 15 HP, this means up to 30 HP and a bonus of up to HP+20 (Size, -10%) [36]. However, the full bonus only suits well-engineered constructs; undead in states of decay get less. *Halve* the bonus for intact, mummified, or (somewhat) rotten corpses, and *ignore* it for skeletons or extra-rotten corpses. Add the result to any adjustment for ST; e.g., a mostly intact undead zombie might get HP+5, but if it has ST+4, it needs only a net HP+1 [2] to attain this.

- *Homogenous zombies.* Zombies with Injury Tolerance (Homogenous) can have up to *four times* the HP of living beings of comparable mass. That means up to 40 HP and a bonus of up to HP+30 [60] at SM 0, and up to 60 HP and a bonus of up to HP+50 (Size, -10%) [90] at SM +1. This is fine for golem-like constructs of solid flesh or bone; just remember to adjust for ST, too (thus, an SM +1 zombified construct with ST+20 would have HP+30). Dramatic necessity overrides this rule for solidified spirits, though – they might be Homogenous, but they aren’t made from any kind of ordinary matter. Treat them like living zombies.

Advantages and Disadvantages Affecting Toughness

A bewildering variety of traits can influence how hard it is to put down a zombie with conventional damage (for unconventional stuff, see *Fatal Flaws*, pp. 80-85), and there's often interplay with HT or HP, so comments are in order. The relevant entries in *Zombie Traits* (pp. 49-70) are also worth a look – and for *undead* zombies, review *Body Meta-Traits* (pp. 68-69) for advantages and disadvantages from this list.

Damage Resistance: This doesn't suit living zombies. For skeletal ones built without the Skeletal Corpse meta-trait, add DR 2 [10] for bone. Undead often gain DR through preservation; use DR 1 (Tough Skin, -40%) [3] for a quasi-realistic zombie, or DR 1 to 5 [5/level] for fantasy monsters with force fields similar to Fortify enchantments (p. B480). Constructs may be armored up to whatever DR their TL supports.

Extra Life: Living zombies that return as walking dead once killed have Extra Life (Reanimation, -20%) [20]; this is most often a consequence of infection, but Vodou zombies work this way in some interpretations. Such creatures require *two* templates – one living and one undead. If the undead form rises instantly, the heroes will have to defeat the zombie twice. This magnifies the effect of HT and HP bonuses, Injury Tolerance, Supernatural Durability, and/or Unkillable!

Fragile: Most constructs, solidified spirits, and undead have Fragile (Unnatural) [-50] (already built into the body meta-traits). With this, the GM can give sizeable HT bonuses to minor zombies and those that attack in huge hordes, as destruction at -HP ensures no lingering down to -5×HP. Between 0 HP and -HP, such zombies technically run the risk of unconsciousness – but this is meaningless for undead, and the GM may rule that failed HT rolls here are terminal. Most other forms of Fragile are found on body meta-traits and are self-explanatory, but feel free to add Fragile (Brittle) [-15] to extra-rotten undead who wouldn't otherwise have it. The most meaningful effect of Fragile (Brittle) is that crippled limbs *come off*, which is great fun alongside Injury Tolerance (Independent Body Parts) [35].

Hard to Kill [2/level]: This is for *living* zombies, obviously! It often suits them well – especially drug-addled ones who continue to maul their victims after being shot multiple times, and infected who just keep coming like rabid dogs. It will drag out fights, though, and is probably excessive for zombies in hordes.

Hard to Subdue [2/level]: On undead zombies with Fragile (Unnatural) or Unkillable, this is a good way to avoid hard-to-explain unconsciousness, if the notes given here for those traits don't fit the GM's vision of what's going on. For living zombies, it's appropriate in all the same situations as Hard to Kill.

High Pain Threshold [10]: This is universal on undead body meta-traits, and should be added to walking dead

built without these. Any other kind of zombie *might* have it – especially a construct, a drug-crazed living zombie, or a mindless super-soldier.

Injury Tolerance: Unliving [20] suits all walking corpses, while Homogenous [40] fits solidified spirits; these appear on the relevant body meta-traits. A construct might have either, if it isn't actually alive. These advantages *greatly* improve the odds of survival by reducing injury; see *Wounding Modifiers and Zombies* (p. 110). They amplify the value of HP bonuses and Unkillable. The other forms of Injury Tolerance on body meta-traits are self-explanatory, and may show up on constructs designed without certain weaknesses. Rarely, a living zombie might end up with such a trait; e.g., one whose brain has turned to fungus might be “alive” but have No Brain [5].

Fatigue Points

Solidified spirits and corporeal undead – including constructs that are undead rather than living – should be given No Fatigue (pp. 67-68), obey the special rules for that feature, and record their FP score as “N/A.” This obviates the question of a FP modifier. Under *Sustenance* (pp. 78-80) and *Fatal Flaws* (pp. 80-85), only traits that cost HP or HT are allowed; those that drain FP are off-limits.

Most other zombies, including all living ones, have an FP score. It's generally best to leave this equal to HT. However, beings zombified specifically to do hard labor – like mutant warriors and Vodou slaves – might operate at peak efficiency and have an FP bonus of up to 30% of their template's average HT (10 plus any HT modifier), at 3 points per +1. For example, a template for otherwise rundown zombified human slaves with HT-2 and average HT 8 could have up to FP+2 [6].

A template for living zombies might also have an FP *penalty*, at -3 points per -1. This mostly suits horribly diseased and parasitized zombies, but may also be dramatically appropriate for ones with large ST and/or Basic Move bonuses who trade endurance for peak power. Since zombies only rarely require FP, limiting the size of this modifier to 30% of HT is fairest (e.g., FP-2 [-6] for the zombified human in the example above).

Radiation Tolerance [5/step]: Zombies created by radioactivity almost always have this advantage. Most others don't.

Supernatural Durability [150]: This offers little to zombies with Fragile (Unnatural), as they'll never benefit from it. However, cursed undead, especially ones with unfinished business, routinely lack Fragile (Unnatural) – they can't escape their doom so easily! And some living zombies created by mad science possess “cellular regeneration” or something similar that works more like Supernatural Durability than Regeneration. Remember that this gift means the zombie cannot be “knocked out”; moreover, it can't be destroyed except via overwhelming force (10×HP in one attack), against which HP are valuable, or a vulnerability, which still permits HT rolls. Be sure to select HP and HT modifiers with this in mind. If the zombies can be destroyed by, say, fire but have HT+5 and piles of HP, destroying them will take a *lot* of fire.

Unkillable 1 [50]: This suits the same sorts of zombies as Supernatural Durability; it makes little sense to have both advantages. Unkillable is the less extreme of the two, in that there's a finite limit after which destruction is ensured (-10xHP). Injury Tolerance and/or lots of HP can mean it takes a long time to get there, though – and a zombie with both will take forever to go down. Thus, this isn't a good capability to give to hordes of zombies unless overwhelming the PCs is the objective. Unlike Supernatural Durability, Unkillable allows unconsciousness, which is fine for living zombies but requires reinterpretation for the undead; for them, treat injury-induced unconsciousness as temporary death (no vital signs!) from which they'll soon return.

Speed

Everybody knows that zombies are slow, right? Certainly, the ones in early B movies were, but there are lots of *other* archetypes out there – notably the fast-moving infected of recent fiction.

Basic Speed

Assuming that the zombie started out as an ordinary human with DX 10 and HT 10, apply the template's DX and HT modifiers, and use the resulting DX and HT to calculate Basic Speed: (DX+HT)/4. This gives the *average* score for such zombies. For instance, if a cohort of predatory zombie super-soldiers has a template with DX+2 and HT+2, then Basic Speed averages 6.00.

Then consider the following:

- *Fast zombies.* Zombies meant to be feared as monsters in their own right are often *fast*, exhibiting reflexes normally associated with predators. This is most common for scary mutants and constructs, tweaked-up drug-users and super-soldiers, and intelligent-but-bestial zombies. However, some infected also show signs of this (though if they're pushing running speed to the limit like they push strength, improve Basic Move instead), and fantasy RPG undead designed to challenge high-powered PCs may have astounding reflexes purely for meta-game reasons. In such cases, if average Basic Speed isn't at least 6.00, assign the template a Basic Speed bonus that raises it to this level, for 5 points per +0.25. That will give literally catlike reflexes, but for zombies that can get the jump on ninjas and quick-draw artists, choose a bonus that gives Basic Speed 7.00.

- *Slow zombies.* Traditional zombies – from Vodou slaves to walking dead in classic horror movies – are dull and physically sluggish. They don't just walk slowly; they *react* slowly. For these, if Basic Speed is above 4.00, assess a Basic Speed penalty that lowers it to this level, at -5 points per -0.25. It isn't necessary to go any lower to make this point, except for zombies that don't duck blows not because they're Berserk and always on the offensive, but because they're in a constant daze. In that case, Basic Speed can go as low as 0.00, which gives Dodge 3 and only as much Basic Move as is bought up from that starting point.

- *Other zombies.* This leaves lots of zombies in the middle. In most cases, just ignore Basic Speed modifiers. However, if the zombies are supposed to be the equals of ordinary humans in this regard, add a modifier (± 5 points

per ± 0.25) that brings average Basic Speed to 5.00. This is often necessary for high-HT zombies that are meant to be tough but not especially quick, and for low-HT infected who carry on feverishly despite their sickness.

Basic Move

Average Basic Move for the zombie will equal the average Basic Speed determined in the previous step. This is typically fine as is – leave it alone and keep reading – but a few special cases merit discussion:

- *Fast zombies.* Rabid infected, drug-crazed lunatics, mindless soldiers doped up on serums, and other living zombies – just about any zombie that would merit Berserk, or qualify for a ST bonus or Striking ST due to pushing its body's limits – ought to have an average Basic Move of 6 or more. The same goes for skeletons unencumbered by flesh, if their animating force grants them near-human ST. If the average is below 6, raise it to at least this level by adding a bonus, at 5 points per +1. There's no hard upper limit, but gamers who insist on "realistic" zombies that stay within human limits should note that the world record for sprinting (p. B354) is consistent with Move 9.5; thus, they might want to stop at a bonus that results in an average Basic Move of 10 (like a lion or a tiger!).

- *Slow zombies.* For traditional slow zombies – and many not-so-traditional undead in fantasy – low movement speed is *de rigueur*. Give these an average Basic Move of 4 or less. If the average is higher than 4, reduce it to at least this level with a penalty, at -5 points per -1. An average Basic Move of 2 restricts the zombie to human walking speed, while Basic Move 1 means a slow shuffle. However, slow zombies with an exaggeratedly low average Basic Speed (lower than 4.00) might actually require a Basic Move *bonus* to be credible threats; a shambler with Basic Speed 0.00 that always acts last in combat and never ducks a blow might still be able to lunge at Move 3 or 4, and have Basic Move+3 [15] or +4 [20].

- *Horror-movie zombies.* The monsters in traditional zombie flicks – usually undead, often flesh-eating ghouls – sometimes exhibit a strange mixture of traits. On one hand, they react sluggishly (low Basic Speed), and seem to shamble slowly *in long shots*. Yet through camera tricks, editing, or dramatic fiat, they nevertheless manage to outrun or corner the protagonists (especially young women). In game terms, this is the low Basic Speed of a slow zombie coupled with a Basic Move bonus that improves average Move above the human norm of 5. The GM may stick special modifiers on the bonus, such as "Accessibility, Only if nobody is watching, -40%," but this is probably an unnecessary complication; the *players* might be aware that the zombies have high Move, but the *PCs* aren't likely to be standing around with police radar guns when the zombies come.

4. SUSTENANCE

Most zombies keep going either by eating something – traditionally something nasty, which they crave (see *The Zombie Mind: Appetites*, p. 79) – or by drawing on some kind of energy source, be that mana or batteries. Deliberate creations often require some sort of upkeep by their creator.

Zombie perpetual-motion machines that can labor or menace people indefinitely without any discernible power supply or maintenance are rare in the source fiction (and lend themselves to creative abuses at the hands of cunning zombie-master PCs).

In all cases, a sustenance requirement that costs FP if missed is incompatible with the No Fatigue feature (pp. 67-68). Pick one or the other!

Basic Needs

Most *undead* – be they walking corpses, solidified spirits, or reanimated constructs – have Doesn't Breathe [20], Doesn't Eat or Drink [10], and Doesn't Sleep [20]. All three appear on the body meta-traits (pp. 68-69) for undead, and should be added to undead built without these. The exception is undead that *must* eat flesh, brains, etc. (as distinct from ones that like to do it but don't have to), which obviously don't qualify for Doesn't Eat or Drink. Templates for ghouls should omit that advantage; those with a meta-trait that includes it should take "No Doesn't Eat or Drink [-10]" as a disadvantage.

Most *living* zombies have none of these traits – they must eat, drink, breathe, and sleep. However, crazies tweaked up on drugs or potent super-soldier serums, or people reduced to zombie-like behavior by pure hate or vengeance, might rate Doesn't Sleep. Living ghouls that can subsist equally well on regular food *and* on brains, meat with extra maggots, and abattoir runoff enjoy (if that's the word for it) Reduced Consumption 4 (Cast-Iron Stomach, -50%) [4]. And unusual living zombies might receive Doesn't Eat or Drink, Doesn't Sleep, and/or Doesn't Breathe in trade for Dependency on an energy source; see *Energies* (below).

Brains!

Especially in the movies, zombies often consume brains, guts, blood, or entire people. How this works once again depends on whether the ghoul is alive:

- *Undead* ghouls of all kinds omit Doesn't Eat or Drink (see *Basic Needs*, above) and take either Dependency (Human Flesh; Common; Illegal; Daily) [-45] or (Hourly) [-60], depending on how ravenous they are. This means that "starvation" costs HP, not FP. If they need extra time to get at their favorite bits, add Slow Eater [-10].

- *Living* specimens that can *only* eat grisly kill have Restricted Diet (Human Flesh) [-20] or Restricted Diet (Specific Organ) [-30]. If they must dissect their prey, the extra disadvantage value for this comes from the more severe form of Restricted Diet rather than Slow Eater. Such zombies never merit Reduced Consumption.

In some fiction, brain-eating raises IQ; see *Borrowed Brains* (p. 50) and *Variable IQ* (pp. 72-73).

Energies

Many zombies that *seem* to run on nothing actually depend on an energy source other than food.

The Zombie Mind: Appetites

Zombies frequently possess physical or supernatural needs; see *Sustenance* (pp. 78-80). While the requirement itself might take the form of Dependency, a weird kind of Maintenance, Restricted Diet, or even the passive "leeching" of Lifebane, zombies with such problems are often driven to trademark behavior. And not all appetites are tied up with consuming! Some forms of contagion – diseases and curses alike – spread because they implant an overwhelming urge to attack and infect others.

Whatever the case, the zombie might end up with Bad Temper [-10*], which is typical of mad biters, particularly the cursed and infected; Bloodlust [-10*], which is rampant among evil dead motivated by hate; or Uncontrollable Appetite [-15*], which is widespread among all kinds of ghouls, and which can occur even if the drive to consume isn't tied to a *need* to consume (as befits some zombies sent as a curse on humanity). Any such zombie could exhibit Berserk (Vicious) [-10*] and/or Bestial [-10] instead or as well – although these foibles best suit ghoulish predators, or constructs given predators' brains. Don't forget Odious Racial Habit (Eats Humans) [-15] or Social Stigma (Monster) [-15] in such cases.

The previous traits *aren't* appetites but consequences of them. However, a nominally mental disadvantage, Addiction [Varies], is sometimes an appetite in itself. Common among abusers of zombie-fying street drugs and living victims of evil zombie-masters, it's explains *why* such people are zombies. In the case of psychological dependency, it can lead to endless additional mental difficulties.

Finally, note that while Involuntary Utterance [-1] isn't necessary, it's common for B-movie zombies to match craving with raving. Braaaains!

External Energies

A power source external to the zombie is a form of Dependency (pp. 59-60). This kind of thing best suits undead, solidified spirits, and constructs. However, the template for a living zombie might incorporate such a Dependency and balance its point value with Doesn't Breathe, Doesn't Eat or Drink, and/or Doesn't Sleep; in effect, some of the zombie's ordinary mortal needs are met through extraordinary means.

Some common examples of external power sources:

- *Divine displeasure, theurgy, or a curse on unhallowed ground.* Gives Dependency (Sanctity; Common; Constantly) [-50] if the zombie can roam the world, or Dependency (Sanctity; Rare; Constantly) [-150] if the zombie depends on one specific bit of ground, such as a particular graveyard.

- *Fantasy necromancy or similar magic.* Just about always gives Dependency (Mana; Very Common; Constantly) [-25]. If magic is genuinely rare, however – or the *kind* of magic is important, in a world with several distinct sorts – the GM may use Dependency (Mana; Common; Constantly) [-50].

- *Weird-science radiation.* Ranges from Dependency (Energy Field; Very Common; Constantly) [-25] for a pervasive source such as “universal cosmic life force,” through Dependency (Energy Field; Common; Constantly) [-50] for a more local one such as “the global Tesla grid,” to Dependency (Energy Field; Occasional; Constantly) [-100] for an extremely restrictive one like “Dr. Tödlich’s Patented Emanator.”

Internal Energies

Other zombies – nearly always weird-science constructs – might run on electric batteries or even have coal-fueled boilers! This calls for a collection of traits that vary with the energy source involved:

- Such a creature has a fuel or power-cell requirement that’s functionally equivalent to the need for food and water. Thus, it *doesn’t* qualify for Doesn’t Eat or Drink. For a living zombie or an undead one built without a body meta-trait, don’t select that advantage. For an undead one that uses a body meta-trait which includes it, add “No Doesn’t Eat or Drink [-10]” as a disadvantage.

- Endurance follows the assumptions given for the Machine meta-trait (p. B263): The zombie has an eight-hour energy reserve and needs refueling three times a day. Adjust these figures using Reduced Consumption [2/level] (p. B80) or Increased Consumption [-10/level] (p. B139).

- If the energy source is air-breathing, like a coal- or gasoline-burning engine, then the zombie won’t have Doesn’t Breathe. For a living zombie, or an undead one built without a body meta-trait, don’t add that advantage. For an undead one that uses a body meta-trait that already includes it, take “No Doesn’t Breathe [-20]” as a disadvantage.

- If the energy source isn’t ubiquitous, consult *Restricted Diet* (p. B151) and select the value that best matches the needed resource; e.g., Restricted Diet (Coal; Common) [-20] or Restricted Diet (Batteries; Very Common) [-10].

- If the energy source is electrical, add Electrical [-20]. If it’s a volatile fuel, select Fragile (Flammable) [-10].

- Living or dead, such zombies almost always have No Fatigue [0]. At the GM’s option, they can accompany this with Extra Effort Costs HT [0].

Upkeep

Deliberately created zombies often need regular attention from their masters to stay in operating condition. The disadvantage(s) that such upkeep entails can either replace or accompany traits that represent food or another energy source, depending on whether the process “recharges” the zombie or merely keeps it in good repair. There are two broad classes of needs, and a given zombie *can* have both:

- *Items.* A weird preparation, be it alchemical or the work of mad science, is the most usual item needed. This is Dependency (Serum; Rare; Monthly) [-30], (Weekly) [-60], or (Daily) [-90] – or Dependency (Serum; Rare; Illegal; Monthly) [-35], (Weekly) [-70], or (Daily) [-105], if unpleasant enough to cause major social inconvenience. Use the same values for spells that must be renewed. Such requirements are commonest among constructs and undead, but

living zombies resulting from chemicals, galvanism, infection, mutation, radiation, etc. might need stabilizing treatments to avoid falling apart.

- *Processes.* Hands-on care is mostly the realm of constructs – especially mad-science ones animated through galvanism or *Internal Energies* (above) – and of undead that need periodic re-embalming. Maintenance (1 person; Monthly) [-2] or (Weekly) [-5] should do in most cases, but anything is possible, up to and including supernatural zombies that require the constant chanting of cultists. In cases like these, calculate disadvantage value using the number of caregivers *per zombie*; for less than one person per zombie, multiply the point value for one caregiver by the ratio and drop fractional points. For example, 100 priests who must pray to keep 13 mummies walking would give Maintenance (6-10 people; Constant) [-200], while 13 cultists whose chants sustain 100 zombie guards would result in Maintenance (0.13 person; Constant) [-6].

Borrowed Time

If *no* requirements apply – if the zombie requires no food, water, air, energy source, or upkeep – then the monster presumably contains whatever “spark” it needs to operate. This can still lead to disadvantages! A zombie that’s running on reserves and grinding itself down should have some of the problems discussed under *Decay* (below), while one driven by a curse or a strong emotion will be subject to *Fulfilling the Mission* (pp. 81-82).

5. FATAL FLAWS

There’s no requirement that zombies possess problems that can lead to their demise – that is, beyond drawing fire from monster-hunters and possibly running out of whatever they need to keep walking. However, many fictional examples are susceptible to things that affect ordinary people less seriously, if at all. Such flaws often bypass the advantageous traits noted under *Toughness* (pp. 76-78), and represent ways for zombie-killers to prevail in combat; thus, they’re useful additions to templates for zombies that PCs will meet in vast hordes. Lone zombies, on the other hand, may well have *no* such failings!

The axiom that a “disadvantage” that doesn’t limit the character isn’t a disadvantage (p. B165) applies here. If it’s impossible for anybody in the setting to learn the zombie’s mission, then a related Destiny isn’t worth points. In a world where electromagnetism and magic aren’t understood, Weakness (EM Fields) and Vulnerability (Magic) aren’t valid zombie flaws. And so on.

Decay

The most obvious problem that zombies face is straightforward falling apart. Undead tend to rot, while living zombies run their bodies into the ground or eventually die of whatever zombified them. Constructs may suffer from any or all of these difficulties, as well as shoddy craftsmanship. And zombies of all kinds often cannot heal, hastening their decay. These flaws can add several disadvantages to a zombie template:

The Zombie Mind: Fears of the Fearsome

While many horror monsters have a laundry list of items that send them running for the hills, this is rare for zombies. There are exceptions, though:

- *Non-supernatural* zombies occasionally wind up afraid of something as a result of damage to the brain – not unlike how rabies victims grow agitated when presented with drinking water. Sunlight is most common; see *Phobias* (pp. 62-63) for further suggestions. This suits disease victims best, though psychoactive drugs and weird brain surgery might also induce fears.

- *Supernatural* zombies often suffer from Can Be Turned By True Faith [-1] if they're remotely unholy – and in some settings, even if they're entirely neutral. A few dread standard religious symbols or "purifying" forces; see *Dread* (p. 61) for ideas. Dread is most widespread among undead, be they corporeal or solidified spirits. Supernaturally animated constructs

might suffer Dread as a result of their motivating force; e.g., ones energized by satanic rituals may be repelled by holy power.

- Zombies with fatal flaws (pp. 80-85) – typically Weakness or Vulnerability, but conceivably Electrical or Fragile, a highly exploitable Destiny, or even an easily withheld Dependency – often fear that which can destroy them. For infected, mutated, and other living zombies, that's a Phobia (and possibly an evolved survival mechanism). For supernatural zombies, it's a Dread.

- Zombies that have some form of horde mind may collectively come to fear the things used to hunt them down (e.g., dogs or fire). Again, this is a Dread except for clearly non-supernatural zombies, which generally have Phobias instead.

In all cases, remember that an Unfazeable zombie *can't* have Phobias.

- *Constructs* "age" by default, wearing out like inanimate artifacts (if built using body meta-traits, add "No Unaging [-15]"). Ones that last about as long as ordinary people don't require any special traits, but most break down more quickly. Take Short Lifespan 1 [-10] if the thing can expect 16 years of useful operation, SL 2 [-20] for eight years, SL 3 [-30] for four years, or SL 4 [-40] for two years. If it will fall apart in mere days upon reaching its limit, add Self-Destruct [-10]. The combination of SL 4 and Self-Destruct has the same value as Terminally Ill (2 years) [-50], which is functionally identical. For shorter-lived specimens, the GM may use Terminally Ill (1 year) [-75] or Terminally Ill (1 month) [-100] *instead*, treating these as having the effects of Self-Destruct after the indicated time is up. Unhealing (Total) [-30] is common among constructs, most of which need surgery to be put back together, but high-end living ones sometimes lack this flaw.

- *Living* zombies also age by default. This is usually at the standard human rate, but the infected – and some zombies caused by radiation, toxic waste, or something equally unwholesome – are often dying quickly enough to rate Terminally Ill. Those that aren't dying quite that fast can use Short Lifespan and Self-Destruct, like constructs. *Do not* add such disadvantages if the creature will turn into another kind of zombie after death, though; treat this as a 0-point feature, or as Extra Life (Reanimation, -20%) [20] if it can reanimate after death *in combat*. On the other hand, a living zombie motivated by unfinished business may well be Unaging [15]. Unhealing is rare for living zombies, but those sickened enough to rate Terminally Ill sometimes suffer from it.

- *Solidified spirits* rarely age and usually require magic to heal. Thus, the Solidified Spirit meta-trait includes both Unaging [15] and Unhealing (Total) [-30]. When building such zombies without Solidified Spirit, give them those traits. Their days may still be numbered, however – see *Fulfilling the Mission* (below).

- *Undead* are by default assumed to be preserved by whatever force got them walking around. Thus, all undead body meta-traits include Unaging [15], and undead designed without such a meta-trait should add that advantage. However, quasi-realistic undead are likely to decay; use the rules for constructs (above), probably with a useful life between a month and two years, and add "No Unaging [-15]" as a disadvantage if the template has a body meta-trait. Unaging or not, intact undead often have the Will Become a Rotting Corpse feature, while rotting ones have Will Become a Skeleton. These simply swap the traits that constitute Intact Corpse [40] for the ones in Rotting Corpse [24], and the traits of Rotting Corpse for those of Skeletal Corpse [13], respectively, on whatever timescale makes sense (which needn't be the one used for aging). Unhealing (Total) [-30] is nigh-ubiquitous among undead, appears on body meta-traits, and should be added manually to undead designed without them.

Whatever the case may be, if the zombie lacks Unaging, *Age and Aging* (p. B444) applies normally, on whatever schedule its disadvantages dictate. Thus, such monsters lose ST, DX, IQ, and HT. If certain attributes don't drop off, the zombie has Unaging with the Attribute Exemption limitation (p. 55).

Fulfilling the Mission

Even if a zombie can endure forever in *theory*, it may have a specific task that it must complete, the execution of which will lay it to rest. This is exceedingly common among solidified spirits, and not uncommon among other sorts of zombies who are driven by a sense of purpose, be that a divine curse, unfinished business, or raw vengeance.

For all zombies but the living kind, this is the -15-point Destiny discussed on p. 61. This disadvantage *doesn't* preclude Unaging. In most cases, it specifies a relatively rare set of conditions that will eventually come to pass . . . but on a longer timescale than the average human lifespan.

Since costs of these traits sum to 0 points, this is effectively a feature that trades inevitable slow decay for the risk of a sudden demise.

By that logic, if such a zombie's expected lifespan is likely to be unusually long, the GM can adjust the Destiny's point value to give an overall advantage. At -10 points, Destiny and Unaging would come to a net 5 points, and should have results comparable to Extended Lifespan 2 [4], which multiplies normal life expectancy by four (a couple of centuries); at -5 points, the costs total to 10 points and the effects ought to be similar to Extended Lifespan 5 [10], which multiplies life expectancy by 32 (over a millennium). Similarly, for a zombie that stands to endure for less than a human lifespan, it may be worth working things out using the guidelines under *Decay* (pp. 80-81) and then pricing the Destiny so that it and Unaging give the same total value as Short Lifespan and/or Self-Destruct. The difference between doing this and buying lifespan-related traits directly is that the zombie *won't age* if its Destiny doesn't come to pass; it will linger indefinitely.

For living zombies, this sort of thing is only rarely applicable. However, if the odds are good that the zombie will be laid to rest in less time than a normal human lifespan as a result of completing a mission or having its reason for existence wiped out, then give it a Destiny worth the same *net* points as above – that is, worth whatever the traits under *Decay* would give for a life that long. For instance, a zombie that's likely to see its end in two years could have a -50-point Destiny.

Headshots and Other Violence

Everybody is familiar with the zombie weakness of “removing the head or destroying the brain” – that is, the headshot – though this is hardly universal, and appears to be the invention of George A. Romero. Still, a lot of zombie fiction posits serious flaws that hunters can exploit through brute force alone:

Decapitation: A sovereign old-time remedy for all creepy threats, from vampires to unpopular leaders, this befits constructs with sewn-on heads and other zombies whose animating force resides in the noggin. Treat it as Vulnerability (Cutting to Neck $\times 2$) [-20], ($\times 3$) [-30], or ($\times 4$) [-40]. Given the $\times 2$ that such blows get already, even the -20-point version makes such attacks deadlier than skull hits (the skull affords DR 2, at least), and will usually suffice. Horror-movie zombies with Injury Tolerance (Independent Body Parts) modified with Detachable Head *won't* have this flaw!

Headshots: This cinematic classic should be taken to mean “any blow that hits above the torso” in the context of zombies. It suits all Unliving zombies that have brains – B-movie undead in particular. Handle it as Vulnerability

(Headshots $\times 2$) [-30], ($\times 3$) [-45], or ($\times 4$) [-60]. The -45-point version offsets the effects of Unliving on gunshots to the face, while the -60-point level renders *all* head injury far deadlier to zombies than to humans. Living zombies that lack Injury Tolerance rarely need anything worse than the -30-point version.

Incineration: Withered old mummies ought to have Fragile (Combustible) [-5], which is included in the Mummified Corpse meta-trait and should be added to mummies built without that

trait. For a traditional mummy preserved with asphalt or tree resin, worsen that to Fragile (Flammable) [-10]; on one with the meta-trait, note this flaw as “Fragile (Flammable, not Combustible) [-5].” Particularly crispy mummies – and walking dead in the *Let Sleeping Corpses Lie* vein – may further suffer from Vulnerability (Heat/Fire $\times 2$) [-30], ($\times 3$) [-45], or ($\times 4$) [-60].

Liquefaction: Squishy, rotten zombies might have Vulnerability (All Physical $\times 2$) [-40], ($\times 3$) [-60], or ($\times 4$) [-80] – customarily with Fragile (Brittle) [-15], so that body parts come off. This amplifies injury from any attack involving a physical object (axe, bullet, car, fist, etc.) forcefully striking the zombie. It's thematic for disgusting horror

and fantasy undead, but cinematic *living* zombies, particularly the infected, sometimes hemorrhage internally to such an extent that powerful blows bust them wide open.

Pulverization: Skeletons of all stripes should have Vulnerability (Crushing $\times 2$) [-30], ($\times 3$) [-45], or ($\times 4$) [-60] and Fragile (Brittle) [-15], to represent dry bones. The Skeletal Corpse meta-trait already includes these disadvantages, specifying Vulnerability at the -30-point level. Drier, older versions can be weaker; alongside Skeletal Corpse, note this problem as “Vulnerability (Crushing $\times 3$, not $\times 2$) [-15]” or “Vulnerability (Crushing $\times 4$, not $\times 2$) [-30].”

For more on interactions with Injury Tolerance, see *Wounding Modifiers and Zombies* (p. 110). In all cases, if a Vulnerability is supposed to destroy the zombie in one shot, it will work best if the creature also has Fragile (Unnatural) [-50] (included in all undead body meta-traits) and *isn't* Unkillable.

Occult Power

Living dead and creepier constructs are commonly raised by and therefore susceptible to supernatural forces.



For zombies created deliberately through weird science other than alchemy, or accidentally by radiation, space dust, etc., these flaws are rarely appropriate and thus safely skipped. Fantasy zombies, in contrast, frequently suffer from failings in *both* of the following categories.

Holiness

Divine power – express or channeled through the faithful – is traditionally baneful to evil zombies, living or undead, regardless of how they were created. Depending on the setting, any zombie may qualify if it has Dependency (Sanctity) linked to dark gods, a Destiny entangled with a spiteful motivation, or just lots of nasty mental disadvantages such as Intolerance (The Living). Such monsters might have any or all of the following:

Functions and Detects as Evil [0]: This feature suits classic black-magic zombies (but possibly not those raised by “gray” or “white” magic); cursed zombies brought about by negative emotions, unhallowed ground, or unpleasant unfinished business; most fantasy or horror “evil dead”; and possibly *all* undead and/or zombies in settings where the gods object to such entities. It doesn’t inflict direct harm, but means that sacred weaponry will be extra-effective. Use this when such armaments’ extra potency is strictly a property of the *attack*, governed by a Bane enchantment (**GURPS Magic**, p. 62), an Accessibility limitation (p. B110), or similar. If artifacts bearing the opposite “charge” exist, and are managed by controls like Limit spells (**Magic**, p. 68), then this also means that the zombie can use such things.

Vulnerabilities: Truly unholy zombies might suffer extra harm from sanctified weaponry that *isn’t* specifically imbued with an attack that switches on against evil foes. As holy hand grenades and blessed blades are relatively rare in most settings, price this as Vulnerability (Blessed Weapons $\times 2$) [-10], ($\times 3$) [-15], or ($\times 4$) [-20]. This makes taking extra damage a property of the *zombie*.

Weaknesses: Evil zombies might be harmed by close encounters with the sacred. For a particular exorcism or prayer, or the will of someone with True Faith, this is Weakness (Specific Ritual or True Faith; 1d/minute) [-10], (1d/5 minutes) [-5], or (1d/30 minutes) [-2]; this suits the evil dead in horror, who generally require some research to defeat. For contact with holy water, use Weakness (Holy Water; 1d/minute; Variable, -40%) [-12], (1d/5 minutes) [-6], or (1d/30 minutes) [-3], where Variable works as explained under *Weakness* (pp. 65-66). A few zombies may be harmed by hearing *any* prayer or by contact with *anything* holy, which is Weakness (The Holy; 1d/minute) [-40], (1d/5 minutes) [-20], or (1d/30 minutes) [-10]. Rarely, horribly evil zombies are harmed merely by being in areas with any “good” sanctity at all, and thus cannot stray from places of darkest evil; this is Weakness (Sanctity; 1d/minute) [-60], (1d/5 minutes) [-30], or (1d/30 minutes) [-15]. In all cases, 1d/minute is the best fit to the fiction but by no means the only option.

Zombies with any of these flaws are especially likely to have Can Be Turned By True Faith [-1], if not a full-on Dread of the things that can harm them; see *The Zombie Mind: Fears of the Fearsome* (p. 81).

Magic

Magic is a common defense against zombies raised by necromancy – anything with Dependency (Mana) qualifies – and often against the undead in general, particularly in traditional fantasy settings. This can lead to a number of traits:

Affected as Dead [0] and *Affected as Living* [0]: These features don’t introduce “flaws” as such, but they do specify what magic affects the zombie. In settings without magic, skip these traits. In settings *with* magic – whether it draws on mana, sanctity, or something else – it’s best if all zombie templates note one or the other, to avoid confusion about what will and won’t work.

Vulnerabilities: Magical zombies in fantasy RPGs are often extra-susceptible to magic weapons. Unless such artifacts are exceedingly common in the setting, treat this as Vulnerability (Magic Weapons $\times 2$) [-10], ($\times 3$) [-15], or ($\times 4$) [-20]. Zombies that can’t tolerate destructive magic at all might have Vulnerability (Magic $\times 2$) [-40], ($\times 3$) [-60], or ($\times 4$) [-80], which amplifies injury from magic weapons, spells, alchemical elixirs, being punched by magical golems, and so on.

Weaknesses: Particularly weak zombies may take injury from the spells listed under *Affected as Dead* or *Affected as Living*, as the case may be, and conceivably from other spells. For one specific, *widely known* spell, this is Weakness (Spell; 1d/minute) [-10], (1d/5 minutes) [-5], or (1d/30 minutes) [-2]. For a whole college of magic, go with Weakness (College; 1d/minute) [-20], (1d/5 minutes) [-10], or (1d/30 minutes) [-5]; for fantasy RPG zombies, this most often means the Healing college. A zombie that takes damage from any magic being cast on it or in an area around it, probably because it’s magical and this disrupts its animating force, has Weakness (Magic; 1d/minute) [-40], (1d/5 minutes) [-20], or (1d/30 minutes) [-10]. As with Weakness to holy forces, 1d/minute is usual across the board.

Purifiers

Some forces that aren’t innately supernatural have occult significance as “purifiers”: things that erase or wash away evil or the unnatural. All of these are strongly linked to real-world traditions, and thus suit horror undead best. Zombie-makers may want to skip this section for sci-fi and hack-and-slash fantasy monsters, and for zombies that are alive rather than undead.

The most common examples:

Fire: Fire purifies in the obvious way – through destruction. Vulnerability (Heat/Fire $\times 2$) [-30], ($\times 3$) [-45], or ($\times 4$) [-60] suits historically inspired zombies of all kinds, notably the undead in most Asian, European, and Central American lore, as well as *supernatural* horror zombies inspired by these. *Weird-science* horror zombies, deliberate or accidental, often pointedly lack this disadvantage. This isn’t tied to the zombie being dried out, and doesn’t imply Fragile (Combustible) or (Flammable).

Salt: Another ancient purifier, held to symbolize “light solidified” and “the action of fire” in European occult teachings, and universally prized for its capacity to keep food safe and wounds clean. In Vodou, it reminds the zombie of its sense of taste and hence of life, laying it to rest.

Traditional Vodou zombies must *taste* the salt; this is Weakness (Salt; 1d/minute; Difficult to Administer, Ingestion, -100%; Irreversible, +100%) [-20]. In cinematic and comic-book settings with firearms, blasting the zombie with rock salt or even a salt-filled hollow-point bullet will suffice, and counts as Vulnerability (Salt $\times 2$) [-20], ($\times 3$) [-30], or ($\times 4$) [-40], given how common salt is.

Sunlight: The sun represents life, the power of God, and everything that fire does. It burns some movie zombies – even ones that seem to be neither supernatural nor undead – like it does vampires. This is Weakness (Sunlight; 1d/minute) [-60], (1d/5 minutes) [-30], or (1d/30 minutes) [-15]. Usually, 1d/30 minutes is more than enough; anything faster greatly reduces the zombies' utility as monsters.

Water: Water rinses away filth and is perhaps the most common purifier of all. Few cultures *lack* this tradition. Generally, the water has to be moving to do its job, and only harms truly evil beings, usually undead or solidified spirits. This is Weakness (Running Water; 1d/minute) [-40], (1d/5 minutes) [-20], or (1d/30 minutes) [-10].

Zombies with such failings often have a matching Dread or Phobia of whatever it is that harms them; see *The Zombie Mind: Fears of the Fearsome* (p. 81).

Science!

Mad science, rubber science, weird science . . . call it what you will, but it often leads to zombies. Fortunately, it offers ways to deal with zombies, too.

Antiserums and Cures: Constructs and mutant supersoldiers created using serums can often be killed by specific antidotes synthesized using the same research. This is also how most “cures” for infected and infested zombies work – they don't restore the victim to normality, but simply kill him. If injected, this is Weakness (Antiserum or Cure; 1d/minute; Difficult to Administer, Injection, -50%; Irreversible, +100%) [-15], and thus a death sentence for the zombie. If it can be delivered as some sort of aerosol, it's usually Weakness (Antiserum or Cure; 1d/minute) [-10], necessitating prolonged exposure to kill the zombie. Finally, *living* weird-science zombies might have Unusual Biochemistry [-5] instead of or as well as Weakness, foiling attempts to use existing medicine to cure them.

Biochemical Weapon: Zombies created by infection, infestation, mutation, serums, toxic waste, and so on often have sufficiently weird biochemistry to be extra-sensitive to plagues and chemicals. If these are harmless or merely irritating to ordinary people, use the rules for antiserums and cures, above. However, if such things are genuinely deadly weapons, that's Vulnerability (Biochemical Weapon $\times 2$) [-10], ($\times 3$) [-15], or ($\times 4$) [-20]. The -20-point version is truest to cinema: the anti-zombie plague weakens and staggers non-zombies but slaughters zombies (say, seven one-day cycles that do 1 HP apiece, so most people lose an inconvenient 7 HP but zombies suffer a fatal 28 HP).

The Zombie Mind: Inhumanity and Humanity

Loss of humanity is a key element of zombification. If decisions made so far about the zombie's nature have yielded a template that includes the Inhuman meta-trait (p. 70) or several disadvantages discussed under *The Zombie Mind: Scrambled Brains* (p. 74) or *Appetites* (p. 79), then the zombie is *already* fairly inhuman. With -20 points or worse in Berserk [-10*], Bestial [-10], Bloodlust [-10*], Low Empathy [-20], and Uncontrollable Appetite [-15*], it will engage in enough unfeeling savagery to seem a monster.

To amplify absence of empathy, or to make this the reason for the zombie's lack of humanity, start with Low Empathy and add Killjoy [-15] or No Sense of Humor [-10]. This especially suits the stone-faced, serum- or drug-fueled living zombie, who theoretically possesses the physiological capacity for emotion. It also works for hatred-driven revenants.

To dial up monstrosity, tack on Intolerance (The Living) [-10]. This can't easily be blamed on “brain damage,” “survival instinct,” or “bad drugs,” and makes the zombie purposely hateful. This is a classic trait of the evil dead – corpses and solidified spirits alike – and of cursed zombies driven by smoldering vengeance or a god's anger. Adding Odious Racial Habit (Eats Humans) [-15] never hurts.

Conversely, a few hints that zombies used to be *people* – the minds of whom might be going insane behind those staring eyes – can add a dramatic edge in a campaign where zombies aren't merely targets. The simplest way to “humanize” a zombie is to be conservative with the disadvantages above. A template with IQ-2 and Slave Mentality as its sole mental traits will yield unfortunate victims, not seething monsters.

Zombie-makers seeking an active measure to “humanize” zombies will find Glimpses of Clarity [-1] tailor-made for the job. It troubles the zombie in a way that suggests that it was once a normal person while remaining minor enough not to dominate the zombie template – or the action. It particularly suits living zombies (who are technically still people) and solidified spirits (who customarily recognize their homes and descendents).

Zombie Motivation [-1 to -15] is *sometimes* useful, too. Carefully worded and added to an undead template, it can give a zombie that retraces its steps in life. The zombie's actions serve as a reminder that it was once a person.

All of the above mostly applies to a zombie with an attribute modifier no worse than IQ-4. One with an average IQ of 5 or less will seem more beast than person, regardless of its disadvantages.

Electricity: Zombies created through galvanism or by “infection” with ultra-tech nanomachines, as well as constructs with batteries or robotic parts, are often sensitive to electrical phenomena. Give these Electrical [-20] if surge attacks that wouldn’t do much to humans temporarily scramble or jam their systems; Weakness (Strong EM Fields; 1d/minute) [-20], (1d/5 minutes) [-10], or (1d/30 minutes) [-5] if they’re physically harmed by ultra-tech EMP warheads, nonlethal microwave and electrolaser weaponry, and similar technologies that wouldn’t actually injure humans; and/or Vulnerability (Electricity $\times 2$) [-30], ($\times 3$) [-45], or ($\times 4$) [-60] if they’re affected unduly by electrical attacks that would harm anyone. Sometimes, electricity replaces fire as a purifier useful against weird-science monsters, giving Vulnerability but not the other problems.

Radiation: Zombies created by radiation can often be laid to rest by it. This is just about always Weakness (Exotic Radiation; 1d/minute) [-10]. The same pricing suits acoustic radiation, specially modulated magnetic fields, and almost anything else that calls for a lab similar to the one where the zombie was created.

6. CONTAGION

Infectious zombification is common in horror and almost required for a zombie apocalypse (pp. 24-25). On the other hand, it rarely suits zombies produced deliberately through black magic, serum infusions, Frankensteinian science, and other complex processes. It’s completely absent from traditional beliefs, from Mesopotamian and Etruscan tales of the walking dead through Vodou witchery. If the zombie cannot transmit its condition, then skip ahead to *Mutatis Mutandis* (pp. 86-90). When designing a template for zombies that *can* increase their numbers, though, it’s important to include traits that enable this.

Slow Contagion

In the least dramatic case, when people exposed to zombies die – for whatever reason, perhaps nothing more than natural causes – they return as zombies. The situation differs little from space dust or contaminated water making the dead walk. The dead rise, and while the zombies are technically causing it, they aren’t doing the killing.

Since death is involved, this implies suitability for the walking dead (unless living zombies somehow spread a long-term undead plague). And as the process is extremely slow, it’s of little practical value to zombies or zombie-masters who desire allies. Thus, such zombies only ever have the Infectious feature, worth 0 points. When assigning this, be sure to note what spreads the infection (breathing the same air, a bite, contact with blood, *any* contact) and whether those who eventually die must roll dice to determine their fate; see *Spreading the Fun* (pp. 124-129) for ideas. Such details don’t affect template cost.

Fast Contagion

More interesting are zombies that transform victims in short order – in days, hours, or even seconds! There are lots of ways to handle this, but in most cases, if the zombie

creates a new zombie that has no strong feelings toward its creator, that’s just a speedier form of Infectious [0]. Again, the GM should read *Spreading the Fun* (pp. 124-129) and specify exactly how the curse or plague spreads, how quickly those sickened or killed become zombies, and whether they must roll dice for this. In most cases, infection is via a particular attack (traditionally a bite) or contact with a bodily fluid (blood, saliva, etc.).

Walking dead that must kill their victims, who then become undead themselves, don’t *need* anything else. However, constructs, mutants, and fantasy ghouls, sometimes have Teeth (Sharp) [1], Striking ST (One Attack Only, Bite, -60%) [2/level], Claws (Blunt or Sharp) [3 or 5], or even Plague Bite (p. 53) 1d or 2d [9 or 17] to assist with the killing. If they do, this is generally the attack that carries the zombie plague.

Living zombies that infect victims who rapidly fall ill and become zombies without dying *still* don’t pay points – no more than humans with bubonic plague or smallpox pay points for their “advantage.” However, if the effect works so quickly as to weaken the subject on a combat timescale, which would give the zombie a definite edge in a fight, add Plague Bite 1d [9], which will sicken but probably not kill. It’s fair to assume that failure to resist this attack means the victim has become infected.

Finally, any kind of zombie that serves a master who specifically intends to spread plague should have one of the Afflictions under *Pestilence and Affliction* (p. 56), with the optional reanimation add-on. Use Contact Disease [47] for biters.

Special Friends and Vicious Rivals

If the zombie creates a new zombie that will fight alongside it, follow the advice above but replace Infectious with one of these fast-acting forms of Dominance (p. 51):

- Fast Reanimation [6] is for cases where victims the zombie *kills* – usually meaning “with a bite,” often enhanced with Teeth, Plague Bite (p. 53), etc. – rise up as zombies quickly enough to influence combat. Obviously, this best suits undead zombies, though if living ones transmit an infection that raises a related form of undead, the point cost is unchanged.

- Infected Touch [61] is for cases where the slightest contact – infected blood on skin, a tiny scratch, etc. – can transform the victim. For living zombies, this means a curse, infection, infestation, or similar effect that creates another living zombie; there’s a brief pause while the virus or magic spreads, after which the subject is a zombie. For walking dead, this represents something that kills the victim, causing him to fall down dead and then get up as a zombie. Remember to specify whether the roll is HT (best for diseases and poisons) or Will (suits curses and contagious magic).

If the zombie creates a rival – uncommon in zombie fiction – then replace Infectious with Infectious Attack [-5]. Worsen this to Fast Foes (p. 62) [-10] for a disadvantageous version of Fast Reanimation. If the zombie’s contagion kills its enemies, though, it may still qualify for Plague Bite 1d or 2d [9 or 17], which *can* yield a net advantage.

Variant Vectors

All of the above assumes that zombie plagues and curses are transferred on a one-on-one basis, usually through a bite or other melee attack. Fiction offers some other options, though:

Plague Auras: If just *being around* the zombie means that you can catch what it has, then follow the usual rules with a few replacements. First, swap Plague Bite for Deadly Cloud (p. 53) [6] or Nauseating Cloud (p. 50) [20] for diseased, toxic, or extremely rotten zombies – or for Background Radiation (p. 53) [6] or The Glow (p. 53) [12], for radioactive ones – in cases where exposure has unpleasant short-term effects. Dominance is best avoided unless the GM's goal is to destroy civilization, in which case Cloud of Infection (p. 52) [90] is suitable. Finally, if the GM opts to charge points for Afflictions that represent plagues, replace Contact Disease with the reanimating form of Airborne Disease (p. 56) [61].

Reprogramming: If *listening* to the zombie reprograms victims with the same orders, then that's Dominance, too. Add Memetic Zombification (p. 52) [76] – and be aware that this will obliterate humanity even more surely than Cloud of Infection.

7. MUTATIS MUTANDIS

Despite the fact that they're usually disgusting, frequently physically powerful, and all too often contagious, zombies sometimes need something extra to be *memorable*. In some settings, this is easy: use the previous steps to engineer a contrast like "infected vs. undead" or "black-magic undead vs. weird-science undead." However, such distinctions aren't suitable if all zombies have the same origin – like, say, an apocalyptic event. In that case, special abilities offer a powerful way to keep zombies fresh (figuratively!) and encounters interesting. This is the successful strategy of video games and fantasy RPGs, where zombies show up in a vast range of sizes and power levels, boasting a bewildering variety of capabilities.

One warning here: Not everything that follows aligns well with specific zombie forms or motivations. The most important guideline is the Rule of Cool!

Aberrant Attacks

Constructs and fantasy undead – and zombies mutated improbably by genetically active serums and viruses, or good old radiation – often transform, sprouting new and *dangerous* body parts, if not de facto super-powers. While these could be almost anything, it's scariest when the result is some kind of natural weaponry.

Melee Attacks

A zombie might develop (or be given) any number of tools for close combat. Skeletal fingertips or overgrown nails are Claws (Blunt) [3], with cinematic extremes counting as Claws (Sharp) [5]. However, sources like **Left 4 Dead** and **Resident Evil** go all the way up to Claws (Talons) [8] and (Long Talons) [11]. Sci-fi surgery or mutation – or strong magic – might swap blunt teeth for Teeth (Sharp) [1] on a ghoul, or even Teeth (Fangs) [2] on something that's more beast than man. Spines and Strikers

(both p. B88) are rare even in extreme fiction, but the GM may wish to include them in *his* story.

The infected, and ghouls and diseased zombies of *any* origin, would fairly qualify for Pestilent Wounds [1]. This is only effective if the monster bites, or possesses one of the mutant cutting or impaling attacks above. If the GM is charging points to keep zombie-masters honest, then replace this perk with the non-reanimating form of Contact Disease (p. 56) [27]. In all cases, the GM should specify the disease involved.

More radically, a zombie that would qualify for Pestilent Wounds or Contact Disease might have Plague Bite (p. 53) 1d or 2d [9 or 17] instead or as well, even if zombification isn't contagious, to represent scarily fast-acting pathogens. Toxic-waste zombies can use this ability for chemical hazards instead. Specify the attack's "special effect" – biological or chemical – for the sake of targets with immunities or susceptibilities.

And fantasy undead, ghouls in particular, often have Paralyzing Scratch (p. 50) [25], whether because they inject a toxin or because being wounded by such a creature immobilizes the victim with supernatural dread.

The GM is welcome to build other melee abilities using Affliction or Innate Attack. Primary attacks typically have Melee Attack, Reach C, Cannot Parry (-35%), and often Blood Agent or Contact Agent. Accompaniments (like poison) need only Follow-Up.

Unwholesome Auras

Zombies created by infection, or that are diseased as a consequence of being sickly, filthy, or dead, are often dangerous to be around. Pestilent Presence [1] is the simplest way to handle this. However, specimens that cause immediate ill effects – typically because they carry fantasy ailments or are bloated with foul corpse gas – might instead be given Deadly Cloud (p. 53) [6] and/or Nauseating Cloud (p. 50) [20]. For either kind of cloud, add Pestilent Ability [1] if failure to resist the attack also leads to *long-term* illness. If the GM charges points to keep zombie-masters from getting free biological weapons, then replace either form of Pestilent with the non-reanimating variety of Airborne Disease (p. 56) [41].

Deadly Cloud and Nauseating Cloud also fit zombies created by toxic chemicals. As with Plague Bite, it's necessary to specify whether the threat the ability poses is chemical or biological. Radioactive zombies, too, are almost inevitably dangerous to be around, and have either Background Radiation (p. 53) [6] or The Glow (p. 53) [12].

Zombies created by infestation, and walking dead that have attracted corpse-eating or -dwelling wildlife, might have Swarm [1]. This isn't precisely an "aura," but it's similar, in that it buzzes around the zombie, harming its enemies. This *can* be the vector for a Pestilent Ability perk.

Not all unwholesomeness is purely physical. The evil dead – and possibly *all* undead, including solidified spirits – might radiate a supernaturally malefic aura. If they leave unholy in their wake, add Desecrator [1]. If they project chilling fear, probably due to the power of black magic, dark gods, or Hell, then add Terror (Always On, -20%) [24]; additional Fright Check penalties are rarely appropriate for "low-end" monsters like zombies.

Terror often accompanies dire Appearance, Frightens Animals, etc.; see *Look and Feel* (below) for inspiration.

A zombie that matches *any* of the above criteria is liable to have passive ill effects on plants and small animals around it. For attacks modified with Always On – like Airborne Disease, Background Radiation, Deadly Cloud, Nauseating Cloud, and Terror – this is merely a drawback of the limitation (The Glow assumes that the zombie is *in control* and doesn't leak radiation). Zombies that lack these abilities but that possess Desecrator or Pestilent Presence, that were created by powerful “death magic” or curses, or whose unwholesome origins pose no chemical, biological, or radiological hazard to people, may have Lifebane [-10] to cover this unhealthiness.

The GM designing novel auras using Affliction or Innate Attack should include Area Effect and Emanation. Most will be Always On. One of Blood Agent, Contact Agent, or Respiratory Agent is necessary for those that don't involve some sort of radiation or supernatural power.

Ranged Attacks

Genuine ranged attacks are rare in zombie fiction. Acidic Vomit (p. 53) [15] is seen in a few sources, primarily video games, and sets the tenor for this sort of thing: a short-ranged blast of bodily fluids. This mostly suits freakish mutants and over-the-top fantasy undead. The GM who wants to give zombies death rays, fire breath, and so on can certainly do so, at the usual point cost. Ranged attacks from diseased and rotten zombies might even convey serious diseases; if so, add Pestilent Ability [1].

Monstrous Movement

For the most part, zombies enjoy whatever mobility they had in their unzombified state. Becoming a zombie might grant a Basic Move bonus, for fast or raging varieties, but almost never exotic abilities like Flight, Tunneling, or Warp. Still, film and video games sometimes let zombies push the limits on human locomotion:

Climbers: Some zombies with Claws or an unnaturally powerful grip (see *Lifting ST*, p. 53) climb with uncanny ease. This is Super Climbing [3/level]. Assume that each level improves climbing speed by the base value on the table under *Climbing* (p. B349); e.g., Super Climbing 4 would let the zombie scramble up a stone wall at a foot per second. In fiction, hordes of climbers have no problem with clambering over one another to scale a wall. If they all have Super Climbing, assume that they needn't make any special roll to get a boost equal to their average height (e.g., a 5'10" zombie that can reach to 7'4" on its own can stand on the head of its horde-mate and reach to 13'2").

Look and Feel

Don't overlook the value of a zombie's *aesthetics* as a tool for horror or a way to distinguish between zombie templates. Some options:

Appearance: Undead usually have Appearance (Monstrous; Universal, +25%) [-25], on the grounds that only bizarre races that keep corpses around would see the visibly dead as anything but disagreeable. Low Appearance also suits any construct not assembled by a mad *plastic* surgeon, and living zombies that are disease-ravaged, parasite-riddled, or chemical- or radiation-scarred. For truly vomit-inducing examples, use Appearance (Horrific; Universal, +25%) [-30], while merely unhealthy ones might get Appearance (Hideous; Universal, +25%) [-20]. Alternatively, a zombie that *should* suffer such problems may be all the scarier for lacking them, perhaps thanks to an illusion placed by a necromancer who favors tidy-looking lackeys. All of the body meta-traits besides Intact Corpse assume Monstrous Appearance; if modifying this, note “Appearance (Horrific, not Monstrous) [-5],” “(Hideous, not Monstrous) [5],” or “(Average, not Monstrous) [25],” as appropriate.

Bad Smell [-10]: Decaying cadavers merit this disadvantage, which is already on the Rotting Corpse meta-trait. However, powerful magic or mad science might remove it (“No Bad Smell [10]”). Ghouls of all kinds – even living ones – are likely to have Bad Smell owing to their diet.

Disturbing Voice [-10]: Any zombie that can speak *might* have this problem. It's usual among constructs (imagine a little girl's voice echoing within a seven-foot behemoth), snarling infected, and undead whose vocal cords have seen better centuries.

Frightens Animals [-10]: Traditionally, beasts react poorly to the supernatural. This disadvantage is especially well-suited to solidified spirits and any zombie – living or dead – that could be considered “evil.” In some settings, all it takes is a supernatural origin, and undead animated by entirely neutral magic will provoke this reaction.

Morph: A folkloric Arabian *ghul* has Morph (Cosmetic, -50%; Needs Sample, -50%) [20], allowing it to steal the outward appearance of those it devours.

Neuter/Sexless [-1]: This is common among less-than-intact undead. The Rotting Corpse, Skeletal Corpse, and Solidified Spirit meta-traits include it; to remove it, use “Not Sexless [1].”

Supernatural Features: If a zombie is undead but hasn't rotted, it has Supernatural Features (No Body Heat, No Pulse, Pallor) [-20]. This is standard on the Intact Corpse meta-trait. Other varieties of walking dead that “buy off” negative Appearance as explained above will generally end up with this package – as might the rare construct flawless enough to pass as an ordinary person.

Unnatural Features [-1/level]: Living zombies often receive this disadvantage to represent the telltale signs of their condition.

Leapers: Not all fast zombies run – predatory ones might pounce on rather than chase down victims. Super Jump [10/level] befits such monsters. This isn't terribly realistic for anything built like a human, but a zombie that scampers on all fours all the time, or that pushes its body to the limit, might manage Super Jump 1, jumping about as well as an Olympian with Jumping-20.

More cinematically, a zombie that meets both criteria could have Super Jump 2.

Sprinters: A few fast zombies appear not to maneuver any better than slow shamblers in combat, yet manage bursts of speed in straight lines. Give these Enhanced Move 0.5 (Ground) [10] for 1.5 times Move, or Enhanced Move 1 (Ground) [20] for double Move. If realism matters, top speed *still* shouldn't exceed the numbers noted under *Basic Move* (p. 78).

Vary your zombies with exceptions.

Sinister Senses

Predatory zombies – ghouls, constructs with too much wolf brain, people zombified by spores scattered by aliens bent on purging humans from the world, etc. – often have senses more commonly found on templates for mundane carnivores:

- Acute Hearing* [2/level], especially for zombies that also have Penetrating Voice [1] for calling each other to dinner.
- Discriminatory Smell† [15] for the +4 to track prey – often boosted by Acute Taste and Smell* [2/level].
- Night Vision [1/level] or Infravision [10] – or possibly Vibration Sense (Air)† [10] or Sonar† [20] (most useful when purchased with the relevant Acute Sense* [2/level]) – if the zombies hunt at night or in the dungeon. Zombies empowered by magic, diabolical energy, or other supernatural forces could justify Dark Vision [25]. Zombies with such senses are candidates for Dread or Phobia of sunlight.
- Subsonic Hearing† [5], for those that don't already have Subsonic Speech, mostly to get the +1 to track prey.

* For zombies that hunt almost exclusively by one sense, an Acute Sense bonus for that faculty might *replace* a general Per bonus.

† Like some real-world creatures that rely on hearing, scent, vibration, etc., zombies might be lousy sight hunters, and suffer from Bad Sight (Nearsighted) [-25] (though this *will* give -2 to melee attacks).

Finally, supernatural zombies might possess Detect (Humans) [20] or Detect (Life) [30] instead of or as well as other special senses. While this neither allows targeting nor replaces vision, it *does* make hiding from the monsters nearly impossible!

Brains of the Mob

As zombies are mindless, they rarely possess mental gifts beyond those included in mentality meta-traits (pp. 69-70). Still, there are exceptions, mainly among zombies that run in hordes. Zombies with several such talents will be *scarily* canny and well-coordinated.

Note: If there are multiple strains of zombies with distinct templates, it's up to the GM whether they're separate "species" or merely variants or "subspecies" for the purpose of Telesend (Racial), Mindlink (Racial), and Mitigator,

Horde. When in doubt, assume that if they differ only in physical attributes and special abilities – and share all disadvantages pertaining to origin, form, mindset, means of sustenance, fatal flaws, etc. – then they're variants. Record this decision with the template's features.

Communication

Zombies of a certain class may share Telecommunication (p. 55). Point cost depends on dependability at a desired range, accounting for racial IQ modifier. For "typical" zombies with IQ-2, if the roll to communicate is 10 or less – the same as the odds of the average human making his Hearing roll – use Telesend (Broadcast, +50%; Racial, -20%; Reliable 6, +30%; Vague, -50%) [33] for a range of 200 yards, (Reliable 7, +35%) [35] for half a mile, (Reliable 8, +40%) [36] for a mile, (Reliable 9, +45%) [38] for three miles, and (Reliable 10, +50%) [39] for 10 miles. If time is no object, zombies at a given distance calling more zombies at that distance from *them*, and so on, can give effectively infinite range!

Still, the GM may want no chance of failure at any range. In that case, use Telesend (Broadcast, +50%; Racial, -20%; Vague, -50%) [24], but add Mindlink (2-9 zombies; Racial, -20%; Vague, -50%) [3], (10-99 zombies) [6], (100-999 zombies) [9], and so on, with every factor of 10 adding 3 points to the cost. For zombies built on points, this requires specifying an average horde size ahead of time. For those with no budget, there's no need to worry about cost, though it's still advisable to pick a number.

Alternatively, the zombies might communicate secretly by calling to each other using frequencies inaudible to humans. As zombies rarely have much to say, it works best to use Subsonic Speech for this – that has twice the range of ordinary speech and includes Subsonic Hearing for +1 to track prey, and half-speed transmission isn't a meaningful drawback for simple messages like "Braaaains!" This trait is a 0-point feature if it's the only way the zombies can communicate, or a 10-point advantage for the rare breed that can also talk normally. Ultrasonic Speech uses the same costs, but offers zombies few advantages.

Of course, some zombies shriek audibly when they sight prey! Use Penetrating Voice [1] for this. As this perk gives +3 to be heard, generic IQ-2 zombies with Per 8 will hear the call from up to 64 yards away on a roll of 10 or less; see *Hearing* (p. B358).

Inherited Memories

Zombies that have access to more memories than their own possess Danger Sense (Twice Shy, -20%) [12]. Racial Memory (p. B78) isn't ideal for zombies, as they can't provide the necessary player interpretation.

Intelligence Gain

As noted in *Variable IQ* (pp. 72-73), zombies reduce the price of their IQ penalty to -12 points/level if eating brains actually makes them smarter, or to -8 points/level if they're smarter in a horde. A strain of zombies that has *both* abilities should record its penalty as IQ (Mitigator, Horde -60%) [-8/level] and its offsetting bonus as IQ (Trigger, Brains, -60%) [8/level], and use the IQ that the current horde density and food supply supports. In a horde, with lots of brains to eat, such monsters *could* completely lose the penalty and claim a net bonus!

Zombie Mastery

A rare but not unknown gift of powerful zombies is the ability to control lesser ones. This can look like a mental ability or an attack, but it isn't precisely either. Buy Zombie Pheromones [48] if nearby zombies tend to rally to the greater zombie's aid, or Target Marking [88] if the master zombie can direct a horde of minions to descend upon a target. See *Mind Control* (pp. 53-54) for these abilities.

Other zombies call associates, as seen in quite a few video games. As described in *Allies* (p. 50), this is Zombie Conjuring (One zombie) [8], (Two zombies) [15], (Three zombies) [23], (Four zombies) [30], (Five zombies) [38], or (10 zombies) [45]. This often occurs alongside the control abilities above, allowing a boss zombie to conjure a small horde which then stays close and defends it or even does its bidding.

Last Laughs

Certain zombies are dangerous to destroy. This suggests some interesting traits, most of which are worth few points to the zombie.

A zombie whose body counts as hazardous waste once destroyed should have Toxic [1]. Details depend on what created it. While this usually means chemical origins that leave behind a chemical poison, the remains of zombies caused by radiation would logically be radiological hazards (read the damage in the perk description as rads, not HP, and ignore the HT roll to resist). Ultra-tech nanomachines could present dangers comparable to weaponized nanotech at the same TL.

Bloated, extra-rotten cadavers – and possibly any fantasy zombie, just because it's a mean trick to play on heroes – might have the *disadvantage* of Fragile (Explosive) [-15]. This means that critically failed HT rolls for major wounds, and failures by 3+ on HT rolls to avoid death, annihilate the zombie in a 6dx(HP/10) crushing explosion (that's 6d to 12d for most zombies). Failure by 3+ is stipulated because for the living, failure by 1 or 2 is merely a mortal wound, not death. However, for zombies that also have Fragile (Unnatural), reduction to -HP *always* means death and hence an explosion.

Fragile (Explosive) can have some interesting interactions with advantages, too. First, change the explosion's damage type from crushing to *corrosion* if the zombie has Acidic Vomit (p. 53), *burning* and *rads* for The Glow (p. 53), just *rads* for Background Radiation (p. 53), or *toxic* for Deadly Cloud (p. 53); if it has several attacks, divide damage evenly among the applicable types and treat the blast as linked explosions. Second, if such an attack is a Pestilent Ability – or if the zombie has the Infectious feature, the Pestilent Presence perk, or Airborne or Contact Disease (see *Pestilence and Affliction*, p. 56) – then being wounded by the blast is considered exposure to the contagion. Finally, if the zombie has the Toxic perk, the respiratory hazard described for that perk *automatically* comes into play; there's no need to burn the body first. These aren't mutually exclusive. If several conditions apply, several bad effects can ensue!

Lastly, remember that for a template with Swarm [1], destroying the zombie leaves behind a cloud of little beasties. Fragile (Explosive), where present, *doesn't* kill these.

Social Traits for Zombies

In most worlds where society is intact, *undead* zombies – and perhaps living ones, if they're believed incurable and effectively written off – are legal non-persons. Include the meta-trait for this, Legally Dead (p. 70) [-45], in their template. This is typical of fantasy undead, which usually exist in settings with stable social frameworks (despite the presence of zombie-making necromancers and dark priests).

In other cases, the answer is "It depends." Almost all zombies will still get Taboo Traits (Social Position) [0] and Wealth (Dead Broke) [-25], since mindless individuals can't navigate the social networks and bureaucracies that undergird office, title, and property ownership. It would be a strange society indeed where this isn't the case!

However, the Social Stigma can vary widely. Constructs that are frighteningly twisted, and living people *recognized* to be dangerous zombies, will have Social Stigma (Monster) [-15]. Constructs in societies where such things are accepted as "robots" or "golems," and living or undead zombies that are legitimate slaves in a world that tolerates this (like that of *Fido* and post-reconstruction *Shaun of the Dead*), will have Social Stigma (Valuable Property) [-10] where protected as individual property, but Social Stigma

(Subjugated) [-20] if viewed as a fungible resource to be exploited or destroyed by any human who comes along. If living zombies are regarded as incompetents rather than as threats or slaves, they'll have Social Stigma (Minority Group) [-10] if isolated, perhaps out of fear of infection (like lepers), or Social Stigma (Second-Class Citizen) [-5] if seen as just another social problem (like drug addicts).

In societies that haven't learned of the zombies among them, there may be *no* Social Stigma. The zombies get Taboo Traits (Social Position) and Wealth (Dead Broke) because they've ceased to play their role in society, but others' reactions will depend on the creatures' looks or behavior, not on a preconceived view of zombies.

And in backgrounds where society has disintegrated, as in an apocalypse, everybody effectively has Taboo Traits (Social Position), so it isn't worth noting. Zombies will have Social Stigma (Monster) if they caused the apocalypse, but *not* Social Stigma (Dead), even if they *are* dead, because the legal apparatus to declare someone dead doesn't exist. Wealth (Dead Broke) depends on whether the campaign uses Wealth; in post-apocalyptic worlds that lack the concept, zombies may be no worse off than anyone else.

INSTANT ZOMBIES

Designing zombies is fun, but sometimes you need a monster *now*. What follows are ready-to-eat examples designed using *Zombie-Maker* (pp. 70-89) – a mix of classics and novel concepts.

In each case, the zombie's "racial" template appears in the main text for applications where character points matter – namely, pricing zombie Allies and Alternate Forms, and using points to calculate costs for zombie-masters on a budget, whether this means \$ for mad scientists or energy points for spellcasting necromancers. For help understanding racial templates, review *How to Use Racial Templates* (p. B261), particularly *Stacking Templates*, and *Selecting Traits* (pp. B451-453). However, zombies commonly serve as monsters that don't need point costs. Stats for this purpose appear in the corresponding *Just the Stats* box. To interpret these, see *Reading Zombie Stats* (below).

Reading Zombie Stats

The monster stats in *GURPS Zombies* use a format that gamers familiar with *GURPS Monster Hunters* or *Dungeon Fantasy* will recognize:

ST, DX, IQ, HT, HP, Will, Per, FP, Speed, and Move: Basic attributes and secondary characteristics mean exactly what they do for any other creature in *GURPS*.

SM: Size Modifier affects all rolls to hit the zombie. The stats *already* reflect the other implications, notably increased Reach.

Dodge and Parry: Defenses are prefigured from DX and Basic Speed, and *already* include +1 for Combat Reflexes, where applicable – don't add this again.

DR: *Innate DR*. The GM is free to increase DR for a zombie dressed in armor, a construct with metal plates riveted to it, and so on.

Attacks: Attack forms listed by name. For strikes and grapples, the number in parentheses is effective skill. For afflictions, curses, venoms, etc., it's the resistance roll, which might be a simple attribute roll or a Quick Contest against the victim's score. Damage scores are *final*, and already consider bonuses for things like Claws.

Traits: Advantages, perks, disadvantages, quirks, and features important for a monster. For brevity's sake, DR and attacks aren't listed again, and many "color" traits don't appear at all. Check the template for full details.

Skills: Constructs may have skills innately programmed into them, which are listed here.

Notes: Anything else of importance, such as exceptions to listed stats or these guidelines, or recommendations regarding skills or equipment.

All values were arrived at by applying the associated template to a baseline human (attributes at 10, no special advantages or disadvantages). For more or less impressive "starting material," modify the relevant stats; e.g., a zombie made from a brute with ST 17 would add +7 to listed ST, and improve damage, HP, etc. accordingly. See also *Nonhuman Zombies* (p. 106).

B-Movie Ghouls

Ghouls in classic horror movies are shambling undead that eat flesh or brains. All share the following basic template, which could be seen as an elaborate meta-trait.

B-Movie Ghoul

-351 points

This is a composite horror-movie ghoul: clumsy, stupid, slow-moving, and with few special gifts beyond being unswerving in its drive to eat brains (or skin, or guts . . .). It *won't* endure forever or become a walking skeleton; it will rot away after a couple of years, and may well perish of starvation long before then. Waiting out such zombies is a problem, though – they never, ever rest, and people exposed to them tend to become new zombies (details below). Fortunately, they're easily detected by their moaning, and can be dropped with a headshot.

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

Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: HP+4 [8]; Per+2 [10]; Basic Speed-0.75 [-15]; Basic Move-1 [-5].

Advantages: Night Vision 2 [2]; Rotting Corpse (p. 69) [24]; Single-Minded [5]; Unfazeable [15].

Disadvantages: Cannot Learn [-30]; Dependency (Human Flesh; Common; Illegal; Daily) [-45]; Incurious (9) [-7]; Inhuman (p. 70) [-45]; Legally Dead (p. 70) [-45]; Mute [-25]; No Doesn't Eat or Drink [-10]; No Unaging [-15]; Short Lifespan 4 [-40]; Uncontrollable Appetite (Brains, Flesh, etc.) (9) [-22]; Vulnerability (Headshots ×4) [-60].

Quirks: Involuntary Utterance [-1].

Features: Infectious; Won't Become a Skeleton.

Ghoulish Subspecies

There are a few popular variations on this basic theme. Each form of reanimation creates its own kind of zombie.

Plague Ghoul

-344 points

The best-known variety of B-movie ghoul is reanimated by some sort of sci-fi pathogen. Anyone it kills will become a plague ghoul in just a second or two. People it merely injures are fated to reanimate after they die of whatever kills them; reanimation takes (HT - 10) minutes, minimum one minute. While "whatever kills them" *could* be old age, it's much more likely to be a septic wound.

Advantages: Fast Reanimation (p. 52) [6].

Perks: Pestilent Wounds [1].

Disadvantages: B-Movie Ghoul [-351].

Radiation Ghoul

-314 points

The *earliest* kind of B-movie ghoul was born of Cold War nuclear fears. Just being around it is dangerous (1d rads/second) – and as it's completely immune to radiation's metabolic effects, and suffers structural effects at 1% of the usual rate, it's often found in dangerously radioactive places. If destroyed, the cadaver counts as radioactive waste that delivers 1d rads/hour for six hours to anyone who gets even a little grue on him. Living people who absorb so much as 1 rad from such a ghoul will become ghouls (HT - 10) minutes after death, minimum one minute, whether they die of radiation poisoning (unlikely, as it's a low dose) or of other causes after exposure (even a heart attack 40 years later).

Advantages: Background Radiation (p. 53) [6]; Radiation Tolerance 100 [30].

Perks: Toxic [1].

Disadvantages: B-Movie Ghoul [-351].

Toxic Ghoul

-350 points

The rarest kind of infectious B-movie ghoul is brought back to life by toxic waste rather than by deliberate injections (which rarely lead to contagion). It enjoys no special attacks or defenses, but if destroyed, the resulting corpse counts as toxic waste. Anybody accidentally drinking water contaminated by it or breathing smoke from its incineration suffers toxic damage; see *Toxic* (p. 57). People who take *any* such injury will become ghouls (HT - 10) minutes after death, minimum one minute. This is true whether ghoul poison kills them or they die from unrelated causes later on.

Perks: Toxic [1].

Disadvantages: B-Movie Ghoul [-351].

Making Ghoulash

There's a *lot* of variety within this category! Any of the above archetypes might have one or more of these additional special characteristics taken from movies:

Brains GOOD: Add IQ+2 (Trigger, Brains, -60%) [16]. *Notes:* The ghouls lose their IQ penalty after feasting. Shortly after dining on at least two victims, they're as smart as ordinary people – and with average Per 12, better hunters! 16 points.

Chatty: Remove Bestial, Involuntary Utterance, Mute, and No Sense of Humor. *Notes:* The ghouls can converse and play evil pranks ("Send more cops!"), though their antics won't be terribly sophisticated without an IQ boost. 46 points.

Fresh: Replace Rotting Corpse with Intact Corpse [40]. *Notes:* Only people killed by ghouls are infected (no delayed-action zombies), but they rise soon enough to avoid rot and are preserved somewhat by the process, so they look human – sort of. 16 points.

Horror Movement: Replace Basic Move-1 with Basic Move+2 [10]. *Notes:* The ghouls *seem* slow but always catch up; average Move is 6, not 3. 15 points.

Mass Mind: Modify IQ penalty with Mitigator, Horde, -60% [24]; add Telesend (Broadcast, +50%; Racial, -20%; Reliable 6, +30%; Vague, -50%) [33]. *Notes:* Where there's one zombie, there are soon *lots* – and the more there are, the smarter they get. 57 points.

The Zombies Won: Replace Legally Dead with Social Stigma (Monster) [-15]. *Notes:* In an apocalyptic scenario where nobody has legal personhood or a bank account, this adjustment gives a fair cost. 30 points.

They're Learning: Add Danger Sense (Twice Shy, -20%) [12]; remove Cannot Learn and Incurious (9). *Notes:* The ghouls learn skills, try to solve problems, and almost never fall for the same trick twice. 49 points.

Trial by Fire: Add Unkillable 1 [50]; remove Fragile (Unnatural) [-50]; change Vulnerability from Headshots ×4 to Heat/Fire ×4. *Notes:* Like any other toxic waste, the zombies must be burned (or nuked) to ensure destruction. Anything else, like ordinary physical violence, is liable to fail! 100 points.

Just the Stats: B-Movie Ghoul

ST: 11	HP: 15	Speed: 4.00
DX: 9	Will: 8	Move: 3
IQ: 8	Per: 10	
HT: 10	FP: N/A	SM: 0

Dodge: 7 Parry: 7 (Unarmed) DR: 0

Bite (9): 1d-2 crushing. Reach C.

Clumsy Slap (9): 1d-2 crushing. Reach C.

Fumbling Grapple (9): Reach C.

Traits: Affected as Dead; Appearance (Monstrous); Bad Smell; Bestial; Cannot Learn; Dependency (Human Flesh; Daily); Doesn't Breathe; Doesn't Sleep; Fragile (Unnatural); Hidebound; High Pain Threshold; Immunity to Metabolic Hazards; Incurious (9); Infectious; Injury Tolerance (No Blood, Unliving); Involuntary Utterance; Low Empathy; Mute; Night Vision 2; No Sense of Humor; Short Lifespan 4; Single-Minded; Social Stigma (Dead); Temperature Tolerance 10; Uncontrollable Appetite (Brains, Flesh, etc.) (9); Unfazeable; Unhealing (Total); Vulnerability (Headshots ×4).

Notes: *Plague* ghouls have Fast Reanimation and inflict Pestilent Wounds; *radiation* ghouls get Background Radiation (1d rads/sec.) and Radiation Tolerance 100, and become radioactive waste; *toxic* ghouls turn into toxic waste. Normally, none have mental skills or wield weapons.

CONSTRUCTS

Constructs vary more than any other class of zombie – they're often one-off creations, better treated as individuals than as "races" with templates. However, some mad wizards and scientists *do* seem to be bent on raising armies of the things. What follows are a few examples to prime the GM's imagination.

Corpse Golem

25 points

This monstrosity is a mass of decaying body parts sewn into vaguely humanoid form, stitched inside a tanned human-leather exterior, treated with alchemical preservatives, fitted with scythes of bone on its arms, and given unlife through powerful magic. It would cost 300 energy points to enchant with the Golem spell (*GURPS Magic*, p. 59). A swift and deadly warrior, it obeys its creator's orders unswervingly, and cannot be suborned. Often used as a guard, it's capable of warning intruders with a chilling, unnatural voice. It has built-in combat skills, and can flawlessly memorize orders and

preprogrammed speeches (however complex), but possesses no capacity to learn.

Attribute Modifiers: ST+5 [50]; DX+2 [40]; IQ-2 [-40]; HT+2 [20].

Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: HP+5 [10].

Advantages: Claws (Long Talons) [11]; Damage Resistance 2 (Tough Skin, -40%) [6]; Inexorable (pp. 69-70) [65]; Photographic Memory [10]; Rotting Corpse (p. 69) [24]; Striking ST 5 [25].

Disadvantages: Automaton (p. 69) [-85]; Cannot Learn [-30]; Dependency (Mana; Very Common; Constantly) [-25]; Disturbing Voice [-10]; Reprogrammable [-10]; Social Stigma (Monster) [-15]; Wealth (Dead Broke) [-25].

Skills: 4 points in combat skills, typically Brawling (E) DX+2 [4].

Features: No Mental Skills; Taboo Traits (Social Position); Won't Become a Skeleton.

Just the Stats: Corpse Golem

ST: 15	HP: 20	Speed: 6.00
DX: 12	Will: 8	Move: 6
IQ: 8	Per: 8	
HT: 12	FP: N/A	SM: 0
Dodge: 9	Parry: 10 (Brawling)	DR: 2 (Tough Skin)

Bone Scythe (14): 2d+2 cutting or impaling. Reach C.

Traits: Affected as Dead; Appearance (Monstrous); Bad Smell; Cannot Learn; Dependency (Mana; Constantly); Disturbing Voice; Doesn't Breathe; Doesn't Eat or Drink; Doesn't Sleep; Fragile (Unnatural); Hidebound; High Pain Threshold; Immunity to Metabolic Hazards; Immunity to Mind Control; Incurious (6); Indomitable; Injury Tolerance (No Blood, Unliving); Low Empathy; No Sense of Humor; Photographic Memory; Reprogrammable; Single-Minded; Slave Mentality; Social Stigma (Monster); Striking ST 5; Temperature Tolerance 10; Unaging; Unfazeable; Unhealing (Total).

Skills: Brawling-14.

Notes: Cannot have mental skills.

Just the Stats: Galvanoid

ST: 30	HP: 30	Speed: 5.00
DX: 9	Will: 10	Move: 6
IQ: 9	Per: 10	
HT: 12	FP: 12	SM: +1
Dodge: 8	Parry: 7 (Unarmed)	DR: 0

Grapple (9): Reach C, 1. Often All-Out for +4 to hit!

Huge Fist (9): 3d-1 crushing. Reach C, 1. Often All-Out for +4 to hit!

Traits: Affected as Living; Appearance (Monstrous); Bad Temper (9); Berserk (9); Cannot Speak; Doesn't Sleep; Electrical; Hard to Subdue 4; High Pain Threshold; Injury Tolerance (No Blood); Low Empathy; No Sense of Humor; Reduced Consumption 4 (Cast-Iron Stomach); Resistant to Metabolic Hazards (+8); Social Stigma (Monster); Temperature Tolerance 10; Unkillable 1; Vulnerability (Electricity x2).

Notes: Can and may well have a full spectrum of skills.

Galvanoid

107 points

The hulking (9'-tall) galvanoid is a true artificial life form, surgically assembled from both human and animal body parts, and animated using electricity. It must eat, drink, and breathe. However, it can consume almost anything in order to generate the electricity that courses through its body in lieu of blood. This bizarre physiology makes it tough (*insanely* so, with Unkillable 1) and slow to wear out, and enables it to heal on its own, but it isn't immune to illness, poison, or the ravages of time. A further consequence is that it's almost fatally susceptible to electricity.

The galvanoid is *not* its creator's servant. That unfortunate individual made the grave error of giving his construct a mostly intact brain with neither the gift of language nor a grasp of emotion. His creation punished him by tearing him to bits and loping off into the world, where it lurks in shadow, eating carrion and slaying anyone who provokes it.

Attribute Modifiers: ST+20 (Size, -10%) [180]; DX-1 [-20]; IQ-1 [-20]; HT+2 [20].

Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: Will+1 [5]; Per+1 [5]; Basic Speed-0.25 [-5]; Basic Move+1 [5]; SM +1.

Advantages: Doesn't Sleep [20]; Hard to Subdue 4 [8]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Injury Tolerance (No Blood) [5]; Reduced Consumption 4 (Cast-Iron Stomach, -50%) [4]; Resistant to Metabolic Hazards (+8) [15]; Temperature Tolerance 10 [10]; Unkillable 1 [50].

Disadvantages: Appearance (Monstrous) [-20]; Bad Temper (9) [-15]; Berserk (9) [-15]; Cannot Speak [-15]; Electrical [-20]; Low Empathy [-20]; No Sense of Humor [-10]; Social Stigma (Monster) [-15]; Vulnerability (Electricity x2) [-30]; Wealth (Dead Broke) [-25].

Features: Affected as Living; Sterile; Taboo Traits (Social Position).

Zombot

-158 points

Zombots are corpses reanimated by weird-science technology. They resemble the living, but their pallor and tinny voices betray them. Under their skin whirl motors that enhance strength and speed – motors that *can* be over-driven in emergencies, although maintenance is required afterward. While zombots aren't indestructible, and eventually (and abruptly) wear out, they can last a human lifetime with proper upkeep.

The secret of zombot animation is etheric fields. The construct's head contains a transceiver for these uncanny energies, and inbound signals bring both commands and power – whoever controls the central transmitter is master of the zombots. Strong electromagnetic fields can jam these broadcasts, causing the zombots to grind gears and short-circuit. Zombots also use etheric waves to coordinate with their allies, and these emissions aren't entirely harmless to small living things.

Attribute Modifiers: ST+3 [30]; IQ-2 [-40].

Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: HP+2 [4]; Basic Move+2 [10].

Advantages: Damage Resistance 2 [10]; Inexorable (pp. 69-70) [65]; Intact Corpse (pp. 68-69) [40]; Lifting ST 4 [12]; Telesend (Broadcast, +50%; Racial, -20%; Reliable 6, +30%; Vague, -50%) [33].

Disadvantages: Automaton (p. 69) [-85]; Cannot Learn [-30]; Dependency (Weird Energy; Occasional; Constantly) [-100]; Disturbing Voice [-10]; Lifebane [-10]; Maintenance (1 person; Monthly) [-2]; Not Unaging [-15]; Reprogrammable (Symbol of Authority, +50%) [-15]; Self-Destruct [-10]; Social Stigma (Monster) [-15]; Weakness (Strong EM Fields; 1d/30 minutes) [-5]; Wealth (Dead Broke) [-25].

Features: Extra Effort Costs HT; No Mental Skills; Taboo Traits (Social Position); Won't Become a Rotting Corpse.

THE CURSED

These supernatural zombies walk not because of magic spells (compare *Necromantic Reanimates*, pp. 99-101) or Generic Fantasy Evil™ (as with *Fantasy Monsters*, pp. 95-96), but as a consequence of the more traditional and nuanced variety of curse. Common examples are the evil person doomed to join the walking dead as punishment, the dead soul sent back to punish the sinful living, and the innocent-but-weak-willed individual turned into the still-living slave of a demonic force. Whatever the case may be, such zombies ought to worry would-be monster-hunters on a *moral* level.

What defines the cursed zombie more than any other feature is a perverse drive to uphold whatever cursed it. A free-willed being would treat this as Extreme Fanaticism (p. B136). For these creatures, it's expressed as a -15-point Zombie Motivation, which is a disadvantage of identical severity and which the GM may opt to handle using the same game mechanics.

Just the Stats: Zombot

ST: 13	HP: 15	Speed: 5.00
DX: 10	Will: 8	Move: 7
IQ: 8	Per: 8	
HT: 10	FP: N/A	SM: 0

Dodge: 8	Parry: 8 (Unarmed)	DR: 2
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Grapple (10): Effective ST 17. Reach C.

Punch (10): 1d-1 crushing. Reach C.

Traits: Affected as Dead; Cannot Learn; Dependency (Weird Energy; Constantly); Disturbing Voice; Doesn't Breathe; Doesn't Eat or Drink; Doesn't Sleep; Extra Effort Costs HT; Fragile (Unnatural); Hidebound; High Pain Threshold; Immunity to Metabolic Hazards; Immunity to Mind Control; Incurious (6); Indomitable; Injury Tolerance (No Blood, Unliving); Lifebane; Lifting ST 4; Low Empathy; Maintenance (1 person; Monthly); No Sense of Humor; Reprogrammable (Symbol of Authority); Self-Destruct; Single-Minded; Slave Mentality; Social Stigma (Monster); Supernatural Features (No Body Heat, No Pulse, Pallor); Telesend; Temperature Tolerance 10; Unfazeable; Unhealing (Total); Weakness (Strong EM Fields; 1d/30 minutes).

Notes: Cannot have mental skills, but sometimes created with combat skills (and armed appropriately).

Judgment's Legionary

3 points

Some claim that during the End Days, the dead will be sent back into the world to punish sinners. These are Judgment's Legionaries. They're solidified spirits with the outward appearance of the deceased's current form: fly-blown corpse, crispy burn victim, cut-up autopsy subject . . . anything goes, provided that the visuals are monstrous. Such zombies mindlessly exact whatever their divine master deems fair reckoning – typically in a grossly physical way. Of course, this might not seem particularly just to mortals. But once in a rare while, these creatures remember *life*, which may give victims a moment to flee.

Judgment's Legionaries can function only where their master's power reaches. This would normally be Dependency (Sanctity; Common; Constantly) [-50], but in worlds overrun by zombies in the End Times, it's safe to say that spots consecrated such that this actually presents a problem will be rare indeed! Thus, sanctity is considered "Very Common."

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

Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: HP-2 [-4]; Per+2 [10].

Advantages: Damage Resistance 5 [25]; Detect (Sinners) [20*]; Inexorable (pp. 69-70) [65]; Solidified Spirit (p. 69) [59]; Terror (Always On, -20%) [24].

Disadvantages: Automaton (p. 69) [-85]; Bloodlust (9) [-15]; Cannot Learn [-30]; Dependency (Sanctity; Very Common; Constantly) [-25]; Disturbing Voice [-10]; Frightens Animals [-10]; Legally Dead (p. 70) [-45]; Zombie Motivation (Do the work of Judgment, marching silently into oblivion if so commanded) [-15].

Quirks: Glimpses of Clarity [-1].

* Priced identically to Detect (Humans) because in settings where this matters, we're *all* sinners but for those who have -20 points or worse in "good" disadvantages such as Charitable, Honesty, and Truthfulness.

Possessed Thrall

-125 points

In many belief systems, gods, demon lords, and similar powerful spirits are bound by a body of complex rules – often a treaty ending a theomachy, or the pronouncements of a supreme creator on a higher plane – which prohibits direct intervention in the world. However, such laws may give them leave to manifest *indirectly* via cults, artifacts of power, and so on. Legalistic divinities, particularly unpleasant ones, often exploit loopholes that permit

them to dominate living people. Their ideal victims are those whose willpower has been compromised by brain injury, drugs, or mental illness, and who have consequently fallen between the cracks of human society in a way that means odd behavior goes unremarked (whence the Social Stigma).

These individuals spend most of their time standing around tirelessly – day and night – staring blankly and awaiting orders. However, they can speak normally, learn, etc. if their personal faculties and remaining IQ allow. The sole *physical* sign of their affliction is a small hallmark of their possessor: stigmata, buzzing flies, etc.

Attribute Modifiers: IQ-2 [-40].

Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: Basic Speed-1.00 [-20]; Basic Move+1 [5].

Advantages: Doesn't Sleep [20]; Immunity to Mind Control* [30]; Indomitable [15]; Night Vision 2 [2]; Single-Minded [5].

Just the Stats: Judgment's Legionary

ST: 12	HP: 10	Speed: 6.00
DX: 12	Will: 8	Move: 6
IQ: 8	Per: 10	
HT: 12	FP: N/A	SM: 0
Dodge: 9	Parry: 9 (Unarmed)	DR: 5

Grapple (12): Reach C.

Punch (12): 1d-2 crushing. Reach C.

Terror (Resisted by Will): Roll a Fright Check on sight!

Traits: Affected as Dead; Appearance (Monstrous); Bloodlust (9); Cannot Learn; Dependency (Sanctity; Constantly); Detect (Sinners); Disturbing Voice; Doesn't Breathe; Doesn't Eat or Drink; Doesn't Sleep; Fragile (Unnatural); Frightens Animals; Glimpses of Clarity; Hidebound; High Pain Threshold; Immunity to Metabolic Hazards; Immunity to Mind Control; Incurious (6); Indomitable; Injury Tolerance (Homogenous, No Blood); Low Empathy; No Sense of Humor; Single-Minded; Slave Mentality; Social Stigma (Dead); Temperature Tolerance 10; Unaging; Unfazeable; Unhealing (Total); Vacuum Support; Zombie Motivation (Do the work of Judgment).

Notes: Might be unarmed and groping, or have weapon skills and weapons (up to and including flaming swords).

Just the Stats: Possessed Thrall

ST: 10	HP: 10	Speed: 4.00
DX: 10	Will: 8	Move: 5
IQ: 8	Per: 8	
HT: 10	FP: 10	SM: 0
Dodge: 7	Parry: 8 (Unarmed)	DR: 0

Grapple (10): Reach C.

Punch (10): 1d-3 crushing. Reach C.

Traits: Affected as Living; Doesn't Sleep; Dread (Anything holy to an opposing power; 1 yard); Glimpses of Clarity; Hidebound; Immunity to Mind Control; Incurious (6); Indomitable; Low Empathy; Night Vision 2; No Sense of Humor; Single-Minded; Slave Mentality; Social Stigma (Second-Class Citizen); Unnatural Features 1; Zombie Motivation (Serve the master blindly).

Notes: Typically pathetic, but with dangerous, high-ST exceptions armed with pitchforks, rusty scissors, broken bottles, etc.

Just the Stats: Selfish Dead

ST: 13	HP: 10	Speed: 6.00
DX: 10	Will: 12	Move: 6
IQ: 10	Per: 10	
HT: 12	FP: N/A	SM: 0
Dodge: 9	Parry: 8 (Unarmed)	DR: 0

Grapple (10): Effective ST 16. Reach C.

Punch (10): 1d-1 crushing. Reach C.

Traits: Affected as Dead; Appearance (Monstrous); Can Be Turned By True Faith; Cannot Learn; Destiny; Disturbing Voice; Doesn't Breathe; Doesn't Eat or Drink; Doesn't Sleep; Frightens Animals; Functions and Detects as Evil; Hidebound; High Pain Threshold; Immunity to Metabolic Hazards; Incurious (12); Indomitable; Injury Tolerance (Homogenous, No Blood); Intolerance (The Living); Lifebane; Lifting ST 3 (Grip ST); Low Empathy; No Sense of Humor; Single-Minded; Social Stigma (Dead); Temperature Tolerance 10; Unaging; Unfazeable; Unhealing (Total); Unkillable 1; Vacuum Support; Vulnerability (Blessed Weapons x2); Zombie Motivation (Seek closure at any cost).

Notes: Dishonorable warriors are apt to have combat skills and superior ST, DX, and HT, though any weapons are likely to be decayed (treat as cheap).

Disadvantages: Automaton (p. 69) [-85]; Dread (Anything holy to an opposing power; 1 yard) [-10]; Social Stigma (Second-Class Citizen) [-5]; Unnatural Features 1 [-1]; Wealth (Dead Broke) [-25]; Zombie Motivation (Serve the master blindly) [-15].

Quirks: Glimpses of Clarity [-1].

Features: Affected as Living; Taboo Traits (Social Position).

* Except for their *dominator's* control, of course!

Selfish Dead

69 points

This is the remnant of someone who either broke an oath – probably one sworn in his god's name, typically to defend some cause to the death or otherwise accept death before dishonor – or made a pact with diabolical forces to linger for self-interested reasons such as wreaking vengeance. It's doomed to wander in a horrific material form, a tormented slave to its wrongs, until the situation is resolved: it fights a final battle and moves on to its reward, it has its revenge and is summarily consigned to Hell, or something similar. While willful, it lacks *free* will. Its curse determines its actions, and it's a slave to a Higher (or Lower) Power in most ways that matter.

Attribute Modifiers: ST+3 [30]; HT+2 [20].

Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: HP-3 [-6]; Will+2 [10]; Basic Speed+0.50 [10].

Advantages: Indomitable [15]; Lifting ST 3 (Grip ST, -30%) [7]; No Fragile (Unnatural) [50]; Single-Minded [5]; Solidified Spirit (p. 69) [59]; Unfazeable [15]; Unkillable 1 [50].

Disadvantages: Cannot Learn [-30]; Destiny [-15*]; Disturbing Voice [-10]; Frightens Animals [-10]; Hidebound [-5]; Incurious (12) [-5]; Intolerance (The Living) [-10]; Legally Dead (p. 70) [-45]; Lifebane [-10]; Low Empathy [-20]; No Sense of Humor [-10]; Vulnerability (Blessed Weapons x2) [-10]; Zombie Motivation (Seek closure at any cost) [-15].

Quirks: Can Be Turned By True Faith [-1].

Features: Functions and Detects as Evil.

* Adjust cost for more- or less-realizable Destinies.

FANTASY MONSTERS

These zombies exemplify the sinister, free-roaming lesser undead ubiquitous in fantasy RPGs. Unlike necromantic reanimates (pp. 99-101), they aren't servitors and are intrinsically *evil*. This has several ramifications:

- Anything that detects evil will sense them.
- They attack the living on sight.
- True Faith can turn them.
- Their touch despoils holy places and items.
- Blessed weapons inflict double injury.
- Holy water and healing spells deal them 1d injury (once per minute in either case, so effectively once per battle).

It's convenient to collect the traits behind these properties as a meta-trait:

Unholy Dead: Desecrator [1]; Intolerance (The Living) [-10]; Vulnerability (Blessed Weapons x2) [-10]; Weakness

(Healing Spells; 1d/minute) [-20]; Weakness (Holy Water; 1d/minute; Variable, -40%) [-12]; Can Be Turned By True Faith [-1]; and Functions and Detects as Evil [0]. -52 points.

Occasionally, undead with this meta-trait can't exist without the unholiness of one particular dungeon or burial place. That's Dependency (Sanctity; Rare; Constantly) [-150], lowering template costs by 150 points. Adding this disadvantage enables heroes who are losing the battle to survive by fleeing, and explains why fantasy towns aren't overrun by hungry ghouls following adventurers' scent trails.

Bloated Carcass

-150 points

This walking corpse resembles a grossly overweight person. In fact, it's puffed up with toxic gas. On sighting the living, it waddles toward them with no thought to defense, attempting to slam – and anyone in close combat with it must roll at HT+1 to avoid disease. It's so rotten that it takes double injury from *all* blows, not just blessed weapons, and explodes for 6d×2 crushing damage if destroyed. Those wounded by the blast have to roll to avoid disease, if they haven't already, *and* roll at HT-1 or suffer 1d toxic damage repeating at hourly intervals for six cycles.

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

Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: HP+9 [18]; Basic Speed+0.50 [10]; Basic Move-1 [-5].

Advantages: Inexorable (pp. 69-70) [65]; Infravision [10]; Rotting Corpse (p. 69) [24].

Perks: Pestilent Presence [1]; Toxic [1].

Disadvantages: Berserk (Battle Rage, +50%) (9) [-22]; Cannot Learn [-30]; Fragile (Explosive) [-15]; Hidebound [-5]; Legally Dead (p. 70) [-45]; Low Empathy [-20]; Mute [-25]; No Sense of Humor [-10]; Unholy Dead [-52]; Vulnerability (Blessed Weapons x2 becomes All Physical x2) [-30].

Features: No Mental Skills; Won't Become a Skeleton.

Ghoul

34 points

The ghouls look superficially human, but unpleasant differences become apparent up close: claws, flesh-rending teeth, and the stench of decay. It must feed daily on the living or perish. Its strength, speed, and keen senses let it accomplish this with disturbing ease – and being clawed or even touched on bare skin paralyzes the victim (HT roll to avoid), whereupon the ghouls may start eating at once. The rare survivor is still in danger; ghouls wounds are prone to infection (HT roll or be diseased). Ghouls *can* learn and may develop high levels of Brawling, Stealth, and Tracking; however, this is animal cunning, as they possess no trace of humanity.

Attribute Modifiers: ST+3 [30]; DX+2 [40]; HT+2 [20].

Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: HP+2 [4]; Per+2 [10]; Basic Move+1 [5].

Advantages: Claws (Blunt) [3]; Discriminatory Smell [15]; Infravision [10]; Inexorable (pp. 69-70) [65]; Intact Corpse (pp. 68-69) [40]; Paralyzing Scratch (p. 50) [25]; Striking ST 2 (One Attack Only, Bite, -60%) [4]; Teeth (Sharp) [1].

Perks: Pestilent Wounds [1].

Just the Stats: Bloated Carcass

ST: 11 **HP:** 20 **Speed:** 5.00
DX: 9 **Will:** 10 **Move:** 4
IQ: 10 **Per:** 10
HT: 9 **FP:** N/A **SM:** 0

Dodge: 8 **Parry:** 7 (Unarmed) **DR:** 0

Clumsy Slap (9): 1d-2 crushing. Reach C. Often All-Out for +4 to hit!

Slam (9): 1d-1 crushing. Often All-Out for +4 to hit!

Traits: Affected as Dead; Appearance (Monstrous); Bad Smell; Berserk (Battle Rage) (9); Can Be Turned By True Faith; Cannot Learn; Desecrator; Doesn't Breathe; Doesn't Eat or Drink; Doesn't Sleep; Fragile (Explosive, Unnatural); Functions and Detects as Evil; Hidebound; High Pain Threshold; Immunity to Metabolic Hazards; Immunity to Mind Control; Indomitable; Infravision; Injury Tolerance (No Blood, Unliving); Intolerance (The Living); Low Empathy; Mute; No Sense of Humor; Pestilent Presence; Single-Minded; Social Stigma (Dead); Temperature Tolerance 10; Toxic; Unaging; Unfazeable; Unhealing (Total); Vulnerability (All Physical x2); Weakness (Healing Spells; 1d/minute); Weakness (Holy Water; 1d/minute; Variable, -40%).

Notes: Cannot have mental skills. Explodes dangerously!

Just the Stats: Ghoul

ST: 13 **HP:** 15 **Speed:** 6.00
DX: 12 **Will:** 10 **Move:** 7
IQ: 10 **Per:** 12
HT: 12 **FP:** N/A **SM:** 0

Dodge: 9 **Parry:** 9 (Unarmed) **DR:** 0

Bite (12): 1d cutting. Pestilent. Reach C.

Paralyzing Scratch (12): 1d crushing + HT roll or paralysis for minutes equal to margin of failure. Pestilent. Reach C.

Traits: Affected as Dead; Bad Smell; Bestial; Can Be Turned By True Faith; Dependency (Human Flesh; Daily); Desecrator; Discriminatory Smell (Smell 16);

Disturbing Voice; Doesn't Breathe; Doesn't Sleep; Fragile (Unnatural); Functions and Detects as Evil; Hidebound; High Pain Threshold; Immunity to Metabolic Hazards; Immunity to Mind Control; Indomitable; Infravision; Injury Tolerance (No Blood, Unliving); Intolerance (The Living); Low Empathy; No Sense of Humor; Single-Minded; Social Stigma (Dead); Supernatural Features (No Body Heat, No Pulse, Pallor); Temperature Tolerance 10; Unaging; Uncontrollable Appetite (Flesh) (9); Unfazeable; Unhealing (Total); Vulnerability (Blessed Weapons x2); Weakness (Healing Spells; 1d/minute); Weakness (Holy Water; 1d/minute; Variable, -40%).

Notes: Can have skills, but never uses weapons.

Just the Stats: Lurcher

ST: 14 **HP:** 15 **Speed:** 5.00
DX: 10 **Will:** 12 **Move:** 4
IQ: 8 **Per:** 8
HT: 10 **FP:** N/A **SM:** 0

Dodge: 8 **Parry:** 8 (Unarmed) **DR:** 0

Punch (10): 1d-1 crushing. Reach C.

Sprinting Slam (10): 1d+1 crushing.

Traits: Affected as Dead; Appearance (Monstrous); Bad Smell; Bloodlust (12); Can Be Turned By True Faith; Cannot Learn; Desecrator; Doesn't Breathe; Doesn't Eat or Drink; Doesn't Sleep; Enhanced Move 1 (Ground Speed 8); Fragile (Unnatural); Functions and Detects as Evil; Hidebound; High Pain Threshold; Immunity to Metabolic Hazards; Immunity to Mind Control; Indomitable; Infravision; Injury Tolerance (No Blood, Unliving); Intolerance (The Living); Low Empathy; Mute; No Sense of Humor; Single-Minded; Social Stigma (Dead); Temperature Tolerance 10; Unaging; Unfazeable; Unhealing (Total); Vulnerability (Blessed Weapons x2); Weakness (Healing Spells; 1d/minute); Weakness (Holy Water; 1d/minute; Variable, -40%).

Notes: Cannot have mental skills, but often possesses combat skills, weapons, and above-average physical attributes.

Disadvantages: Bad Smell [-10]; Dependency (Human Flesh; Common; Illegal; Daily) [-45]; Disturbing Voice [-10]; Inhuman (p. 70) [-45]; Legally Dead (p. 70) [-45]; No Doesn't Eat or Drink [-10]; Uncontrollable Appetite (Flesh) (9) [-22]; Unholy Dead [-52].

Features: Won't Become a Rotting Corpse.

Lurcher

-61 points

Lurchers are old-fashioned zombies that get up and start walking around when there's enough evil in the air. Their noteworthy traits are great strength and an uncanny ability to lunge forward with surprising speed to close the gap with fleeing victims. They're also willful and difficult to

turn. While menacing enough as unarmed fighters, many are former warriors, and possess combat skills and above-average physical attributes.

Attribute Modifiers: ST+4 [40]; IQ-2 [-40].

Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: HP+1 [2]; Will+4 [20]; Basic Move-1 [-5].

Advantages: Enhanced Move 1 (Ground) [20]; Inexorable (pp. 69-70) [65]; Infravision [10]; Rotting Corpse (p. 69) [24].

Disadvantages: Bloodlust (12) [-10]; Cannot Learn [-30]; Hidebound [-5]; Legally Dead (p. 70) [-45]; Low Empathy [-20]; Mute [-25]; No Sense of Humor [-10]; Unholy Dead [-52].

Features: No Mental Skills; Won't Become a Skeleton.

THE INFECTED

The infected are *living* zombies made mindless by plague – often one contracted in a top-secret facility, from a test subject (human or animal), or even from human remains sealed in an ancient tomb. They're driven to bite and eat the living, but their condition weakens them enough that their attacks are unlikely to *kill*. They only take flesh sufficient for a meal, leaving a wounded victim who has good odds of becoming infected himself.

These zombies are nobody's slaves and have no ties to the supernatural. In theory, science might even be able to cure them. Regardless, their disease has effectively turned them into a species different from humanity – perhaps literally, as it seems to alter DNA.

All infected share a basic template, which can be used as a meta-trait when creating new subtypes.

Infected

-285 points

The infected are sickly and dull, with no motivation beyond biting chunks out of uninfected humans (missed meals cause slow starvation, not rapid HP loss; see p. B426), though sometimes they appear to be captivated by a building or a person. While of little danger individually, it's rare to encounter just one – their condition drives them to shriek hideously upon sighting prey, bringing nearby infected stumbling to dinner, groping as they try to bite off a mouthful. Dissuading them is difficult, as they don't experience pain and tend to survive horrific wounds.

Observation suggests that the infected don't sleep as such but mill around in some sort of daze between meals, which appears to serve a similar purpose. Beyond the behavioral signs, they're easily recognized by their red eyes, green-gray skin, and staggering gait (not to mention the smell of their last meal rotting between their teeth). The condition is known to kill within a year, and all attempted "cures" have proven fatal.

This affliction is of course contagious. Bites that reach flesh start the infection process, visible as a spreading "spider web" of black veins. Anybody with unhealed wounds from bites *or* the ensuing infection (Plague Bite) – from one or several infected – must roll vs. total HP of injury from these sources upon awakening from any sleep. Subtract 3, 8, or 15 from injury for Resistant to Disease (+3), (+8), or Immunity to Disease, respectively. Any "success" means the victim wakes up infected!

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

Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: Basic Speed+0.25 [5].

Advantages: Acute Hearing 2 [4]; Hard to Kill 3 [6]; Hard to Subdue 3 [6]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Plague Bite (p. 53) 1d [9].

Perks: Penetrating Voice [1].

Disadvantages: Bad Smell [-10]; Bad Temper (9) [-15]; Cannot Learn [-30]; Disturbing Voice [-10]; Inhuman (p. 70) [-45]; Restricted Diet (Human Flesh) [-20]; Social Stigma (Monster) [-15]; Terminally Ill (1 year) [-75]; Unnatural Features 5 [-5]; Weakness (Cure; 1d/minute; Difficult to Administer, Injection, -50%; Irreversible, +100%) [-15]; Wealth (Dead Broke) [-25].

Quirks: Glimpses of Clarity [-1].

Features: Affected as Living; Infectious; Sterile; Taboo Traits (Social Position).

*KV had a 90% kill rate,
that's 5.4 billion people dead.
Crashed and bled out. Dead.
Less than 1% immunity. That left
12 million healthy people . . .*

– Robert Neville,
in *I Am Legend*

Variant Strains

Basic infected aren't *that* daunting for people in armor or who are athletic enough to stay ahead of mobs. Some cinematic interpretations are scarier! Add one or both of these lenses to crank up the terror. Such modified zombies might be the standard variety (as in many films) or unusual subtypes.

Enraged

+45 points

The infection's standard lifecycle is "a weak zombie bites someone, who's left alive to sicken and then infect many others before dying." This calls for aggressive, inhuman behavior, but not ripping victims apart. The enraged variant deprives the infected of all concern for their own survival as they violently tear into prey. It's either a less successful strain or one that selects for the fittest carriers.

Advantages: Indomitable [15]; Striking ST 6 [30]; Unfazeable [15].

Disadvantages: Berserk (Vicious, +0%) (9) [-15].

Fast

+45 points

More useful to the pathogen's success is an enhanced ability to run down and bite prey.

Attribute Modifiers: DX+1 [20].

Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: Basic Speed+0.75 [15].

Advantages: Enhanced Move 0.5 (Ground) [10].

Prognoses

Two further options could fit any infected:

Returner: Add Extra Life (Reanimation, -20%) [20]; remove Terminally Ill (1 year). **Notes:** When the infected die, they're back a few seconds later as undead – perhaps as plague ghouls (pp. 90-91). 95 points.

The Zombies Won: Remove Wealth (Dead Broke) [-25]. **Notes:** Since wealth won't matter in an apocalypse, apply this adjustment to get a fair cost. 25 points.

Just the Stats: Infected

ST: 9 **HP:** 9 **Speed:** 5.00
DX: 10 **Will:** 8 **Move:** 5
IQ: 8 **Per:** 8
HT: 9 **FP:** 9 **SM:** 0
Dodge: 8 **Parry:** 8 (Unarmed) **DR:** 0

Grapple (10): Reach C.

Plague Bite (10): 1d-3 crushing + HT-4 roll or 1d toxic repeating hourly for three hours, with -3 ST, DX, IQ, and HT after losing 2/3 HP. Reach C.

Traits: Acute Hearing 2 (Hearing 10); Affected as Living; Bad Smell; Bad Temper (9); Bestial; Cannot Learn; Disturbing Voice; Glimpses of Clarity; Hard to Kill 3; Hard to Subdue 3; Hidebound; High Pain Threshold; Infectious; Low Empathy; No Sense of Humor; Penetrating Voice; Restricted Diet (Human Flesh); Social Stigma (Monster); Terminally Ill (1 year); Unnatural Features 5; Weakness (Cure; 1d/minute).

Notes: Retains skills useful to its survival, but can have no new skills.

Just the Stats: Enraged Infected

ST: 9 **HP:** 9 **Speed:** 5.00
DX: 10 **Will:** 8 **Move:** 5
IQ: 8 **Per:** 8
HT: 9 **FP:** 9 **SM:** 0
Dodge: 8 **Parry:** 8 (Unarmed) **DR:** 0

Grapple (10): Reach C. Often All-Out for +4 to hit!

Plague Bite (10): 1d crushing + toxic effects as for infected. Reach C. Often All-Out for +4 to hit!

Traits: As infected, plus Berserk (Vicious) (9), Indomitable, Striking ST 6, and Unfazeable.

Just the Stats: Fast Infected

ST: 9 **HP:** 9 **Speed:** 6.00
DX: 11 **Will:** 8 **Move:** 6
IQ: 8 **Per:** 8
HT: 9 **FP:** 9 **SM:** 0
Dodge: 9 **Parry:** 8 (Unarmed) **DR:** 0

Grapple (11): Reach C.

Plague Bite (11): 1d-3 crushing + toxic effects as for infected. Reach C.

Traits: As infected, plus Enhanced Move 0.5 (Ground Speed 9).

Just the Stats: Fast, Enraged Infected

ST: 9 **HP:** 9 **Speed:** 6.00
DX: 11 **Will:** 8 **Move:** 6
IQ: 8 **Per:** 8
HT: 9 **FP:** 9 **SM:** 0
Dodge: 9 **Parry:** 8 (Unarmed) **DR:** 0

Grapple (11): Reach C. Often All-Out for +4 to hit!

Plague Bite (11): 1d crushing + toxic effects as for infected. Reach C. Often All-Out for +4 to hit!

Traits: As infected, plus Berserk (Vicious) (9), Enhanced Move 0.5 (Ground Speed 9), Indomitable, Striking ST 6, and Unfazeable.

THE INFESTED

Zombies created by parasites fall into two sweeping categories. The larger of these classes involves microscopic organisms; such zombies are almost indistinguishable from the infected (pp. 97-98), and use the same stats. Then there are the *interesting* ones caused by macroscopic *things* that peer out of eye-sockets or boil from bodily orifices when the unfortunate host is finally destroyed. Such zombies may be living or undead, depending on whether the critters control their subject or bodily replace him beneath his skin.

Buzzing Corpse

54 points

This is a cadaver colonized by beetle-like “corpse-bugs” that cooperate to run the dead body as a mobile nest. The host provides the outermost skin, as well as a skeleton for rigidity (thus, his build influences the zombie’s strength), while the densely packed bugs provide motive power and secrete chemicals that preserve the corpse. The hive feeds by sending out workers to fetch rotting waste and carrion, but this is unrelated to how it spreads . . .

Buzzing corpses hunt *live* people to turn into fresh cadavers that will house daughter hives. They can locate prey by movement alone, and attack viciously by swinging fists and sending a few soldiers outside to bite. Once the victim is well-murdered, a cohort of corpse-bugs moves in and starts eating and reproducing. Left undisturbed, a new buzzing corpse will rise in about a month (2d+20 days). Existing ones seem to “guard” their kill, so it’s possible to encounter several at once.

A buzzing corpse doesn’t have its victim’s mind. The new tenants consume the brain, but all they absorb from this is a basic grasp of how to manipulate the body. Still, while individual corpse-bugs are barely sentient (IQ 1), *colonies* possess a respectable collective intelligence – especially if the brain was large and bright enough. And unlike many low-IQ zombies, they can *learn*.

Buzzing corpses could be deemed “undead” by virtue of being walking cadavers, but the creatures inside are alive – they eat and breathe, breed and heal. They show as much will to live as any human, and can use extra effort. While tough, they’re still susceptible to hazards such as poison gas and high temperatures. In campaigns where magic exists, they’re subject to spells that affect *insects*, not ones that target the undead.

Attribute Modifiers: ST+10 [100]; IQ-5 [-100]; HT+2 [20].

Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: HP+20 [40]; Will+5 [25]; Per+5 [25]; Basic Speed+0.50 [10].

Advantages: Doesn't Sleep [20]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Indomitable [15]; Resistant to Metabolic Hazards (+3) [10]; Injury Tolerance (Homogenous, No Blood) [45]; Reduced Consumption 4 (Cast-Iron Stomach, -50%) [4]; Unaging [15]; Unfazeable [15]; Vibration Sense (Air) [10].

Perks: Swarm (Crawlers) [1].

Disadvantages: Appearance (Horrific; Universal, +25%) [-30]; Bad Smell [-10]; Bloodlust (6) [-20]; Inhuman (p. 70) [-45]; Legally Dead (p. 70) [-45]; Mute [-25]; No Sense of Smell/Taste [-5]; Numb [-20]; Zombie Motivation (Make new homes for new hives) [-10].

Quirks: Sexless [-1].

Features: Affected as Insects; Won't Become a Rotting Corpse or a Skeleton.

Infester

-97 points

The infester is a *living* person whose brain has been occupied by something resembling a pallid, needle-headed worm. This organism drives its subject to do the mindless minimum necessary to stay alive – speech is beyond him, and he's in no state to uphold his social position, though the GM may wish to game out the slow slide to the street or loony bin (especially for hosts with high Status and Wealth). The victim's behavior is the sole sign that he isn't an ordinary human; there's no weird coloration change or visible decay. When the worm reproduces through fission, which occurs at intervals of 2d days after infestation, the zombie goes in search of an uninfested human.

A hunting infester will try to grapple its prey, after which the home-seeking worm will erupt from the mouth and thrust its way into the victim's body; treat this as a bite, rolled at DX. If this does *any* injury, the victim gets a single HT roll, at -5 if the infester targeted the face (DX-5) or -7 if it targeted the skull (DX-7). Failure means that he'll become an infester in (HT - 10) full days, minimum a day, unless the worm is surgically excised in the interim (a Surgery roll, at -3 for the head or chest). Once an infester has succeeded at its task, it will try to flee – though it will fight back robotically, preferring All-Out Defense, if need be.

Attribute Modifiers: ST+4 [40]; IQ-4 [-80].

Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: HP-4 [-8]; Per+4 [20]; Basic Move+1 [5].

Advantages: Hard to Kill 2 [4]; Hard to Subdue 2 [4]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Indomitable [15]; Lifting ST 4 (Grip ST, -30%) [9]; Striking ST 4 (One Attack Only, Bite, -60%) [8]; Teeth (Sharp Beak) [1]; Unfazeable [15].

Disadvantages: Cannot Learn [-30]; Cannot Speak [-15]; Incurious (6) [-10]; Inhuman (p. 70) [-45]; Wealth (Dead Broke) [-25]; Zombie Motivation (Do the minimum needed to survive, but seek hosts relentlessly when the time is right) [-15].

Features: Affected as Living; Infectious; Taboo Traits (Social Position).

Just the Stats: Buzzing Corpse

ST: 20	HP: 40	Speed: 6.00
DX: 10	Will: 10	Move: 6
IQ: 5	Per: 10	
HT: 12	FP: 12	SM: 0

Dodge: 9 **Parry:** 8 (Unarmed) **DR:** 0

Biting Swarm: 1d cutting. Appears on 12 or less. Dispersed by 20 HP. Reach C.

Punch (10): 2d-2 crushing. Reach C.

Traits: Affected as Insects; Appearance (Horrific); Bad Smell; Bestial; Bloodlust (6); Doesn't Sleep; Hidebound; High Pain Threshold; Indomitable; Injury Tolerance (Homogenous, No Blood); Low Empathy; Mute; No Sense of Humor; No Sense of Smell/Taste; Numb; Reduced Consumption 4 (Cast-Iron Stomach); Resistant to Metabolic Hazards (+3); Social Stigma (Dead); Unaging; Unfazeable; Vibration Sense (Air); Zombie Motivation (Make new homes for new hives).

Notes: May have any skill that an IQ 5 animal might have. If destroyed before its swarm, the swarm has Move 4.

Just the Stats: Infester

ST: 14	HP: 10	Speed: 5.00
DX: 10	Will: 6	Move: 6
IQ: 6	Per: 10	
HT: 10	FP: 10	SM: 0

Dodge: 8 **Parry:** 8 (Unarmed) **DR:** 0

Grapple (10): Effective ST 18. Reach C. Often All-Out for +4 to hit!

Worm Thrust (10): 1d+1 large piercing. Reach C. Often All-Out for +4 to hit!

Traits: Affected as Living; Bestial; Cannot Learn; Cannot Speak; Hard to Kill 2; Hard to Subdue 2; Hidebound; High Pain Threshold; Incurious (6); Indomitable; Infectious; Lifting ST 4 (Grip ST); Low Empathy; No Sense of Humor; Unfazeable; Zombie Motivation (Do the minimum needed to survive, but seek hosts relentlessly when the time is right).

Notes: Doesn't use weapons, but tougher hosts may give better physical attributes and even unarmed combat skills.

NECROMANTIC REANIMATES

These are undead servitors animated by low-powered necromancy. In the standard magic system, that means the Zombie spell (*GURPS Magic*, p. 151) – although these templates differ somewhat from the ones in *Magic*, mainly because they assume “Very Common” mana. Other varieties of magic might raise similar zombies. Simply replace Dependency (Mana) with a more suitable disadvantage:

Just the Stats: Reanimated Corpse

ST: 11 **HP:** 15 **Speed:** 5.00
DX: 10 **Will:** 8 **Move:** 5
IQ: 8 **Per:** 8
HT: 10 **FP:** N/A **SM:** 0
Dodge: 8 **Parry:** 8 (Unarmed) **DR:** 0

Grapple (10): Reach C.

Punch (10): 1d-2 crushing. Reach C.

Traits: Affected as Dead; Appearance (Monstrous); Bad Smell; Cannot Learn; Dependency (Mana; Constantly); Disturbing Voice; Doesn't Breathe; Doesn't Eat or Drink; Doesn't Sleep; Fragile (Unnatural); Hidebound; High Pain Threshold; Immunity to Metabolic Hazards; Immunity to Mind Control; Incurious (6); Indomitable; Injury Tolerance (No Blood, Unliving); Low Empathy; No Sense of Humor; No Sense of Smell/Taste; Reprogrammable; Single-Minded; Slave Mentality; Social Stigma (Dead); Temperature Tolerance 10; Unaging; Unfazeable; Unhealing (Total).

Notes: Cannot have mental skills. Commonly made from a warrior, meaning better ST, DX, and/or HT, a weapon skill, a suitable weapon, and armor. Will eventually become a skeleton.

Just the Stats: Reanimated Mummy

ST: 11 **HP:** 15 **Speed:** 5.00
DX: 10 **Will:** 10 **Move:** 5
IQ: 10 **Per:** 10
HT: 10 **FP:** N/A **SM:** 0
Dodge: 8 **Parry:** 8 (Unarmed) **DR:** 0

Grapple (10): Reach C.

Punch (10): 1d-2 crushing. Reach C.

Traits: Affected as Dead; Appearance (Monstrous); Cannot Learn; Dependency (Mana; Constantly);

Disturbing Voice; Doesn't Breathe; Doesn't Eat or Drink; Doesn't Sleep; Fragile (Combustible, Unnatural); Hidebound; High Pain Threshold; Immunity to Metabolic Hazards; Immunity to Mind Control; Incurious (6); Indomitable; Injury Tolerance (No Blood, No Brain, No Vitals, Unliving); Low Empathy; No Sense of Humor; Reprogrammable; Single-Minded; Slave Mentality; Social Stigma (Dead); Temperature Tolerance 10; Unaging; Unfazeable; Unhealing (Total).

Notes: As for reanimated corpse, but *won't* become a skeleton.

Just the Stats: Reanimated Skeleton

ST: 9 **HP:** 9 **Speed:** 6.00
DX: 12 **Will:** 8 **Move:** 7
IQ: 8 **Per:** 8
HT: 10 **FP:** N/A **SM:** 0
Dodge: 9 **Parry:** 9 (Unarmed) **DR:** 2

Bony Claw (12): 1d-2 crushing. Reach C.

Grapple (12): Reach C.

Traits: Affected as Dead; Appearance (Monstrous); Cannot Float; Cannot Learn; Dependency (Mana; Constantly); Doesn't Breathe; Doesn't Eat or Drink; Doesn't Sleep; Fragile (Brittle, Unnatural); Hidebound; High Pain Threshold; Immunity to Metabolic Hazards; Immunity to Mind Control; Incurious (6); Indomitable; Injury Tolerance (No Blood, No Brain, No Eyes, No Vitals, Unliving); Low Empathy; Mute; No Sense of Humor; No Sense of Smell/Taste; Reprogrammable; Single-Minded; Skinny; Slave Mentality; Social Stigma (Dead); Temperature Tolerance 10; Unaging; Unfazeable; Unhealing (Total); Vacuum Support; Vulnerability (Crushing x2).

Notes: As for reanimated corpse, but *already* a skeleton.

Alchemical Animates: Replace Dependency (Mana) with Dependency (Elixir; Rare; Monthly) [-30]. **Notes:** The zombie requires monthly infusions of an elixir. -5 points.

Shamanic Summons: Replace Dependency (Mana) with Maintenance (1 person; Daily) [-10]. **Notes:** The zombie weakens without daily sacrifices to appease the spirits. 15 points.

Theurgic Thralls: Replace Dependency (Mana) with Dependency (Sanctity; Common; Constantly) [-50]. **Notes:** The zombie cannot function for long in areas inimical to the god behind the "clerical" magic that created it. -25 points.

Game-world details of how reanimation is accomplished can vary, too. Some rituals call minor spirits (*not* the soul of the body's original owner!) to occupy and animate the corpse. If these spirits are demonic, add Functions and Detects as Evil [0]. In other cases, magic alone physically moves the body around and gives the *appearance* of intelligence, much like a Create Servant spell. Regardless, these kinds of servitors cannot normally be "turned" using True Faith.

In all cases, necromantic reanimates are well-behaved thralls, not vicious monsters with sinister appetites (compare *Fantasy Monsters*, pp. 95-96). The magic that empowers them preserves them moderately well – they'll last indefinitely, although walking corpses will rot into skeletons – but adds little in the way of extraordinary capabilities. On the other hand, they lack special flaws beyond the customary undead problem of falling to bits at -HP, and are completely fearless. Moreover, they're "clean," in that the energies which limit natural decay are hostile to infection.

Reanimated Corpse

-143 points

This fleshy, unembalmed corpse will eventually become a reanimated skeleton; see below. It's sufficiently intact to speak, but not to taste or smell (although it *stinks* well enough).

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

Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: HP+4 [8].

Advantages: Inexorable (pp. 69-70) [65]; Rotting Corpse (p. 69) [24].

Disadvantages: Automaton (p. 69) [-85]; Cannot Learn [-30]; Dependency (Mana; Very Common; Constantly) [-25]; Disturbing Voice [-10]; Legally Dead (p. 70) [-45]; No Sense of Smell/Taste [-5]; Reprogrammable [-10].

Features: No Mental Skills.

Reanimated Mummy

-82 points

This well-preserved cadaver has carefully embalmed organs.

Attribute Modifiers: ST+1 [10].

Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: HP+4 [8].

Advantages: Inexorable (pp. 69-70) [65]; Mummified Corpse (p. 69) [40].

Disadvantages: Automaton (p. 69) [-85]; Cannot Learn [-30]; Dependency (Mana; Very Common; Constantly) [-25]; Disturbing Voice [-10]; Legally Dead (p. 70) [-45]; Reprogrammable [-10].

Features: No Mental Skills.

Reanimated Skeleton

-139 points

This zombie is all bones – the flesh has rotted away, taking with it the capacity to speak, taste, or smell.

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

Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: Basic Speed+0.50 [10]; Basic Move+1 [5].

Advantages: Claws (Blunt) [3]; Inexorable (pp. 69-70) [65]; Skeletal Corpse (p. 69) [13].

Disadvantages: Automaton (p. 69) [-85]; Cannot Learn [-30]; Dependency (Mana; Very Common; Constantly) [-25]; Legally Dead (p. 70) [-45]; Mute [-25]; No Sense of Smell/Taste [-5]; Reprogrammable [-10].

Features: No Mental Skills.

SHATTERED MINDS

Not all zombies are obvious monsters or undead. Ordinary living people might end up mindless or crazy in ways that make them behave in a slavish or frightening manner. Such unfortunates have a meta-trait that's otherwise uncommon among zombies:

Asocial: Disturbing Voice [-10]; Low Empathy [-20]; Wealth (Dead Broke) [-25]; Glimpses of Clarity [-1]; and Taboo Traits (Social Position). **Notes:** A severe psychiatric problem prevents you from functioning socially. You can neither grasp emotions nor inflect your voice to disguise this reality. This behavior has cost you everything that requires regular interaction with people (job, possessions, etc.), and when you occasionally “snap out of it,” your confusion over this matter only makes things worse. These difficulties often lead to Odious Personal Habits and Social Stigmas. You're also likely to have several of

Bestial, Cannot Learn, Hidebound, Incurious, Killjoy, and No Sense of Humor, but that isn't automatic – you might appreciate *deranged* humor and show a sophisticated interest in *disturbing* events and pursuits. -56 points.

Crazy

-36 points

Crazies are infected (pp. 97-98) of a sort whose illness isn't terminal (for them . . .), doesn't drive them to eat flesh, and lends them no special physical power. What's scary about them isn't their strength or special abilities, but their madness: they kill without reason and are difficult to stop, as they ignore pain, can't be reasoned with, and never sleep. What's truly *terrifying* is the fact that merely being around them puts you at risk of joining them!

The crazy virus (if it's genuinely a virus) seems to be transmitted via coughing or contact – especially if lots of bodily fluids are involved. Make a HT roll after each 24-hour period during which you got within two yards of crazies or people who've failed this HT roll but haven't turned yet. This is at +2 if you just let one get close, +1 for an actual touch, no modifier if you wrestled, -1 if you were spat on, -2 if you were bled on, or -3 if you had more intimate contact (hopefully with someone who isn't crazy yet!). Use the *worst* modifier that applies for that interval. Failure means catching the disease, becoming a crazy in (Will + 14) hours.

Advantages: Doesn't Sleep [20]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Indomitable [15]; Unfazeable [15].

Disadvantages: Asocial [-56]; Bloodlust (N/A) [-25]; Zombie Motivation (Kill, kill, kill!) [-15].

Features: Affected as Living; Infectious.

Face-Eater

-32 points

“Face-eater” is a derogatory term for a drug addict whose poison of choice has turned him into a savage murderer who gnaws on the living. The latter habit isn't a need but a frightening symptom of drug-induced psychosis; face-eaters aren't true cannibals, and must eat ordinary food. What the face-eater *does* require is the drug, which causes psychological dependence. Withholding that makes him *crazier* – start by worsening Bad Temper and Berserk. Face-eaters exhibit hysterical strength, speed, and pain resistance, and attack everyone (including each other!) on sight. They can be recognized by their bloodshot eyes, and by the sound of growling and tooth-grinding.

Face-eaters are a distortion of real-life abusers of dangerous drugs. Marginally more plausible than most other zombies in this book, they might just work in a quasi-realistic campaign.

Attribute Modifiers: ST+4 [40]; HT-1 [-10].

Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: HP-4 [-8]; FP+2 [6]; Basic Speed+1.25 [25].

Advantages: Hard to Kill 3 [6]; Hard to Subdue 3 [6]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Indomitable [15]; Less Sleep 4 [8]; Unfazeable [15].

Disadvantages: Addiction (Psycho Drug) [-25]; Asocial [-56]; Bestial [-10]; Bad Temper (9) [-15]; Berserk (9) [-15]; Odious Racial Habit (Eats Humans) [-15]; Overconfidence (9) [-7]; Unnatural Features 2 [-2].

Features: Affected as Living.

Vodou Slave

-272 points

This take on the Vodou *zombi* assumes that the victim is alive but drugged. He has “died” and been buried, as far as society knows, but that was a deception facilitated by potent paralysis-inducing neurotoxins. The *bokor* who did this to him has since exhumed him (or more likely had zombies do that), and now controls him with daily doses of yet another evil concoction.

Vodou zombies are workers, not warriors. They’ll attack if so ordered, but they won’t be especially effective at it.

Per traditional belief, the taste of salt will lay them to rest permanently – perhaps it brings on a sudden heart attack that overloads their weakened constitution.

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

Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: FP+2 [6]; Basic Speed-0.25 [-5].

Advantages: Doesn’t Sleep [20]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Night Vision 2 [2]; Reduced Consumption 2 [4]; Single-Minded [5]; Temperature Tolerance 2 [2]; Unfazeable [15].

Disadvantages: Addiction (Mind-Control Drug) [-40]; Asocial [-56]; Cannot Learn [-30]; Duty (Bokor; 15 or less) [-15]; Hidebound [-5]; Incurious (6) [-10]; Killjoy [-15]; Slave Mentality [-40]; Social Stigma (Dead) [-20]; Weakness (Salt; 1d/minute; Difficult to Administer, Ingestion, -100%; Irreversible, +100%) [-20].

Features: Affected as Living.

Just the Stats: Crazy

ST: 10 **HP:** 10 **Speed:** 5.00
DX: 10 **Will:** 10 **Move:** 5
IQ: 10 **Per:** 10
HT: 10 **FP:** 10 **SM:** 0

Dodge: 8 **Parry:** 8 (Unarmed) **DR:** 0

Punch (10): 1d-3 crushing. Reach C.

Traits: Affected as Living; Bloodlust (N/A); Disturbing Voice; Doesn’t Sleep; Glimpses of Clarity; High Pain Threshold; Indomitable; Infectious; Low Empathy; Unfazeable; Zombie Motivation (Kill, kill, kill!).

Notes: *Extremely* likely to be armed – and possibly skilled – with whatever weapon is common in the area, whether that means a sword, a gun, or a disturbingly large and sharp farming implement.

Just the Stats: Face-Eater

ST: 14 **HP:** 10 **Speed:** 6.00
DX: 10 **Will:** 10 **Move:** 6
IQ: 10 **Per:** 10
HT: 9 **FP:** 11 **SM:** 0

Dodge: 9 **Parry:** 8 (Unarmed) **DR:** 0

Bite (10): 1d-1 crushing. Reach C. Often All-Out for +4 to hit or +2 to damage!

Grapple (10): Reach C. Often All-Out for +4 to hit!

Punch (10): 1d-1 crushing. Reach C. Often All-Out for +4 to hit!

Traits: Addiction (Psycho Drug); Affected as Living; Bad Temper (9); Berserk (9); Bestial; Disturbing Voice; Glimpses of Clarity; Hard to Kill 3; Hard to Subdue 3; High Pain Threshold; Indomitable; Less Sleep 4; Low Empathy; Odious Racial Habit (Eats Humans); Overconfidence (9); Unfazeable; Unnatural Features 2.

Notes: Can’t use weapons effectively, but the stereotypical street thug may have higher ST, DX, and HT, and possibly Brawling and/or Wrestling.

Just the Stats: Vodou Slave

ST: 10 **HP:** 10 **Speed:** 4.00
DX: 9 **Will:** 8 **Move:** 4
IQ: 8 **Per:** 8
HT: 8 **FP:** 10 **SM:** 0

Dodge: 7 **Parry:** 7 (Unarmed) **DR:** 0

Grapple (9): Reach C.

Punch (9): 1d-3 crushing. Reach C.

Traits: Addiction (Mind-Control Drug); Affected as Living; Cannot Learn; Disturbing Voice; Doesn’t Sleep; Duty (Bokor; 15 or less); Glimpses of Clarity; Hidebound; High Pain Threshold; Incurious (6); Killjoy; Low Empathy; Night Vision 2; Reduced Consumption 2; Single-Minded; Slave Mentality; Social Stigma (Dead); Temperature Tolerance 2; Unfazeable; Weakness (Salt; 1d/minute).

Just the Stats: Whisperer

ST: 10 **HP:** 10 **Speed:** 5.00
DX: 10 **Will:** 10 **Move:** 6
IQ: 10 **Per:** 10
HT: 10 **FP:** 10 **SM:** 0

Dodge: 8 **Parry:** 8 (Unarmed) **DR:** 0

Whispering (Resisted by Will): Turns victim into a zombie next turn! Affects 2-yard radius.

Traits: Acute Hearing 2 (Hearing 12); Affected as Living; Disturbing Voice; Glimpses of Clarity; Hidebound; Indomitable; Involuntary Utterance; Low Empathy; Penetrating Voice; Single-Minded; Zombie Motivation (Spread the meme).

Notes: Not aggressive – almost never physically attacks.

Whisperer

29 points

Whisperers have had their minds reprogrammed by a neurolinguistic virus that drives them to spread the meme and reprogram other people . . . by *talking*. Their mad babbling can be heard at great distances, but not clearly; their name comes from the fact that the meme spreads most successfully when whispered at close range. While whisperers will give chase, they're *not* interested in attacking – they just want you to hear what they have to say. When there's nobody but whisperers around, they eat, drink, and sleep normally, and chatter among (or *to*) themselves.

Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: Basic Move+1 [5].

Advantages: Acute Hearing 2 [4]; Indomitable [15]; Memetic Zombification (p. 52) [76]; Single-Minded [5].

Perks: Penetrating Voice [1].

Disadvantages: Asocial [-56]; Hidebound [-5]; Zombie Motivation (Spread the meme) [-15].

Quirks: Involuntary Utterance [-1].

Features: Affected as Living.



TECHNO-ZOMBIES

Some high-tech zombies aren't constructs (pp. 91-93) assembled from bits and brought to life or unlife, but intact bodies – living or dead – engineered into mindless menaces by well-meaning research gone wrong . . . or less-than-well-meaning mad science gone terribly, horribly *right*. The sky's the limit here, because such zombies tend to be irreproducible results. Attempts to recreate them seem doomed to turn out atrocities that are almost but not entirely different, and inevitably scarier.

Neuroid

-265 points

This is a normal-looking living person enslaved through electronic brain implants (visible only on an X-ray or MRI

scan). The surgery involved hacks out individuality and intellect, leaving a lobotomized shell with the sophistication of a 1980s video-game console, subject to the authority of whoever holds the remote control. Neuroids must eat, drink, and breathe – though they can thrive on mush and sleep hanging in racks – and their only remarkable talents are a computer's programmability and flawless recall. These last two traits mean that, in theory, their brains can be updated with new skills (explaining the absence of Cannot Learn).

Neuroids are the work of crude superscience. They would fit well in a setting that features TL7⁺ or TL8⁺ conspiratorial weirdness. Any random face in the crowd could belong to a "convert"!

Attribute Modifiers: DX-1 [-20]; IQ-8 [-160].

Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: Per+8 [40]; Basic Speed+0.25 [5].

Advantages: Digital Mind [5]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Photographic Memory [10].

Disadvantages: Automaton (p. 69) [-85]; Electrical [-20]; Klutz [-5]; Maintenance (1 person; Weekly) [-5]; Reprogrammable (Symbol of Authority, +50%) [-15]; Wealth (Dead Broke) [-25].

Features: Affected as Living; Taboo Traits (Social Position).

ReViv™-ified

-102 points

The ReViv™-ified are dead people resuscitated by experimental nanomachines. The treatment was developed to save the terminally ill, arrest aging, or something equally high-minded, but the outcome wasn't quite what was intended: All the test subjects died, and when they returned to life a few days later – famished because nobody had bothered to feed them – they dined on lab technician. However, they aren't vicious, merely animalistic and incapable of grasping morality; in theory, they can be "tamed."

ReViv™ nanotech imparts powerful self-repair mechanisms, rendering the subject nearly immortal, barring serious physical accidents. The nanites also seem to be self-replicating – a dead body that comes into contact with a carrier is revived in 1d days. However, the machines have limits; notably, they don't cope well with *other* nanotech. They also can't seem to get eyes right – the ReViv™-ified see the world through a pair of shiny black orbs.

These zombies' capabilities are (barely) consistent with TL10 bio-tech, though they're *weird* and suggest superscience. They work better as futuristic monsters than as modern-day ones. The *real* monsters might be their creators – perhaps the research's true goal was to recycle the dead as a source of cheap, durable labor.

Attribute Modifiers: IQ-2 [-40]; HT+3 [30].

Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: HP+6 [12]; FP+3 [9]; Basic Speed-0.75 [-15].

Advantages: Extended Lifespan 2 [4]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Longevity [2]; Reduced Consumption 2 (Cast-Iron Stomach, -50%) [2]; Regeneration (Slow) [10]; Resistant to Metabolic Hazards (+3) [10].

Just the Stats: Neuroid

ST: 10 **HP:** 10 **Speed:** 5.00
DX: 9 **Will:** 2 **Move:** 5
IQ: 2 **Per:** 10
HT: 10 **FP:** 10 **SM:** 0
Dodge: 8 **Parry:** 7 (Unarmed) **DR:** 0

Grapple (9): Reach C.

Punch (9): 1d-3 crushing. Reach C.

Traits: Affected as Living; Digital Mind; Electrical; Hidebound; High Pain Threshold; Incurious (6); Klutz; Low Empathy; Maintenance (1 person; Weekly); No Sense of Humor; Photographic Memory; Reprogrammable (Symbol of Authority); Slave Mentality.

Notes: Stands around doing very little except when ordered to. Specific neuroids might boast better stats and useful skills.

Just the Stats: ReViv™-ified

ST: 10 **HP:** 16 **Speed:** 5.00
DX: 10 **Will:** 8 **Move:** 5
IQ: 8 **Per:** 8
HT: 13 **FP:** 16 **SM:** 0
Dodge: 8 **Parry:** 8 (Unarmed) **DR:** 0

Bite (10): 1d-3 crushing. Reach C.

Grapple (10): Reach C.

Punch (10): 1d-3 crushing. Reach C.

Traits: Affected as Living; Bestial; Cannot Speak; Extended Lifespan 2; Hidebound; High Pain

Threshold; Infectious; Longevity; Low Empathy; No Sense of Humor; Odious Racial Habit (Eats Humans); Reduced Consumption 2 (Cast-Iron Stomach); Regeneration (Slow); Resistant to Metabolic Hazards (+3); Social Stigma (Dead); Unnatural Features 1; Unusual Biochemistry; Vulnerability (Nanotech Weapons x2).

Notes: Only "hunts" if hungry – can be bribed with food. Can't use weapons, but big, tough people with unarmed combat skills make the best hunters, and are thus more common.

Just the Stats: Soldier X

ST: 14 **HP:** 14 **Speed:** 7.00
DX: 14 **Will:** 10 **Move:** 8
IQ: 10 **Per:** 12
HT: 14 **FP:** 18 **SM:** 0
Dodge: 11 **Parry:** 11 (Unarmed) **DR:** 0

Grapple (14): Reach C.

Punch (14): 1d-1 crushing. Reach C.

Traits: Affected as Living; Bloodlust (N/A); Combat Reflexes; Delusion ("Everyone else is The Enemy"); Disturbing Voice; Doesn't Sleep; High Pain Threshold; Indomitable; Low Empathy; Night Vision 5; No Sense of Humor; Resistant to Metabolic Hazards (+3); Temperature Tolerance 5; Unaging; Unfazeable; Unkillable 1; Very Fit; Weakness (Antiserum; 1d/minute).

Notes: Used on an actual soldier, the serum would produce a true "combat monster," with skills to match.

Disadvantages: Cannot Speak [-15]; Inhuman (p. 70) [-45]; Legally Dead (p. 70) [-45]; Odious Racial Habit (Eats Humans) [-15]; Unnatural Features 1 [-1]; Unusual Biochemistry [-5]; Vulnerability (Nanotech Weapons x2) [-10].

Features: Affected as Living; Infectious; Sterile.

Soldier X

242 points

The Soldier X treatment was meant to create a faster, stronger, more aggressive infantryman. An utter failure in that regard, it had the curious effect of preventing the recipient from dying of severe trauma. Mortal wounds catalyzed the serum, rendering the subject capable of surviving almost any injury. The catch? Those it saved awoke in a permanent altered mental state where everyone they met was "the enemy" and in need of killing. Back to the drawing board . . .

This is mad science with no specific place in the TL hierarchy. The serum could as easily be the TL6⁺ invention of Nazi doctors as alien tech discovered by TL12 starfarers. There should be an equally weird antiserum awaiting discovery, though major force may prove to be the more expedient solution.

Attribute Modifiers: ST+4 [40]; DX+4 [80]; HT+4 [40].

Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: Per+2 [10]; FP+4 [12]; Basic Move+1 [5].

Advantages: Combat Reflexes [15]; Doesn't Sleep [20]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Indomitable [15]; Night Vision 5 [5]; Resistant to Metabolic Hazards (+3) [10]; Temperature Tolerance 5 [5]; Unaging [15]; Unfazeable [15]; Unkillable 1 [50]; Very Fit [15].

Disadvantages: Bloodlust (N/A) [-25]; Delusion ("Everyone else is The Enemy") [-15]; Disturbing Voice [-10]; Low Empathy [-20]; No Sense of Humor [-10]; Weakness (Antiserum; 1d/minute; Difficult to Administer, Injection, -50%; Irreversible, +100%) [-15]; Wealth (Dead Broke) [-25].

Features: Affected as Living; Taboo Traits (Social Position).

ZOMBIE BOSSES

Some fiction – particularly video games – includes zombies that are bigger or smarter than average. If zombies can create other zombies, such a boss might be "zombie zero": first of its kind, perhaps the origin of the curse or infection. And some bosses live up to their title, influencing lesser zombies directly, even exerting control over the zombifying disease or magic.

A boss *can* be a unique variety of zombie – design a high-powered template with lots of special abilities and turn it loose. However, most examples appear to be of the same general type as lesser zombies, just with significant improvements. Below are several major overhauls to apply to templates to generate boss *versions* of those zombies. It's quite possible for a boss to boast two or more of these "lenses."

*Why have you disturbed
our sleep, awakened us
from our ancient slumber?*

– Possessed Cheryl,
in *The Evil Dead*

Controller

The "bossiest" boss ability – only occasionally seen in fiction – is commanding other zombies. This is easily arranged: choose a zombie template and add Mind Control with Zombie Command; e.g., Zombie Pheromones [48] or Target Marking [88] (both p. 54). For zombies of the boss' baseline type, the condition that only zombies with cheaper templates are affected will always be met by virtue of the boss template costing extra thanks to this ability's point cost.

Remember that this facility is modified Mind Control. Would-be minions must lack Immunity to Mind Control, which rules out bloated carcasses, corpse golems, ghouls, Judgment's Legionaries, lurchers, possessed thralls, zombots, and all necromantic reanimates – that is, Inexorable monsters and other zombie-masters' servants. Alternatively, the GM can change their Immunity to Mind Control to Immunity to Mind Control From Non-Zombies, for the same value. Likewise, Zombie Pheromones can't affect zombies with No Sense of Smell/Taste, which further eliminates the buzzing corpse.

Controllers often have some of the traits described in *Communication* (p. 88), even if lesser zombies of their class don't. For the purpose of the Racial limitation on Telesend and Mindlink, they're considered members of the same "race" as zombies built using the original, non-boss template. When adding *acoustic* communications abilities to a boss whose baseline template has Cannot Speak [-15] or Mute [-25], it's necessary to buy off this disadvantage as well.

Controller often occurs alongside Smart, Summoner, and Zombie Zero.

Example: Controller Buzzing Corpse

The GM wants each buzzing corpse (pp. 98-99) to be the domain of a queen corpse-bug who answers to the *empress* who rules the boss zombie in a horde. The buzzing corpse lacks a sense of smell and can't have Zombie Pheromones, but the GM decides that it's sensitive to *insect* pheromones which activate different receptors, and gives the empress Target Marking [88]. As well, because corpse-bugs have

Vibration Sense (Air), it seems logical that the empress might communicate that way; the GM removes Mute, adds 0-point Ultrasonic Speech (ultrasonic speech *only*), and decides that buzzing corpses don't "hear" sounds other than Vibration Sense and their boss' commands. These adjustments add 113 points to template cost (54 points), for a Controller boss template cost of 167 points.

Humongous

Often, the boss is simply huge. Perhaps it ate *lots* of brains (or entire people), or was mutated by its condition, and kept growing. Maybe it started out that way thanks to the efforts of a mad scientist, a wizard, or a god. Beginning with any zombie template, follow these steps:

1. Add +1 to SM if it towers over ordinary zombies *or* is as tall as it is wide. Add +2 to SM if both conditions are true. Bigger bosses are unlikely, but these rules still work for them.

2. Consulting the *Size Modifier Table* (p. B19), divide "Longest Dimension" in yards for the new SM by that for the old SM to get a scale factor (SF); e.g., when going from SM 0 to SM +1, SF is 1.5.

3. Multiply racial average ST for the original template by SF to get the boss' ST.

4. Turn this ST into a *ST modifier* by subtracting 10.

5. Multiply racial average HP for the original template by SF to get the boss' HP.

6. Turn this HP into a *HP modifier* by subtracting the boss' ST.

7. Multiply any Arm ST, Damage Resistance, Lifting ST, or Striking ST level by SF to find the boss' level.

8. Price any ST bonus, HP bonus, Arm ST, Lifting ST, or Striking ST at -10% for a final SM +1, -20% for SM +2, and so on up to -80% at SM +8 or more.

9. Add a Basic Move bonus equal to the SM increase to reflect longer legs: Basic Move+1 [5] for +1 SM, Basic Move+2 [10] for +2 SM, and so on. This *isn't* realistic bio-mechanical scaling – huge zombies are rarely fast.

Round fractional levels *up* – this is a boss!

Example: Humongous Judgment's Legionary

The GM wants a colossal Judgment's Legionary (pp. 93-94) to lead Judgment's armies; SM +2 seems about right. Going from SM 0 to SM +2 gives $SF\ 5/2 = 2.5$. The original template specifies racial ST 12, HP 10, and DR 5, which scale up to ST 30, HP 25, and DR 13! Thus, the ST bonus goes from ST+2 [20] to ST+20 (Size, -20%) [160]; the HP modifier changes from HP-2 [-4] to HP-5 [-10]; Damage Resistance 5 [25] becomes DR 13 [65]; and the boss acquires Basic Move+2 [10]. These adjustments add 184 points to template cost (3 points), for a Humongous boss template cost of 187 points.

Smart

Many bosses are remarkable for retaining their unzombified intellect and capacity to learn and adapt. This is most suitable for zombies that lack Reprogrammable and Slave Mentality. Starting with a fitting zombie template, follow these steps:

1. If the original template has an IQ penalty, however large, then omit it for the boss; the zombie is as smart as it was prior to zombification. For one with *no* IQ penalty, give the boss IQ+1 [20] – the zombie plague or curse grants “alpha zombies” inhuman cunning.

2. If the original template’s racial average Will is 10 or less, then the boss has no Will modifier; Will equals IQ. If racial average Will is 11+, subtract 10 from this and give the difference to the boss as a Will bonus.

3. Repeat the previous step for Per.

4. Remove these racial disadvantages that hinder cognition: Cannot Learn, Confused, Hidebound, and Incurious. Remember, Automaton includes Incurious (6), and both it and Inhuman include Hidebound. Do *not* remove other

mental problems – smart servitors remain slaves, brainy Bestial zombies are still animalistic, and so on.

5. If Will changed, adjust any remaining disadvantages that have self-control numbers so that these numbers remain close to Will as explained in *Zombies and Self-Control* (p. 60).

Example: Smart Lurcher

This lurcher (p. 96) might be found leading a band of undead warriors. The original template gives racial average IQ 8, Will 12, and Per 8. The IQ-2 [-40] goes away. Next, we subtract 10 from Will 12 and assess a bonus of Will+2 [10]; this replaces the original Will+4 [20]. Since Per on the original template isn’t 11+, no modifier applies – Per is equal to IQ.

Nonhuman Zombies

GURPS Zombies implicitly assumes that *humans* become zombies. Still, fantasy necromancers might reanimate ogre or even dragon corpses. There are also cinematic examples of zombie contagion jumping species: humans catch a virus from chimps in *28 Days Later*, and a transmissible curse from a “Sumatran rat-monkey” in *Braindead* – and then there are the dogs in *Resident Evil*.

If the explanation for zombification permits, assume that nonhumans can become zombies unless forbidden by racial immunity or a feature on one of the templates. *Stacking Templates* (p. B261) applies when adding a zombie template to a true racial one:

Attribute and Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: Sum the templates’ modifiers.

All-or-Nothing Traits: If something that’s “all or nothing” (e.g., High Pain Threshold) appears on both templates, there will be only one instance of it. Where templates offer opposing traits like this, they cancel (e.g., High Pain Threshold plus Low Pain Threshold leaves nothing).

Leveled Traits: If a trait on both templates has numerical levels, add *levels* (Night Vision 3 plus Night Vision 4 is Night Vision 7). Do the same for a trait and its opposite (Hard to Kill 5 and Easy to Kill 2 give Hard to Kill 3). Standard maxima still hold (Night Vision 3 and Night Vision 7 give Night Vision 9).

Variable Traits: If similar or opposing traits occur on both templates but don’t use levels, add *point values* and use the form nearest the final cost, still subject to maxima; e.g., two instances of Bloodlust (12) [-10] yield Bloodlust (6) [-20], while Immunity to Poison [15] with Susceptible to Poison 2 [-8] gives Resistant to Poison (+8) [7].

The GM may rule that truly definitive zombie traits *override* any related traits, whatever the respective point values. In particular, a zombie racial feature that renders certain traits taboo wipes out those traits. For a zombie without a basic faculty (like blood, skin, or olfaction), the GM may delete anything that depends

on it, unless he feels that not doing so would yield a more interesting creature.

Obviously, the end point cost often won’t equal the sum of the template costs when combining this way!

When zombifying animals, supernatural monsters, or nonhumans that will be treated as monsters (rather than as Allies, Alternate Forms, etc.), the above guidelines apply but you can ignore point costs – simply apply changes to the stats. Where opposites collide, sweat the details only if those traits would affect the encounter.

Optional Rule: Scaling to Race

The GM who doesn’t mind math – and who’s willing to let zombie templates vary a *lot* in cost by recipient race – can scale attribute and secondary characteristic modifiers to racial norms. Start with the stats for an average human made into a zombie and for an average unzombified nonhuman. Multiply each score’s value by the corresponding value on the other template; divide by 10 for ST, DX, IQ, HT, HP, Will, Per, and FP, or by 5 for Basic Speed and Basic Move; and drop all fractions. These are the averages for a zombie of that race. Convert these to modifiers, adjusting secondary characteristic modifiers only if attribute modifiers don’t give the needed effect.

Example: The dragon on p. B261 has racial averages ST 25, DX 10, IQ 10, HT 10, HP 25, Will 13, Per 13, FP 10, Basic Speed 5.00, and Basic Move 5. A reanimated skeleton (p. 101) has ST 9, DX 12, IQ 8, HT 10, HP 9, Will 8, Per 8, FP N/A, Basic Speed 6.00, and Basic Move 7. By this recipe, the average skeletal dragon would have ST 22, DX 12, IQ 8, HT 10, HP 22, Will 10, Per 10, FP N/A, Basic Speed 6.00, and Basic Move 7. This makes a skeletal dragon’s racial modifiers ST+12, DX+2, IQ-2, Will+2, Per+2, Basic Speed+0.50, Basic Move+1. In addition, the dragon’s Claws (Talons) would outrank the skeleton’s Claws (Blunt), the skeleton’s Doesn’t Eat or Drink would preempt the dragon’s Gluttony, and so on. The GM might rule that a skeleton with bony wings and no scales loses the dragon’s DR and Flight, too.

The lurcher also loses Cannot Learn [-30] and Hidebound [-5]. Its only disadvantage with a self-control roll is Bloodlust (12), but because the boss' Will is 12, this doesn't change. These alterations add 65 points to template cost (-61 points), for a Smart boss template cost of 4 points.

Summoner

Bosses can often conjure lesser zombies. This involves adding some level of Zombie Conjuring (see *Allies*, p. 50) to the baseline template. While most suitable if the template lacks Reprogrammable and Slave Mentality, that isn't a hard-and-fast rule.

Zombie Conjuring's built-in "Up to 25% of summoner's points" requires finesse to interpret for a boss whose point total is zero or less – a common problem with templates with extreme negative costs. At this juncture, it's helpful to consider what p. B10 says about "100-200 points being typical for career adventurers." At the low end of that (100 points), the Ally point totals expressed as percentages on p. B37 could be read as 25, 50, 75, 100, and 150 points. That is, these Allies would have the purchasing character's 100 points adjusted by -75, -50, -25, +0, or +50 points, respectively; e.g., a "25%" Ally would be identical to one worth 75 points less than its summoner. Thus, for zombie summoners, replace the normal Ally power table with the following:

Point Total	Cost
(Summoner's Total)-75	1 point
(Summoner's Total)-50	2 points
(Summoner's Total)-25	3 points
Summoner's Total	5 points
(Summoner's Total)+50	10 points

This interpretation remains relatively fair below 100 points, and doesn't misbehave at zero or fewer points. Thus, it's balanced to require Summoner bosses to be worth at least 75 points more than their minions. There are numerous ways to accomplish this. Beyond the cost of Zombie Conjuring itself, consider adding further boss options (particularly Controller and/or Smart), removing Reprogrammable or Slave Mentality to get a boss that's clearly more master than slave, and giving the boss superior personal abilities – better ST, IQ, skills, etc.

Minion zombies should usually be of a variety similar to the boss, but they needn't be the *same*. Boss fantasy monsters (pp. 95-96) might call necromantic reanimates (pp. 99-101), while a boss Judgment's Legionary (pp. 93-94) could raise whatever walking dead its divine patron (as personified by the GM) wishes.

Example: Summoner Bloated Carcass

The bloated carcass (p. 95) is rather pathetic in a fight, but would be scarier if it could spew corpse gas that conjures 10 zombie slaves from the ground! The original template is worth -150 points, and the GM wants it to summon reanimated corpses (pp. 100-101) with no

abilities beyond their -143-point template. The 75-point rule means the bloater should be worth -68 points or more, so it needs 82 points of improvements. Zombie Conjuring (10 zombies) [45] is a good start. The GM decides that the boss is also Smart, adding another 62 points, which is more than enough.

Zombie Zero

In some cases, all zombies of a given type can infect, but the boss can manipulate the zombification process to turn victims almost instantly! Choose a template that has Infectious but not Dominance (p. 51), and then add some variety of Dominance; e.g., Fast Reanimation [6], Infected Touch [61], Cloud of Infection [90], or Memetic Zombification [76]. The form should suit the template's theme. Dominance added to a template rather than included in it from the start does *not* create zombies with the boss template, but zombies built on the baseline template (the one without Dominance). In most cases, the boss should remain Infectious – if Dominance fails, it can still make zombies the slow way.

This modification often accompanies Controller or Summoner.



Example: Zombie Zero Infected

The infected (p. 97) normally turn those they bite only if the injuries are severe *and* the subject has slept, allowing the plague to alter his unconscious brain. The GM is fond of the idea of this contagion originating from a boss that delivers a stronger, more effective dose. Reviewing the Dominance options, he rules out Fast Reanimation (it requires killing the victim, but the infected are living) and Memetic Zombification (wrong kind of infection!). Cloud of Infection and Infected Touch both fit the infection theme, and the GM picks the latter because it involves physical contact. This capability adds 61 points to template cost (-285 points), for a Zombie Zero template cost of -224 points.

CHAPTER FOUR

ZOMBIES

IN PLAY

Step 1: Kill the infected. Step 2: Containment. If containment fails, then Step 3: Extermination.

– *Scarlet*, in **28 Weeks Later**

It is possible to dump zombies into a scenario as generic monsters. That's fine – it's the custom of most fantasy RPGs

and “monster of the week” horror fiction – but it still necessitates some advice on battling zombies. In a zombie-centric campaign, additional considerations arise: how zombies spread, how to survive a plague of zombies, how to cure zombified friends, and perhaps even how to *create* zombies.

ZOMBIES IN COMBAT

Zombies are mindless beings, programmed like machines or driven by inhuman urges, often created from ordinary people with no special combat ability. They tend to bite and swarm in ways that humans don't. All of this necessitates rethinking how to use them as opponents for the PCs.

BITING 101

The classic zombie attack is the *bite*. This is standard for ghouls (be they B-movie or fantasy monsters), sci-fi feeders

such as the ReViv™-ified (pp. 103-104), and mad face-eaters (pp. 101-102) – it's just how they eat. Zombies whose bite spreads contagion (e.g., the infected, p. 97) also lead with their teeth. Other zombies may nip if forced into close combat; this is especially true of those in the throes of Bad Temper, Berserk, Bestial, or Bloodlust, as such aggression makes them unlikely to back off. The GM decides which stock zombies to turn loose and whether his original creations are bitey, but he should bear in mind that players who are fans of old-school zombie movies will be disappointed if there's *no* chomping!



Biting Basics

Obviously, biting doesn't require free hands. A bite is always possible provided that the zombie's *head* or *neck* isn't grappled specifically to prevent this. (Success at such a grapple keeps fingers away from its mouth.)

Maneuvers

A bite can be an Attack, an All-Out Attack, or a Move and Attack. When using Move and Attack to bite, the “cannot parry” restriction becomes “cannot dodge.”

Reach

A bite is a close-combat attack: Reach C. This is true even for huge zombies – *Size Modifier* and *Reach* (p. B402) affects *arms*, not teeth.

Skill

Roll against the *higher* of DX or Brawling to hit with a bite, with all applicable modifiers from *Melee Attack Modifiers* (p. B547).

Hit Location

A zombie whose Size Modifier is no greater than its victim's can bite the *face, neck, torso, arms, legs, hands, or feet*. One whose SM exceeds its victim's can target any hit location susceptible to the bite's damage type. Standard hit location penalties apply.

Warning: If someone tried and failed to grapple the zombie's head or neck to restrain it from biting, then on the zombie's turn immediately following the attempt, the zombie can opt to chomp that person's hand *without* the usual -4 to hit.

Defense vs. Bites

A victim who isn't grappled may defend normally, though he can only use a weapon parry if he has a close-combat weapon *or* he can retreat out of close combat (which also grants its usual bonus) *or* the zombie just entered close combat this turn (presumably to bite).

A grappled opponent may only dodge at -1 or parry at -2, can't parry using a grappled limb, and can't retreat or try Acrobatic Dodge.

As *Parrying Heavy Weapons* (p. B376) explains, a bite's effective weight equals the attacker's ST/10. Ignore this except for *huge* zombies or dinky weapons.

Successfully parrying a bite with a weapon allows the defender to roll vs. weapon skill to deliver the weapon's usual damage to the zombie's *face*.

Warning: An *unarmed* parry using an *uncovered* body part, successful or not, means contact. Wear gloves when fighting zombies that merely have to drool on or touch you for Infectious to kick in, or that have something like Contact Disease (p. 56), Infected Touch (p. 52), or Pestilent Presence (p. 56)!

Consequences

Critical misses with bites and critical successes on active defenses against them send the zombie to the *Unarmed Critical Miss Table* (p. B557). If there are *many* zombies, the GM can save time by always using the most probable result: The zombie's turn ends immediately (it can't step away, take a free action, etc.) and it has -2 to active defenses until its next turn.

Damage

Basic biting damage is thrust-1. For a Move and Attack, substitute slam damage ($HP \times \text{velocity}/100$ dice) for thrusting damage, if that would be greater. Either way, add +1 per die for Brawling skill at DX+2 or above.

Damage type is *crushing* unless the zombie has Teeth (Sharp) to make it *cutting*, Teeth (Sharp Beak) to render it *large piercing*, or Teeth (Fangs) to improve it to *impaling*.

A zombie whose Size Modifier is no greater than its victim's can cripple body parts but *not* dismember them. One whose SM exceeds the target's can bite things off!

Warning: If even one point of damage penetrates DR, the bite can deliver follow-up effects such as Pestilent Wounds (p. 56), Plague Bite (p. 53), or any variety of Infectious that

relies on injury. Against *no* DR, a bite for zero damage can transmit these things!

Fright Checks?

Zombies are legitimate Fright Check triggers, but the GM should apply *Fright Check Modifiers* (p. B360) judiciously. For instance, if walking dead erupted from a grave on a quiet evening, surprising a PC who had never met a zombie before, the GM might require a Fright Check at -3 for a grisly body-turned-monster and another -3 for being alone at night. By contrast, in a long-running survival-horror campaign, that same zombie wandering around the mall would at worst give a hardened hero +5 for continuous exposure and familiarity, and the GM may well waive such "nuisance rolls" altogether except when survivors are bitten, overrun, etc. These Fright Checks have nothing to do with Terror (p. 55) – they're natural reactions to scary situations.

Grappling and Worrying

Zombies can and usually do grapple victims with one or both hands before biting. This keeps prey from defending effectively or escaping. However, if the zombie attacks using teeth (rather than with a beak, like the infester, p. 99), then the *bite itself* can be a grapple, which is bad news.

When a zombie bites well enough to inflict damage, the GM should decide whether it lets go afterward or clamps on with its teeth; zombies driven by hunger, hate, or rage will attempt the latter. If it holds on, the bite inflicts damage *and* establishes a grapple. Even if this grapple was the zombie's goal, it's a follow-up to a bite, so standard hit location penalties – not the halved ones for grappling – apply to the initial attack.

The grapple's effectiveness depends on the Size Modifier difference between zombie and victim, which can be significant for Humongous bosses (p. 105) and huge constructs:

Zombie's SM is no greater than victim's. The bite counts as a one-handed grapple for all purposes. On subsequent turns, the zombie can *worry*. This requires an Attack or an All-Out Attack, but it automatically maintains the grapple *and* hits for damage – simply roll biting damage each turn. This can cripple a body part but never dismember. Injury past that needed to cripple inflicts full shock. *Exception:* Injury sufficient to dismember an extremity won't remove a hand but will bite off a finger (see *Missing Digit*, p. B144).

Zombie's SM exceeds victim's by +1 or +2. The bite counts as a two-handed grapple for the purpose of strangling, breaking free, and *Neck Snap or Wrench Limb* (p. B404), but as a one-handed grapple for all other purposes. It can dismember arms, legs, hands, and feet. Otherwise, use the rules above.

Zombie's SM exceeds victim's by +3 or more. The bite counts as a two-handed grapple for all purposes. It can worry at, cripple, or dismember any body part. Against the torso, it allows the zombie to take an Attack or All-Out Attack maneuver to try a pin (p. B370), even against a standing victim. Success means the zombie traps him in its jaws.

Optional Rule: Worrisome Worrying

When a creature with a poisonous or infectious bite latches on and worries, it delivers one dose per second of whatever its bite carries – that is, each turn of working unpleasant stuff into the wound equals a dose. It's best to assess acute effects (immediate damage in particular) each turn. For longer-term effects – including most instances of Infectious and Pestilent – there's no short-term damage, and the GM might want to adapt *Dosage* (p. B438) to the cause: each doubling of dosage

halves delay and interval (for finer detail, divide delay and interval by doses), and gives -2 to HT rolls to resist. Only work out modifications that matter; not all zombie bites have delay, interval, and HT rolls.

Exception: Do not apply this rule to any effect that depends directly on HP of biting injury (e.g., forms of Dominance that require a roll vs. HP lost). Worrying already worsens these by causing mounting injury over successive turns.

WOUNDING MODIFIERS AND ZOMBIES

The interplay of damage type and hit location often leads to wounding modifiers that multiply injury (see *Hit Location*, pp. B398-400). These multipliers change when Injury Tolerance (pp. 52-53) enters the picture, which is commonly the case for zombies. The table below summarizes the results to speed up combat.

When using the table for living or Unliving zombies that have No Brain or No Vitals, use the "All other" line for skull or vitals injuries, respectively. Skull and vitals are listed for Homogenous zombies to cover the possibility that someone who doesn't know better targets those areas, but as Homogenous includes No Brain and No Vitals, such attacks never enjoy extra effectiveness.

In all cases, if the source of damage satisfies the conditions for Vulnerability, that disadvantage's $\times 2$, $\times 3$, or $\times 4$ further multiplies the listed factor.

Hit Location Living Unliving Homogenous

Burning (burn)

Skull	$\times 4$	$\times 4$	$\times 1$
All other	$\times 1$	$\times 1$	$\times 1$

Burning, Tight-Beam (burn)

Skull/Eye	$\times 4$	$\times 4$	$\times 1$
Vitals	$\times 2$	$\times 2$	$\times 1$
All other	$\times 1$	$\times 1$	$\times 1$

Corrosion (cor)

Face/Neck	$\times 1.5$	$\times 1.5$	$\times 1.5$
Skull	$\times 4$	$\times 4$	$\times 1.5$
All other	$\times 1$	$\times 1$	$\times 1$

Crushing (cr)

Neck	$\times 1.5$	$\times 1.5$	$\times 1.5$
Skull	$\times 4$	$\times 4$	$\times 1$
All other	$\times 1$	$\times 1$	$\times 1$

Cutting (cut)

Neck	$\times 2$	$\times 2$	$\times 2$
Skull	$\times 4$	$\times 4$	$\times 1.5$
All other	$\times 1.5$	$\times 1.5$	$\times 1.5$

Hit Location Living Unliving Homogenous

Fatigue (fat)

Skull	$\times 4$	$\times 4$	$\times 1$
All other	$\times 1$	$\times 1$	$\times 1$

Impaling (imp)

Limb/Extremity	$\times 1$	$\times 1$	$\times 1/2$
Skull/Eye	$\times 4$	$\times 4$	$\times 1/2$
Vitals	$\times 3$	$\times 3$	$\times 1/2$
All other	$\times 2$	$\times 1$	$\times 1/2$

Piercing, Small (pi-)

Skull/Eye	$\times 4$	$\times 4$	$\times 1/10$
Vitals	$\times 3$	$\times 3$	$\times 1/10$
All other	$\times 1/2$	$\times 1/5$	$\times 1/10$

Piercing (pi)

Skull/Eye	$\times 4$	$\times 4$	$\times 1/5$
Vitals	$\times 3$	$\times 3$	$\times 1/5$
All other	$\times 1$	$\times 1/3$	$\times 1/5$

Piercing, Large (pi+)

Limb/Extremity	$\times 1$	$\times 1/2$	$\times 1/3$
Skull/Eye	$\times 4$	$\times 4$	$\times 1/3$
Vitals	$\times 3$	$\times 3$	$\times 1/3$
All other	$\times 1.5$	$\times 1/2$	$\times 1/3$

Piercing, Huge (pi++)

Limb/Extremity	$\times 1$	$\times 1$	$\times 1/2$
Skull/Eye	$\times 4$	$\times 4$	$\times 1/2$
Vitals	$\times 3$	$\times 3$	$\times 1/2$
All other	$\times 2$	$\times 1$	$\times 1/2$

Toxic (tox)

All	$\times 1$	$\times 1$	$\times 1$
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FASTER FIGHTS

In addition to using *Horde Action* (pp. 114-117) when ever appropriate, there are several ways to speed up combats involving zombies.

Know Your Zombies!

GURPS has lots of combat rules . . . many of which won't apply to zombies, greatly speeding play. However, there's no One True Way for zombies to behave in battle. Thus, it can save a lot of *gaming* time if the GM puts in a little *preparation* time to review the zombie's description and traits, and work out how it fights.

Simplifying Combat Options

Zombies have grave mental limitations, but the details vary greatly – that's part of why **GURPS Zombies** fills a book! By default, zombies enjoy access to the full gamut of maneuvers (Attack, Feint, etc.), attack options (like grapples, hit locations, and slams), active defenses (Dodge, Parry, and, for those with shields, Block), and so on. But using all that stuff can slow things down a lot. Fortunately, many zombies' problems restrict their choices in combat; e.g., quite a few give no thought to defense and attempt nothing trickier than basic attacks. Common traits that affect basic behavior in combat include:

Berserk: Zombies that always attack and never defend should have this disadvantage. With Battle Rage, it requires a self-control roll when combat begins; with Vicious, it forces a roll on sighting victims. Failure leads to All-Out Attacks (and no defenses to worry about!), interspersed with Move maneuvers.

Bestial: A Bestial zombie will never restrain someone for an allied zombie to attack, or take a Wait contingent on a fellow zombie's actions; the *only* coordination allowed is *Multiple Close Combat* (p. B392). If it picks up a weapon, it's unskilled and has an extra -4 to hit . . . so it just about never will.

Bloodlust: A zombie with this disadvantage must check self-control upon knocking down a victim. Failure means it won't switch targets until its current one seems dead, at which point it loses interest.

Hidebound: Few zombies use Artist or Engineer skills, or the Gadgeteer advantage, so the GM should make up for this with unimaginative combat behavior. Such zombies repeatedly strike or grapple the torso (the face or skull, if brain-eaters), and can only try "tricky" moves such as disarming, Deceptive Attack, Feint, and Rapid Strike if they have 5+ points in combat skills *and* the GM wants to bother. Hidebound non-warrior zombies with only baseline template abilities never try such tactics.

Incurious: **GURPS** gives combatants a generously broad picture of the battlefield; e.g., allowing players to see the entire combat map. Incurious zombies must roll against the *worse* of their self-control number or (typically low) Per to care about events not in their arc of vision. Failure means they press the attack on enemies they can see.

No Fatigue: Zombies with this feature can't use *Extra Effort in Combat* (p. B357).

Uncontrollable Appetite: Failed self-control for this disadvantage has the effects noted for Bloodlust (above) *and* compels the zombie to make All-Out Attacks on its dinner.

Optional Rule: Zombie Toughness

Zombies are often so tough that rolling to see whether they fall down stunned or unconscious after an injury is a waste of time. While genuine immunity to this stuff calls for Supernatural Durability, the GM may find it convenient to use some of the following options to accelerate combat.

Can't Stun This

Start with HT and add +1 for Fit or +2 for Very Fit, any Hard to Subdue, and +3 for High Pain Threshold. If the total is 15+, don't bother rolling for knockdown and stun on major wounds unless they're to the face or vitals (-5), or the skull (-10). If such a zombie also has Injury Tolerance (Homogenous or No Vitals), ignore even knockdown rolls for the vitals, while if it has Injury Tolerance (Homogenous or No Brain), ignore even knockdown rolls for the face and skull.

Examples (* denotes Homogenous): buzzing corpse*, corpse golem, face-eater, galvanoid, ghoul, infected, infester, Judgment's Legionary*, ReViv™-ified, selfish dead*, and Soldier X.

I'll Sleep When I'm Dead

Start with HT and add +1 for Fit or +2 for Very Fit, any Hard to Subdue, and +4 for Berserk (assuming it kicks in at once!). If the total is 15+, don't bother rolling for unconsciousness at 0 or fewer HP. The zombie will fight to the death.

Examples: enraged infected, face-eater, galvanoid, and Soldier X.

Unnatural Causes

If the zombie has Fragile (Unnatural) and doesn't have a 15+ to avoid unconsciousness, then roll for consciousness at 0 or fewer HP just *once*, when it first crosses the line – not every turn. Any failure means death!

Examples: bloated carcass, B-movie ghoul, corpse golem, ghoul, Judgment's Legionary, lurcher, reanimated (corpse, mummy, or skeleton), and zombot.

You Can't Kill Me, I'm Already Dead

If the zombie has Unkillable 1 and doesn't have a 15+ to avoid unconsciousness, then again, roll just *once* for consciousness at 0 or fewer HP. Success means it fights to the bitter end, while failure presents the *appearance* of death.

Example: selfish dead.

Simplifying Combat Results

Much complexity in combat comes from rolling dice to check whether an attack affects someone. Consider using *Zombie Toughness* (above), and note that several common zombie traits eliminate many such rolls:

Berserk: Once this disadvantage kicks in, the zombie is completely immune to knockdown, so don't bother with HT rolls for major wounds.

Doesn't Breathe: Don't bother rolling when a zombie like this is exposed to gas or when somebody tries to strangle it – there's no effect.

Doesn't Sleep: Zombies with this advantage *can't* sleep – they're outright immune to the likes of knockout gas and Sleep spells, so don't waste time checking for these things.

Fragile (Unnatural): A zombie with this problem simply dies at -HP, no HT rolls required.

Immunity to Metabolic Hazards: Almost any mundane weapon that requires a HT roll to resist – and all poison – does *nothing* to a zombie with this advantage. Simply ignore tranquilizer darts, electrolasers, etc. If the carrier is a weapon that does a puny 1d-3 burn or 1d pi-, even a Dodge roll is a waste of time; just have the zombie take the damage.

Immunity to Mind Control: With this common zombie trait, all attempts to resist mental control succeed automatically – don't roll for them.

Indomitable and Unfazeable: Zombies with either advantage cannot be dissuaded by Intimidation; don't bother with a Will roll.

Supernatural Durability: Anything that has this trait can ignore all HT rolls for injury (knockdown, unconsciousness, etc.) save for those to do with *death*.

Giving Heroes the Upper Hand

Defeating zombies shouldn't be *too* easy, but combat will go more quickly if clever PCs can take advantage of zombie shortcomings. An attempt to use *Discovering Zombie Flaws* (p. 35) to recall prior knowledge requires a Concentrate maneuver. In addition, heroes should occasionally be able to fool zombies, either making them easier to take out or convincing them to pass on by. Exploitable traits include:

Bloodlust: A fighter who has been knocked down can capitalize on this disadvantage by using his turn to attempt a Quick Contest of Acting vs. the *higher* of the zombie's (typically abysmal) IQ or Per. The zombie gets bonuses for special senses (like +4 for Discriminatory Smell), while the trickster has +1 at half HP, +2 at 0 HP, +3 at -HP, +4 at -3×HP, and +5 at -4×HP. Victory convinces the zombie to go kill somebody else.

Cannot Learn: Zombies like this fall for the same moves over and over! Their foes can repeat dirty tricks (p. B405), benefit from the Dirty Fighting perk (**GURPS Power-Ups 2: Perks**, p. 5) *every turn*, throw Combinations and Targeted Attacks (see **GURPS Martial Arts**) without giving up +1 to defend against successive uses, etc.

Glimpses of Clarity: Zombie victims can try "Remember your mother?" or "John Galt! Is that you?" If they sacrifice a turn and make a successful Acting or Fast-Talk roll, the GM should roll 6 or less to see whether this problem kicks in (-1 to attacks and defenses for 1d turns).

Slave Mentality and Zombie Motivation: People fighting zombies that are bound by compulsions or orders of these sorts may roll vs. the *higher* of Per or Per-based Tactics, at a basic -5, +1 per turn of combat, and +1 per full -5 points of disadvantage value (+8 for Slave Mentality). Success reveals the zombies' tactical goals: "They're guarding this bridge," "They've been ordered to stall for time," etc.

Rule of 6

As *Simplifying Combat Options* (p. 111) explains, zombie behavior in combat is often dictated by disadvantages with self-control rolls. Zombies that can't resist their problems should use *No Self-Control* (p. 60), but rolling at 6 or less is such a faint hope that it's a nuisance roll. The GM may wish to use this optional rule:

If a disadvantage that affects combat has a self-control number of 6, don't roll for it in battle. It takes effect automatically!

Zombies with severe-but-resistible disadvantages still roll in noncombat encounters, immediately before combat, and so on – a 6 isn't as bad as "N/A." This rule removes a speed bump *in combat*, with the handy side effect of ensuring dramatically appropriate behavior when it matters.

The GM may also want to consider two related "combat accelerators":

Extended Rule of 6: Rolls against IQ, Will, and Per sometimes arise in combat. These scores are often abysmal for zombies. The GM may opt not to roll against a score of 6 or lower here, either – zombies with IQ 1-6 always fall for dirty tricks (p. B405), ones with Hearing 1-6 never hear enemies behind them, and so on. As well, Slave Mentality gives -8 to IQ and -6 to Will where *motivation* is central. A zombie with that trait never rolls to change tack in battle; it keeps following orders, however misguided.

Rule of 9: A 9 or less self-control roll (or IQ, Will, or Per roll) is reasonably likely to succeed, but it's still an extra roll. The GM may opt to apply the Rule of 6 here but offer a 9 or less roll to "snap out of" behavior that would endanger the zombie. For instance, a zombie with Bloodlust (6) or (9) wouldn't roll to avoid focusing on its victim – but if a dangerous enemy came along, the one with a 6 would ignore him to make its kill, while the zombie with a 9 would roll to engage him. This reduces rolls by only requiring them for zombies the PCs are focusing on *right now*. The GM might extend this to self-control numbers of 12 or even 15, as "roll only when it matters" is a timesaver when controlling legions of walking dead.

Horde Rolls

When there are many zombies – especially when using *Horde Action* (pp. 114-117) – there can be lots of rolls if you play by the rules. Invoking *Rule of 6* (above) to avoid these is fine when failure is likely, but horror and suspension of disbelief will shatter if "mildly ghoulish" zombies with Uncontrollable Appetite (15) or vengeful dead with Will 13 all fail their rolls . . . or for that matter, if they all *succeed*, or if *Zombie Toughness* (p. 111) leads to results like not one zombie being stunned by a massive explosion. Fortunately, there are ways to handle such situations quickly and plausibly.

What's a Horde? These and other rules assume a semi-cohesive "horde" – a vague notion. *Mob Attacks* (pp. 115-117) cites 3.5 zombies/square yard (three per hex); *The Cloud* (pp. 114-115), 1.2 zombies/square yard (one per hex). For idiotic zombies with IQ-9 mitigated by *Horde Intelligence* (pp. 49-50), even 0.23 zombies/square yard (roughly one per five hexes) would matter! Use that last density as a nominal cutoff.

The GM may make exceptions in open areas, or for zombies that run quickly or communicate well, and is free to *assume* a horde and specify only its size.

Horde Mentality

Zombies with at least *two* of an IQ penalty, Hidebound, Incurious, and Slave Mentality aren't exactly original thinkers. Many creatures described in *Instant Zombies* (pp. 90-107) qualify: B-movie ghouls, buzzing corpses, corpse golems, infected, infesters, Judgment's Legionaries, lurchers, necromantic reanimates, neuroids, possessed thralls, ReViv™-ified, selfish dead, Vodou slaves, and zombots. When these gather in a horde, make a *single* roll for Bad Temper, Berserk (Battle Rage or Vicious), Incurious, Uncontrollable Appetite, attempts to use Acting or Fast-Talk to manipulate Bloodlust or Glimpses of Clarity, or a dirty trick played on multiple zombies. The outcome affects the *entire pack*, which goes into a feeding frenzy, ignores the hero playing dead, etc.

*"Roll only when it matters"
is a timesaver when controlling
legions of walking dead.*

Statistically Speaking

Some rolls lead to such severe outcomes that rolling once for an entire horde would give an underwhelming scene. Rolls to resist Confused, Epilepsy, and Phobias are like this – "the mob is dazed," "the mob suffers a fit," or "the mob flees" would be silly, not dramatic. For these, instead of rolling, the GM could consult *Probability of Success* (p. B171), read "Skill Level" as "Resistance Roll," and have the corresponding percentage of the horde resist.

Simple fractions that approximate these percentages are easier to use in play, though – and while technically 3 or 4 always succeeds and 17 or 18 always fails, variety is more fun in *massive* hordes. Use the following table for quick assessment of zombies affected (standard self-control numbers are in **boldface**):

Resistance Roll	Fraction that Resist	Resistance Roll	Fraction that Succumb
3	1/200	11	1/3
4	1/50	12	1/4
5	1/20	13	1/6
6	1/10	14	1/10
7	1/6	15	1/20
8	1/4	16	1/50
9	1/3	17	1/100
10	1/2	18	1/200

Apply the fraction and round *down* to learn how many zombies resist or succumb. If the result is less than one (e.g., 1/50 of a horde of 40), then the whole horde really does succumb or resist.

The GM can also use this method when an area effect or an explosion goes off in a horde. See *Hordes and*

Large-Area Attacks (p. 116) for how this table replaces rolls for resistance, knockdown, unconsciousness, or death in that situation. Those rules also use average injury, so there are no damage rolls, either!

When using *Speedy Horde Combat* (p. 115), failures that would take zombies out of the fight (send them fleeing from the object of a Phobia, cause an incapacitating condition or knockdown, etc.) reduce headcount.

Example: An entire horde of 30 crazies (p. 101) is engulfed by an area effect that does just enough injury to inflict a major wound on an individual crazy (6 HP). The GM could rule that this eliminates all the crazies, but that would grossly distort the abstraction. A crazy's roll to avoid knockdown is HT 10, +3 for High Pain Threshold, or 13 or less. Instead of rolling, the GM looks up 13, sees that 1/6 of the zombies succumb, and reduces mob size by five zombies.

For *Mob Attacks* (pp. 115-117), failures at such things reduces horde HP in proportion to the results.

Example: A 10-hex mob of crazies (again, 30 of them) with 180 HP is struck by the above area-effect attack. In this case, the GM would mark off 1/6 of the mob's HP, or 30 HP.

Who's Affected? When using figures on a battle map to represent the horde, it's most plausible if the zombies removed are those nearest to whatever is triggering Confusion, Epilepsy, or Phobia, or the center of an area effect or an explosion. Remove casualties from "ground zero," then a yard away, then two yards away, and so on until the quota is met.

Resistance for Mobs

Many area-effect advantages, spells, etc. – and attempts to deceive *smart* zombies with Acting or Fast-Talk – call for *Resistance Rolls* (p. B348). Against zombie mobs, do the following:

1. Roll once for the ability's user. Use *effective* skill, accounting for all modifiers to the roll (things like shock, spells "on," and distance to the area's edge). Failure means that no zombies are affected. Otherwise, record margin of success.
2. Subtract the user's margin from the score with which the zombies resist: IQ, HT, Will, the Zombie spell that created them, whatever. If the adjusted score is less than 3, use 3.
3. Using this adjusted score, follow the rules for resistible area effects under *Hordes and Large-Area Attacks* (p. 116).

Example: A priest uses an undead-turning ability that works as a Quick Contest of Will. His Will is 14; the zombies' Will is 8. The priest rolls once and gets 10, succeeding by 4. Looking up 8 - 4 = 4 on the table under *Statistically Speaking* (above) shows that only 1/50 of the zombies in the area of effect resist!

Who Notices?

In or out of combat, whether the horde notices something is often important. As with other situations involving many zombies, making piles of rolls – in this case Sense rolls (or the equivalent, for an exotic gift) – is tedious and time-consuming.

If the zombies have time to stagger around looking for something that would interest them, then start with racial Per and determine effective Per by applying any situational modifiers (notably, the bonus to IQ and hence Per for a mob of zombies that enjoy *Horde Intelligence*, pp. 49-50). Minimum effective Per is 3. Look that up on the table under *Statistically Speaking* (p. 113) to learn what fraction stumble onto the target, reading “resist” as “notice” and “succumb” as “don’t notice.”

Example: If the zombies have a racial Per of 8 and -2 for darkness, effective Per is 6. Thus, 1/10 of the zombies will eventually stumble upon an item of interest. In a horde of 30 zombies, three will notice.

However, when it’s important that the zombies notice *right now*, or if they’re seeking a hero who’s attempting to hide, it’s worth rolling. Spotting something fleeting isn’t the same as searching, and telling the players that at least some zombies will find the PCs no matter what they do isn’t very fair. Still, one roll is enough!

In such high-pressure situations, again adjust racial average Per for circumstances, to a minimum of 3. This time, though, find the individual score on the table below and read over to the column for the largest applicable horde size to determine the mob’s *collective* score.

<i>Individual Score</i>	<i>Collective Score by Horde Size</i>						
	5	10	20	50	100	200	500
3	4	5	6	7	9	11	14
4	6	7	8	11	13	16	16
5	8	9	11	14	16	16	16
6	9	11	13	16	16	16	16
7	11	13	16	16	16	16	16
8	12	15	16	16	16	16	16
9	14	16	16	16	16	16	16
10	15	16	16	16	16	16	16
11+	16	16	16	16	16	16	16

If the horde is bigger than 500, then collective Per is 16 – that many zombies won’t miss much, even if they’re thick as bricks.

For an *uncontested* roll, roll just once against the mob’s collective score.

Example: For a horde of 30 zombies, the largest applicable horde size is 20. If they individually have a Sense roll of 6, the mob would roll once at 13 or less.

For a *contested* roll – say, against a hero’s Stealth – roll a single Quick Contest using the collective score.

If the zombies fail at an uncontested roll, or lose or tie at a contested one, their target eludes them.

If the zombies succeed at an uncontested roll or win at a contested one, some of them notice the target. Once again, look up the individual score on the table under *Statistically Speaking* to learn what fraction reacts – but now there’s a minimum of one zombie, even if the fraction is tiny. That’s how many zombies show up *each turn*. They keep flooding in until they’re all present, which may give the heroes time to pick them off or flee.

Example: Those same zombies would roll a single Quick Contest of 13 vs. a hero’s Stealth to find him. If they won,

three would show up each turn for the next 10 turns, until all 30 were there!

Zombies with racial Telesend are better-coordinated: Use *collective* Per to find the fraction that shows up initially and arrives on every successive turn.

Example: If the zombies who beat the hero’s Stealth had Telesend, the GM would look up 13, not 6, under *Statistically Speaking*. Thus, only 1/6 of them – or 5 – *wouldn’t* show up. The hero would find 25 of them waiting, with the last five on their way next turn!

HORDE ACTION

When the PCs battle a handful of unusually capable zombies (e.g., buzzing corpses, corpse golems, or selfish dead) or a single exceptionally powerful one (such as a galvanoid, a Soldier X, or any boss), it’s best to game out combat normally, treating each zombie as an individual. Such monsters might be nameless but they aren’t “generic,” and the details of how the heroes defeat a succession of deadly foes are a source of drama. This is doubly true when the zombies have Unkillable or Supernatural Durability!

However, when countless “cannon fodder” zombies rush the heroes – or block their way to safety – gaming out every last detail becomes a tiresome bookkeeping exercise. Fortunately, abstraction in this case can add to the drama even as it reduces the tedium, as the thrills and chills come from the zombies being so numerous that the heroes can’t see them as individuals. In effect, their fell opponent is *the horde* as a collective.

Below are three systems for abstracting horde action in combat. For related optional rules, see *Horde Rolls* (pp. 112-114).

The Cloud

The lowest level of abstraction is to game out combat normally on a battle map but to “cheat” a little with zombie figures (*Cardboard Heroes*, metal miniatures, pennies, etc.) and movement. This works well when the zombies are tough, even Unkillable, and the slog is the point of the exercise. Use these guidelines:

1. The GM decides how many zombies are in the horde: 20, 50, 100, or whatever. It can be useful to have counters to indicate how many are defeated; e.g., by using green dice for 1, yellow dice for 5, and red dice for 25, a set of **Zombie Dice** could count off 101 zombies.

2. Put all the zombie figures you have on the map (unless you somehow have more figures than zombies – lucky you!), one per hex. For the purpose of *Horde Intelligence* (pp. 49-50), such packing is roughly 1.2 zombies per square yard.

3. Resolve movement, attack, defense, injury, etc. normally, with two exceptions:

- (a) On the horde’s turn, simply push all the zombie figures toward the PCs so that the *front* moves no more than the zombies’ Move. Don’t count off individual hexes or worry about zombies ending up on hex lines, sharing hexes, not using full Move, or effectively taking sidesteps that should cost extra. Work out zombie attacks after the horde moves.

(b) When a zombie is defeated, mark it off and recycle its figure to the *back* of the horde if more zombies are needed.

This “cloud” treatment saves a little time on movement and lets you represent lots of zombies with few figures, but doesn’t cut any corners on dice-rolling or combat results.

Speedy Horde Combat

This next level of abstraction still leaves zombies as nominal individuals but fudges many details to accelerate combat. It works best for low-end (*never* Unkillable) zombies in scenarios where exact body count matters – there are only so many zombies, the PCs are bounty hunters, the players are competitive, etc.

1. Again, the GM decides how many zombies the horde contains and devises a way to count them off (and again, we suggest **Zombie Dice**). He should also note the zombies’ *major wound threshold*: injury over HP/2. That’s 6 for 10-11 HP, 7 for 12-13 HP, and so on. If the zombies wouldn’t suffer stun because they’re all Berserk or because the GM is using *Zombie Toughness* (p. 111), set this to *full* HP!

2. The PCs always act first, in turn sequence order (p. B363) if they’re competitive, or in whatever order they agree on if they’re cooperating (usually wise!). This remains true even against fast zombies – *individuals* may be speedy, but a horde gets in its own way. However, if a horde of fast zombies *ambushes* the PCs, start the battle at step 7.

3. When a PC attacks, he simply rolls to hit. He has all the usual options: Rapid Strike to increase melee damage output, Deceptive Attack to get around zombie defenses, using automatic weapons to get rapid-fire bonuses, aiming for the face to exploit Vulnerability (Headshots), etc.

4. If the zombies are making All-Out Attacks – and Berserk ones usually do – move to step 5. Otherwise, they get a collective active defense against the PC’s attacks. Roll once per discrete attack. When dodging rapid fire, roll once and note margin of success. Deceptive Attack penalizes defenses normally.

5. Once the number of hits is known, roll damage and find injury, taking into account traits such as DR, Injury Tolerance (see *Wounding Modifiers and Zombies*, p. 110), and Vulnerability. For lots of identical hits – like machine-gun bullets – use average damage (3.5 points/die), find injury, multiply by the number of hits, and drop fractions at the very end.

6. Each *full* multiple of the zombies’ major wound threshold takes one zombie out of the fight – mark off the defeated zombies. Lesser injury has no effect. The zombies have no states between “beaten” and “fine” (no “stunned,” “knocked down,” “crippled,” etc.). This abstraction accounts for realistic overpenetration; such credible fortunes of war as one zombie being knocked into the path of another, taking both down in a tangle of limbs; and fantasy and video-game classics like slashing through whole rows of zombies.

7. Once every PC has acted, it’s the zombies’ turn. If the zombies outnumber the PCs by 2:1 or more, assume that

they’ll shore up their ranks and that each PC will be attacked by two zombies – go to step 8. If fewer zombies remain, skip to step 11.

8. Roll the zombies’ attacks, let the PCs defend, and assess any injury as in standard combat. The *heroes’* fate merits extra detail!

9. If the zombies grapple, handle this as two fighters cooperating in *Multiple Close Combat* (p. B392): *one* attack at 1.2 times the zombies’ racial average ST and DX (round down). If a PC ends up grappled, he should probably use his next turn to attempt to break free. If he would rather attack, he has -4 to hit and can only use unarmed attacks, close-combat weapons, or firearms (at a *further* penalty equal to Bulk) – and whatever he rolls, he can at most take out the two zombies grappling him.

10. Return to step 2 until the zombies outnumber PCs by less than 2:1. In that case, go to step 11.

11. If no zombies remain, the fight is over! If less than two per PC are left, finish the battle using *standard* combat. Those last few zombies are always the toughest!

This approach requires no map – arguably, the complication of setting one up would defeat the purpose. However, it would work just fine with *The Cloud* (pp. 114-115). In that case, the GM should remove defeated zombie figures along the “line of fire” in front of a PC who blows them away using ranged weapons, or those in the hero’s own or adjacent hexes in the case of melee attacks.

Zombie Dice

Zombie Dice is a fast-playing dice game from Steve Jackson Games. You can learn more at zombiedice.sjgames.com. **GURPS Zombies** has several optional rules which use that game’s special dice (only – *not* its rules!). We recommend using genuine **Zombie Dice** for these, but here’s a brief description if you decide to improvise.

Like **GURPS**, **Zombie Dice** uses six-sided dice. However, it involves 13 dice, marked with icons – brains, footprints, and shotgun blasts – instead of pips. All 13 have footprints on two sides. The remaining faces vary: the six green dice have three brains and one blast, the four yellow dice have two of each, and the three red dice have one brain and three blasts. (Dice from the expansion, **Zombie Dice 2: Double Feature**, aren’t used here.)

Zombie Dice also includes a dice cup. Where an optional rule depends on die color, the GM might prefer to spill out a die at random.

These components come with rules for a game – and we think it’s a *fun* game. You could play it while waiting for your **GURPS** players to arrive . . .

Mob Attacks

Especially in apocalyptic scenarios, vast hordes of *really* low-end zombies strike on a regular basis. In that case, the previous two measures might not speed things up enough. This highest level of abstraction handles zombie hordes as swarms (see *Swarm Attacks*, p. B461).

It's strictly for scenarios where the PCs want to drive off the zombies and escape, and care about how many heroes get away, not how many zombies remain or went down.

A swarm of SM 0 zombies, or *mob*, has three identical members per hex on a battle map. If using *Horde Intelligence* (pp. 49-50), such packing is almost 3.5 zombies per square yard, so collective IQ will be at its maximum. Swarm Move and DR equal the individual scores for that kind of zombie.

Damage is likewise as for individuals – but unlike swarms of smaller creatures, mobs deliver discrete attacks, not aggregate damage. Use *Rapid Fire* (p. B373) to resolve how many blows hit; RoF equals mob size, while Rcl is 1. The GM should divide hits among the heroes (usually evenly), who may try a separate active defense against each blow.

Example: A 10-hex mob contains 30 zombies, for RoF 30. This gives a rapid-fire bonus of +5. If the mob rolls to hit at DX+5 and succeeds by four, it scores one basic hit and four *extra* hits. The five blows would be divided among the PCs as the GM sees fit. If the zombies had used All-Out Attack (Determined) for +4 to hit, there would be *nine* hits to go around!

If the attack has a follow-up effect, this applies as well. For multiple hits, consider using *Worrisome Worrying*

(p. 110) to assess modifiers to HT rolls and so on. Each hit delivers one dose.

Mobs can also grapple. Treat this as a *single* attack at 1.2 times the zombies' racial average ST and DX (round down) for a grapple or a takedown, or 1.4 times ST and DX for a pin. This yields results identical to *Multiple Close Combat* (p. B392). Each hex of mob can grapple with one man-sized target, and while doing so reduces the mob's RoF for striking by 3.

Mobs are attacked normally. Treat them as a single creature for this purpose. While it's customary for *zombie* mobs to All-Out Attack, they may attempt any active defense if they don't.

Unlike swarms of tiny creatures, zombie mobs aren't Diffuse unless the zombies are. If the zombies are living, Unliving, or Homogenous, then so is a mob of them. The mob's HP equal 60% of its constituents' *total* HP. After suffering this much injury or more, the mob dissipates: some of the zombies have fallen to wounds, are confused, have been buried beneath dead zombies, or are otherwise unable to fight effectively. If the PCs insist on attacking a dissipated mob, switch to *Speedy Horde Combat* (p. 115) involving 40% of the original headcount.

Hordes and Large-Area Attacks

When an area effect or an explosion goes off in a horde of zombies, how best to handle it depends on how combat is being run; see *Horde Action* (pp. 114-117).

For Standard Combat or The Cloud

Work it out longhand. Using these approaches implies a willingness to do the math!

For Speedy Horde Combat

This method implicitly assumes one zombie per hex, as with *The Cloud*.

For an *area effect* with radius *R* yards, hexes affected equal $1 + 3 \times R \times (R - 1)$: one hex for 1 yard, seven hexes for 2 yards, 19 hexes for 3 yards, and so on. The number of zombies *potentially* affected is the lower of hex count or total horde size.

A *non-damaging, irresistible* area effect defeats 100% of potential targets. For a *non-damaging, resistible* one, consult *Statistically Speaking* (p. 113) to discover what fraction of those zombies resist.

For a *one-off, damaging* area effect, don't roll damage; use the average, at 3.5 points/die. If average injury after DR and wounding modifiers would be *lethal*, 100% of potential targets go down. If it's enough for unconsciousness (full HP) or knockdown (over HP/2), use *Statistically Speaking* with the appropriate HT roll to find the fraction eliminated. Ignore lesser injury.

For a *persistent, damaging* area effect like an incendiary, triple average injury, round *up*, and then handle it like a one-off. For instance, fire doing 1d-1 burn (average

2.5) per second counts as 8 points of damage – enough for knockdown on a DR 0 zombie with 15 or fewer HP.

For an *explosion*, sum average injury for the basic damage and average injury for any fragmentation damage (ignore distance), divide by zombie HP, and round *up* to a whole number to find *R*. Then follow the rules for a one-off, damaging area effect of that radius that does enough injury for knockdown; 1/4 of casualties are killed. For instance, if a 5dx2 cr grenade (average 35) explodes among zombies with DR 2 and 15 HP, average injury is 33 HP; 33/15 rounds up to $R = 3$, so 19 zombies are potentially affected. If their knockdown roll is 13, only 1/6 of these – three zombies – would be eliminated.

For Mob Attacks

Use the rules for *Speedy Horde Combat* with these changes:

- For an area effect, potential casualties are the lower of actual horde size or *triple* the hexes affected; e.g., for $R = 3$, 19 hexes are affected, so use the lower of horde size or 57.

- For an explosion, potential casualties are the lower of actual horde size or *double* the hexes affected. In a dense mob, the grenade above could possibly affect the lower of horde size or 38 zombies, 1/6 of which would be six.

- Mark off mob HP in proportion to casualties. This works out to (casualties $\times$ racial HP $\times$ 0.6). If that grenade took out six zombies with racial HP 15, it would knock 54 HP off the mob total.

Zombie Mobs Table

It's important to read a zombie's full description before using it for a mob attack, but this table summarizes a few key stats for likely candidates from *Instant Zombies* (pp. 90-107). *Move*, *Dodge*, and *DR* have their usual meaning. Other columns are as follows:

Type: The zombie type, with a reference to the page where it's described.

sST/sDX: ST and DX scores for *striking*. This ST includes any Striking ST.

Damage: Damage for the most common attack, considering ST, Claws, etc. An asterisk (*) means a bite; a dagger (†) indicates a punch.

gST/gDX: ST and DX scores for mob *grapples* and *takedowns*. This ST factors in any Lifting ST. These scores can also be used when two zombies grapple someone in *Speedy Horde Combat* (p. 115).

pST/pDX: ST and DX scores for mob *pins*. Again, ST considers Lifting ST.

HP: HP of damage *per hex* to disperse the mob. Multiply this by the number of hexes in the mob. Letter codes denote Injury Tolerance, if any: "L" means "living," "U" means "Unliving," and "H" means "Homogenous."

Notes: Special notes on infection, follow-up damage, etc.

Type	sST/sDX	Damage	gST/gDX	pST/pDX	Move	Dodge	DR	HP	Notes
B-Movie Ghoul (p. 90)	11/9	1d-2 cr*	13/10	15/12	3	7	0	27U	[1, 2]
Crazy (p. 101)	10/10	1d-3 cr†	12/12	14/14	5	8	0	18L	[1]
Enraged Infected (pp. 97, 98)	15/10	1d cr*	10/12	12/14	5	8	0	16.2L	[1, 3]
Face-Eater (p. 101)	14/10	1d-1 cr*	16/12	19/14	6	9	0	18L	
Fast Infected (pp. 97, 98)	9/11	1d-3 cr*	10/13	12/15	9	9	0	16.2L	[1, 3]
Fast, Enraged Infected (pp. 97, 98)	15/11	1d cr*	10/13	12/15	9	9	0	16.2L	[1, 3]
Infected (p. 97)	9/10	1d-3 cr*	10/12	12/14	5	8	0	16.2L	[1, 3]
Judgment's Legionary (p. 93)	12/12	1d-2 cr†	14/14	16/16	6	9	5	18H	[4]
Lurcher (p. 96)	14/10	1d-1 cr†	16/12	19/14	8	8	0	27U	
Neuroid (p. 103)	10/9	1d-3 cr†	12/10	14/12	5	8	0	18L	
Possessed Thrall (p. 94)	10/10	1d-3 cr†	12/12	14/14	5	7	0	18L	
Reanimated Corpse (p. 100)	11/10	1d-2 cr†	13/12	15/14	5	8	0	27U	
Reanimated Mummy (p. 101)	11/10	1d-2 cr†	13/12	15/14	5	8	0	27U	
Reanimated Skeleton (p. 101)	9/12	1d-2 cr†	10/14	12/16	7	9	2	16.2U	
ReViv™-ified (p. 103)	10/10	1d-3 cr*	12/12	14/14	5	8	0	28.8L	[1]
Vodou Slave (p. 102)	10/9	1d-3 cr†	12/10	14/12	4	7	0	18L	
Zombot (p. 93)	13/10	1d-1 cr†	20/12	23/14	7	8	2	27U	

Notes

[1] Infectious; see description.

[2] Plague ghouls have Fast Reanimation (p. 52) and inflict Pestilent Wounds; radiation ghouls cause 1d rads/sec.

[3] Plague Bite (p. 53); see description.

[4] Terror – Fright Check is at -1 for five zombies, -2 for 10, -3 for 20, -4 for 50, or -5 for 100+.

A mob that's dispersed but not destroyed eventually reforms. At worst, it will rally as a mob with 40% of its original size in (6d - Move) minutes, minimum one minute. One with access to "reinforcements" – from graves, the mad scientist's lab, use of Infectious or Dominance, etc. – will wait (3d - Move) hours, minimum one hour, and then return at full strength.

TURNING THE TIDE

Someone with suitable abilities may be able to make certain sorts of zombies hesitate or even break off their attack. This is easiest to resolve when using *Horde Action* (pp. 114-117), *Hordes and Large-Area Attacks* (p. 116), and *Resistance for Mobs* (p. 113) to streamline the hostilities. However, these notes also cover standard combat.

Intimidation (and Other Skills)

The Intimidation skill affects only zombies that have IQ 6+ and neither Indomitable nor Unfazeable. Though rare, these do exist. Like any predatory gang, infected (p. 97), ReViv™-ified (pp. 103-104), and similar living ghouls can occasionally be discouraged by threatening posturing.

The rules for group intimidation (p. B202) apply when facing a horde, and enough people must be involved to affect the entire horde – singling out *part* of it won't work. Everyone contributing to the attempt must take a Concentrate maneuver on his turn, and when the last person has done so, the individual with the highest skill rolls, at the standard penalties for relative group size. Failure means nothing happens and allows no repeated attempt. *Critical* failure may trigger Bad Temper, Berserk, or other aggressive zombie behavior! On a success, find the zombies' effective Will by starting with average Will – or the Will of their boss, if present – and modifying:

Modifiers: A penalty equal to the margin of success on Intimidation; +5 if combat has already started; a bonus for being incapable of reading or caring about ordinary people. This last modifier is +1 per -10 points or fraction thereof from *racial* Bad Temper [-10*], Berserk or Berserk (Vicious) [-10*], Berserk (Battle Rage) [-15*], Bestial [-10], Bloodlust [-10*], Intolerance (The Living) [-10], Low Empathy [-20], No Sense of Humor [-10], and Uncontrollable Appetite [-15*]; e.g., +4 for ReViv™-ified and +6 for ordinary infected (enraged ones are Indomitable).

Look up effective Will under *Statistically Speaking* (p. 113) to learn what fraction of the zombies back down and leave the fight.

At the GM's option, other skills may replace Intimidation for these rules: Animal Handling for constructs with beast brains, Religious Ritual for a priest whose church teaches *non-supernatural* abjurations for frightening weak-willed monsters, and so on.

Objects of Fear

Usefully presenting the object of a Dread or a Phobia requires a full turn – even for someone with Altered Time Rate – and is considered a Ready maneuver if brandishing something (like fire or a religious symbol) or a Concentrate maneuver for an activity (such as chanting or praying). If it's a ritual of some sort, it also requires a skill roll; use Religious Ritual for sacred rites, or Ritual Magic or Thaumatology (as appropriate) for magical ones other than spells. Failure simply wastes the turn, but repeated attempts *are* allowed. As soon as this activity stops, any fear effect it establishes ends.

If using *Horde Action* to accelerate combat, find the number of zombies potentially affected using *Hordes and Large-Area Attacks*. However, only use the full number if the individual presenting the item is *surrounded*. If he's right at the *edge* of the horde, halve it, to a minimum of one zombie.

Object of Dread: For the purpose of *Hordes and Large-Area Attacks*, this is a non-damaging, irresistible area effect that defeats 100% of potential targets – there's no roll to resist. In the formula for how many zombies are affected, treat this as an area effect with radius *R* equal to that of the Dread *plus one yard*. If using the full standard combat rules, measure the distance normally to see which zombies are affected.

Object of Phobia: Unlike the focus of a Dread, the object of a Phobia must be seen and doesn't advertise its presence supernaturally. Two intervening rows of zombies are more than enough to block sight. When applying *Hordes and Large-Area Attacks*, this is a non-damaging, resistible area effect with a radius *R* of two yards – three yards, if the wielder holds the item aloft at the cost of having an arm unavailable for active defenses. The Phobia's self-control number determines the fraction of zombies in the area that are affected: 9/10 at (6), 2/3 at (9), 1/4 at (12), or 1/20 at (15). If using the standard combat rules, any zombie screened from the object by two or more figures can't see it, while those that can see it must make self-control rolls. In all cases, use common sense; a flare fired high above zombies that fear

bright light should potentially affect them all, while a targeting laser would affect only the zombie it was pointed at.

Spells of Turning

For the purpose of *Hordes and Large-Area Attacks*, Area spells have a radius *R* equal to the radius that multiplies base cost; e.g., Turn Zombie (base cost 2) cast over a three-yard radius costs 6 energy points and affects 19 hexes.

Turn Spirit (*GURPS Magic*, p. 151): This spell affects zombies with the Affected as Dead feature and the Solidified Spirit meta-trait. It *isn't* an Area spell, so it's best to resolve it normally even in horde combat – although if it works, treat any zombie it sends away as out of the battle rather than worrying about where it runs to and when it returns.

Turn Zombie (*GURPS Magic*, p. 152): This spell only ever gets rid of zombies with the Affected as Dead feature. In the standard combat rules, roll 1d injury and 1d for the turning effect for each zombie in the area. For *Hordes and Large-Area Attacks*, find the number of potential casualties and eliminate 1/5 of these, rounding down. That's the 1/6 that the dice would turn plus a “fudge factor” to account for zombies trampled by fleeing horde-mates and the fact that if detailed wounds were tracked, a few zombies might not be able to afford 1d HP.

Example: A two-yard-radius Turn Zombie is cast at a horde of 30 zombies in a *Mob Attacks* (pp. 115-117) scenario. It blankets seven hexes, or at most 21 zombies. It turns 1/5 of those, or four zombies. If the zombies have racial HP 15, four casualties would chip 36 HP off the mob total.

True Faith

This advantage affects only zombies with the Can Be Turned By True Faith quirk. It always calls for Concentrate maneuvers to use.

For basic True Faith, follow the rules for presenting the object of a Dread to a zombie whose disadvantage has a one-yard radius. Can Be Turned By True Faith is just a one-yard Dread! In detailed combat, measure distance normally.

True Faith modified with Turning uses the visibility rules for presenting the object of a Phobia. When using *Hordes and Large-Area Attacks*, have the user roll against Will; on a success, apply *Resistance for Mobs* (p. 113) to determine how many zombies are driven off. If using standard combat rules, the person with True Faith must roll a Quick Contest of Will with any zombie not screened by two or more figures.

SURVIVING THE APOCALYPSE

During a full-fledged zombie outbreak or even a modest one in the graveyard next door – or if you're enemies with a necromancer – you may find yourself in a survival situation. What follows are rules and guidelines for such scenarios. The GM planning a survival-oriented campaign ought to be familiar with these, as should players creating survivor characters (unless catching them unaware is part of the GM's evil plans!).

KNOWLEDGE AND EQUIPMENT

When the zombies aren't *right there*, the principles for surviving any disaster apply. Everyone has a favorite list, but it always boils down to “know what to do” and “have what you need to do it.”

Short-term, knowing what to do means basic survival skills: Survival (in wilderness) or Urban Survival (in the city) for camping, fire-making, and gathering – along with First Aid for treating injuries, Fishing for catching food (Tracking, if you intend to hunt), Hiking and Navigation for leaving the hot zone or searching for help (almost certainly without a riding beast or a working car), Knot-Tying for securing gear and lashing together hasty shelter, and Scrounging and perhaps Forced Entry for finding supplies in built-up areas. Area Knowledge can replace Navigation, Scrounging, Survival, Tracking, or Urban Survival for rolls to recall *known* resources or routes in the area it covers, but never to discover new ones.

Longer-term, learn how to maintain what you have and make what you lack. You'll want Armoury for weapons and zombie-proof suits, Carpentry for shoring up hideouts, Gardening or even Farming for *growing* food, and Machinist or Smith for tool-making. Modern folk may be able to salvage gear with Electronics Repair and Mechanic (which *also* lets you do things like adapt an old car into a generator). Serious survivalists will find Chemistry valuable for distilling ethanol and making explosives.

Detailed rules for applying these skills aren't specific to zombie scenarios, and fill entire books. **GURPS Low-Tech** and **Low-Tech Companion 3** are indispensable guides to tasks for such skills, regardless of TL. **GURPS High-Tech's** "Dirty Tech" boxes are also immensely valuable, addressing improvised armor, batteries, explosives, fuel, and weapons at TL5-8.

For equipment, see *Zombie-Fighting Gear* (pp. 43-48), paying particular attention to *Personal Protection* (pp. 45-47) and *Survival Gear* (pp. 47-48).

*The guys used to laugh
when I hit the rifle range
at lunch. Ain't so funny now,
is it?*

– Louis,
in Left 4 Dead

BIOHAZARD!

If contagion plays a role, then it's imperative to avoid contact with whatever it is that infects. *Zombies in Combat* (pp. 108-118) offers several warnings that apply when fighting infectious zombies, *Spreading the Fun* (pp. 124-129) describes the rolls required if you're bit or splattered, and *A Better Tomorrow* (pp. 129-133) discusses cures.

Preventing Exposure

For a zombie plague that spreads like mundane disease, the GM should decide on its vector(s) and require daily HT rolls from people in the "hot zone" (see *Contagion*, p. B443).

Splatter (p. 125) may force more frequent HT rolls. Measures that block the vector or splash might grant a bonus to the roll or even waive it completely.

Armor: Total coverage with DR 1+ garments waives the roll for exposure to biting bugs or similar tiny skin-piercing threats. The effect becomes a mere +2 to HT if there are any missing pieces – and there's no benefit at all without torso coverage! Against splashes, *sealed* armor on the location splashed waives the roll; see *Armor and Clothing Modifications* (p. 47).

Breathing Gear: Surgical masks and dust masks (pp. 45-46) grant +1 against respiratory agents – or +2 if good-quality (×5 cost). Gas masks afford +(TL-4). Surgical masks last one day; dust and gas masks need daily cleaning (see the notes on decontamination, below). For a supplied-air respirator, roll vs. NBC Suit skill on donning it; success waives the need for a HT roll, while failure means it's no better than a good dust mask: +2.

Clothing: Waterproof clothing over the entire body – including wetsuits, dry suits, and anything waterproofed as described under *Armor and Clothing Modifications* (p. 47) – gives +2 vs. environmental contact agents, dropping to +1 if there are small gaps (no hat, no gloves, etc.) or to 0 without torso coverage. Such garments are also considered sealed against localized splashes on that body part.

Decontamination: Taking an hour to wash one's gear in *clean* water gives +1 on that day's roll vs. contact threats. Roll against Housekeeping for most gear, NBC Suit for a mask or an environment suit. Failure means the cleaner must make an extra HT roll without any bonuses. A decontamination sprayer or shower calls for a Hazardous Materials+4 roll to use, and success gives +TL/2 (rounded up) instead of +1 *and* counts as washing all of one's gear without risk of accidental exposure. Failure gives just +1, and the gear still needs washing.

Detectors: When on the move, if a detector or someone scouting ahead while wearing a test strip (see *Testing Equipment*, p. 48) reveals the presence of zombie plague, *and* extra time (at least 1.5 times as long, possibly longer) is taken to skirt the area, a roll is required that day, but at +4.

Environment Suits: A successful NBC Suit roll to don a full biohazard suit, disposable NBC suit, or space suit waives the need for contagion or splatter rolls. With a disposable "clean suit," infection is still possible, but contagion rolls are at +4. Failure on the skill roll, or any tear, means that such gear gives just +2, like waterproof clothing. Disposable suits last at most 72 hours. Other suits require daily decontamination.

Eye Protection: Goggles eliminate the extra -1 for splatter to the face, while full face protection (face shield, welding mask, etc.) is considered sealed – the splatter doesn't count. On daily rolls vs. contact or blood contagion, either gives a flat +1.

Insect Repellent: Daily use gives +3 on that day's roll against insect-borne plagues.

Washing: Daily use of ordinary soap or hand sanitizer gives +1 on that day's roll against anything that isn't exclusively inhaled or injected (e.g., biting bugs) – including aerosols, which settle on skin. Scrubbing down with antiseptic, surgical soap, etc. makes this +2. Showering in *clean* water gives a separate +1 on the day's roll vs. such threats.

If several bonuses would apply in a situation, they're cumulative except when they're different versions of the same thing (waterproof clothing *and* clean suit, dust mask *and* gas mask, etc.). For instance, in a hot zone for a contact plague, a survivor who always wears full waterproof clothing (+2) plus goggles (+1), decontaminates this getup with water each day (+1), and showers daily (+1) with soap (+1) receives +6. A roll of 17-18 always fails, though!

Cleaning Wounds

Cleaning zombie wounds won't affect rolls for contagion or splatter, but might affect those for infected bites – including rolls for *Infection* (p. B444). Household soaps and sanitizers grant +1. Most antiseptics (alcohol, hydrogen peroxide, iodine, phenol, etc.) give +2. Antibiotic ointment is good for +TL/2, rounded up, against *bacteria*. Use the best applicable bonus. Cauterization requires a Surgery roll, inflicts 1d-3 burn (minimum 1 point), and gives a *separate* bonus of +1 plus half the margin of success if successful.

Antibiotics and Antivirals

Drugs *might* help stave off slower-acting contagion, if they're in the victim's system already or he receives them shortly after exposure (intravenously, for plagues that work in hours or less). An antibiotic has no effect on a virus, an antiviral does nothing against bacteria, antiparasitics might affect nematodes, nanotech calls for other nanotech, some chemical toxins have chemical antidotes, and nothing much works on prions. In all cases, a *suitable* drug gives up to +TL/2 to resistance rolls.

Judging correct dosage calls for a Physician roll. Failure means no HT bonus. Critical failure precipitates a dangerous drug reaction of the GM's choosing; e.g., roll versus HT, with success meaning 1d injury, ordinary failure inflicting 2d, and critical failure causing heart attack (p. B429). Long-term prophylactic dosing has many minor-but-unpleasant side effects, collectively giving -1 to DX, IQ, and skill rolls.

Handling Grue

Handling infected zombie bodies, blood samples, and so on always has risks attached. Such work requires a Hazardous Materials roll. The correct specialty for classic plagues is Biological, but stranger outbreaks might call for Chemical, Radioactive, Nanotech, or even Magical. Success indicates no special exposure that day. Failure means an *extra* roll to resist is needed, although precautions still help. Critical failure signifies a needle stick or similar disaster: roll to resist immediately, with an additional -3 *instead* of bonuses for precautions.

An Ounce of Prevention

Regardless of bonuses, a contagion roll of 17-18 always fails. Thus, without an NBC suit or similar protection, you'll be infected after about 50 days in or near a "hot zone" no matter how careful you are! In a campaign where the heroes cannot easily avoid diseased locales, the GM may want to implement the following *optional* rule:

When rolling against HT to avoid contagion, infection, etc., a roll of 17-18 might not fail *if* you have a bonus from Resistant or one of the precautions above *and* effective HT is 16+. If both conditions hold, roll again at -10. You're only infected if this "confirmation roll" fails as well.

Then Again, Maybe Not

The above guidelines assume that zombie contagion behaves at least somewhat like real-world dangers – but zombies aren't from the real world! The GM may reduce *any* bonus for *any* countermeasure. He might reserve full bonuses (or all bonuses) for weird countermeasures, like tinfoil suits rather than waterproof ones, or obscure mountaintop flowers instead of antibiotics. He can also change skills to match; e.g., requiring rolls against Hazardous Materials (Magical) for general safety, Alchemy for decontamination, and Esoteric Medicine to administer that mountaintop flower.

STAYING OUT OF REACH

If zombies are infectious, then it's unwise to approach them, much less fight them – survivors can avoid lots of HT rolls by steering clear of them. Even survivors who are immune or facing non-infectious zombies should heed this advice. A fight can expend ammo, damage gear, lead to injuries that slow the group (and consume scarce medical supplies), and kill fighters you'll need in the battles you *can't* circumvent.

Route Planning

At the highest level, "avoid zombies" means not going where they are. Travelers with a map created by officials or other survivors may roll Cartography, Navigation, or IQ-5, with up to +5 for good, recent maps, or a penalty of any size for iffy work. Any success avoids the zombies. Failure by 1 is a close approach – no zombies attack, but there will be a contagion roll at +4 that day if zombies are infectious, and the GM should apply *Who Notices?* (pp. 113-114) to see if zombies detect the survivors and come searching. Worse failure means an encounter, with critical failure spelling an ambush!

If the map is a deliberate trap, critical success gives a close approach, success means an encounter, and *any* failure indicates an ambush.

Without a map (or if you don't trust the map), this is a job for Observation. Roll at a basic -5, with +1 per 10% reduction in daily travel speed – constantly stopping to check for zombies is smart but slow. A day of static observation gives a net +5. Results are as for following a reliable map.

Deception

Barring super-powers or spells that grant literal invisibility – or inaudibility, no scent, etc. – survivors require Camouflage or Stealth to hide in zombie territory. These work normally: a Quick Contest of skill vs. the zombies' Perception, which often isn't spectacular. Remember that *Who Notices?* (pp. 113-114) gives large hordes an edge, and that *Sinister Senses* (p. 88) may grant zombies a bonus.

If zombies rely on *behavior* or *scent* to distinguish prey from other zombies, brave heroes might be able to fool them in plain sight! Such trickery is only possible if the zombies haven't yet grown agitated or started to attack.

Walk the Walk: Against zombies that use only vision and hearing, the trick is to act like a zombie (*Shaun of the Dead* shows how). This requires winning a Quick Contest of Will-based Acting against the higher of the zombies' effective IQ or Per.

Carry On With What You Were Doing: If the zombies use scent, which is standard for those with Discriminatory Smell, then fooling them means covering yourself in zombie grue – butcher one and smear it on, *Walking Dead*-style. This is *foul*, and anyone with a Phobia regarding blood, death, dirt, or infection, or with Squeamish, must make a self-control roll to go through with it; on a success, the attempt still suffers the penalty on p. B149. If zombie plague is spread by any splatter (not just a bite), make an immediate resistance roll at an extra -2, and protective gear doesn't help unless it's a full, sealed suit worn under the filth. To trick the zombies, win a Quick Contest of Will vs. their Smell roll. In a setting where zombies are old news, there may be a Disguise (Zombies) skill; if so, heroes may use that instead.

In both cases, the real zombies receive the standard bonus for a horde, while the fake zombies roll *once* using the worst score among them. Loss means that someone sweated, fidgeted, or otherwise gave up the game – or threw up or flicked off a maggot, if covered in carrion – with predictable consequences. Victory or a tie lets the survivors pass. Roll again every minute.

Mobility

Creative use of the environment can help survivors avoid trouble in zombie territory. Many zombies are clumsy (poor DX) or slow (low Basic Move), and therefore unable to follow an agile runner. Staying up high inflicts -2 on the zombies' typically mediocre Per (see *Attack from Above*, p. B402) – and Incurious zombies won't even glance at treetops or rooftops. The GM should also be generous about zombies with Bestial being stumped by ladders, those with Hidebound being unable to follow fancy acrobatics, and so on. Some sample stunts, all of which take a penalty equal to the hero's encumbrance level:

Balancing: Roll Acrobatics at -2 to traverse something *narrow* (ledge, plank between rooftops, etc.) or at -5 for something slack like a telephone wire. A pole helps balance: +2 for a 6' pole, +3 for a 10' pole. Failure means a fall, but permits a DX roll to grab something and try a pull-up. Critical failure (or failing that DX roll) means a fall from the height of the crossing. Heroes with Perfect Balance don't have to roll!

Climbing: Roll vs. Climbing at -3 once per story when scaling a building, once at no modifier if clambering over a fence, or once at +5 for a tree. Failure and critical failure work as for balancing.

Diving: An Acrobatics roll at -4 lets you dive through a narrow opening – say, an open window. Failure means you

Sacrifice

Rules for zombies-versus-survivors situations – notably *Deception* (pp. 120-121) and *Run for Your Life* (p. 122) – often assume that survivors want to stay together, the leaders telling the followers when to move out, the strong assisting the weak, the swift waiting for the slow. In a lot of zombie fiction, this isn't the best assumption. Two dramatic exceptions come to mind:

Voluntary Sacrifice: People who *know* they'll hold back their allies – because the rules call for the group to use its lowest DX, Move, or skill, and that's theirs – may voluntarily abandon an attempt to flee or hide. Courageous souls may wish to keep these martyrs company, or to stop, fight, and thin the horde while others get away. In either case, the abilities of those who opt out no longer restrict the group; each volunteer can even help one fleeing ally with something like a magic spell or the "leg up" stunt (see below). The zombies *automatically* get to engage in combat with these brave few, who buy their associates time to break off contact without further dice-rolling, though the zombies may come looking after the fight.

Left for Dead: And then there are desperate and selfish survivors who don't *care* about others. They don't roll with the group; they rely on their own abilities and make their own rolls, deciding what skills and options they'll use. The group (if there's one left) still decides and rolls collectively, and the zombies still make one roll, which is compared to the group's outcome and the selfish individuals' rolls. The person who beats the zombies' Per by the most if hiding or who opens up the biggest gap in a chase thanks to DX, Move, and/or skills – and anyone who hides successfully while others flee – escapes without further dice-rolling. Everyone else remains in the situation, though selfish types can try again on the next roll. And note that if the *group* does best, or hides while someone runs off . . . well, the overconfident jerk just sacrificed himself, as above!

Don't take the wording too seriously. A speedy survivor might be making a real sacrifice if he leads the zombies off while the group hides, or sprints ahead for help. A voluntary sacrifice who's carrying the group's only first aid kit isn't much of a hero. And so on.

end up *stuck*; roll vs. Escape each second until you get free or the zombies get you. Critical failure adds 1d-3 HP of injury (DR doesn't protect).

Leaping: If an obstacle is small enough for anyone to hurdle, just roll DX – only use *Jumping* (p. B352) if it's wide or *dangerous*, like a gap between rooftops. Failure allows a DX roll to catch the far side and try a pull-up. Critical failure (or failure on the DX roll not to fall) means you fall somewhere in the middle – pray you're not 10 stories up.

Leg Up: A friend can boost you to reach a high area. He rolls against ST while you roll Acrobatics at -2. If you both succeed, you can reach anything up to the sum of your heights and try a pull-up to get yourself up there.

Failure by either of you lets you retry, but your partner must pay 1 FP per repeated attempt. On any critical failure, you collapse in a pile and each take 1d-3 HP of injury (DR doesn't protect).

Pull-Up: Make a ST-based Climbing roll to pull yourself up onto anything you can reach: your height plus 1.5'. On a failure, you hang there and may retry, paying 1 FP per repeated attempt. Critical failure means a strained arm (crippled for 30 minutes) and a fall.

Squeezing: Roll against Escape to wiggle through a narrow crack (like an air duct). Success lets you do it. Failure means you won't fit and can't retry. Critical failure means you're *stuck*; roll vs. Escape each second until you succeed and pull back out or the zombies get you.

Vaulting: An Acrobatics roll lets you hurtle over an obstacle no taller than 3/4 of your height without slowing. Failure means you don't make it, costing you only time. Critical failure means you *fall down*.

Such exploits are mostly useful for ducking behind cover, reaching high places where the zombies can't see you, and moving between rooftops without venturing downstairs, through a horde, and all the way up again. If zombies haven't spotted you yet and one of these stunts would let you reach a hiding spot before they do, go ahead and try. Failure means the zombies find you dangling, prone, or stuck. Success executes the move *and* counts as a successful Stealth roll – even if you're running frantically and don't know Stealth! If your margin of success beats the zombies' Per roll (see *Deception*, pp. 120-121), you evade them; if it doesn't, you can still run, and further athletics may yet save you.

Run for Your Life

When zombies chase PCs, the GM *can* say "You're faster, so you escape" or "You're slower, so they catch you," but that's boring. It also isn't in the spirit of zombie movies, where hordes are huge, zombies always seem to be lurking along the survivors' path, and heroes rely on resourcefulness rather than sheer speed. Optionally, handle a chase as a series of Quick Contests of DX. A zombie horde rolls once at racial average DX, while a group of heroes also gets one roll at their *lowest* DX. Those with the Running skill may substitute DX-based Running for DX.

The GM sets the starting encounter distance, which can be anything from a few yards to 60 times the zombies' Move. Then start rolling Quick Contests! Each Quick Contest covers roughly 10 seconds. Modifiers include:

Skills: Heroes may opt to try Area Knowledge in familiar territory, Survival in any wilderness situation, or Urban Survival in built-up surroundings. A group of PCs rolls once per Quick Contest, using the *best* applicable skill level. Critical success gives +2, success gives +1, failure gives -1, and critical failure gives -2.

Speed: Each side receives a bonus for Move – racial average Basic Move for a horde of zombies, the lowest Move among multiple heroes. Use the "Size" column of the table on p. B550, selecting the *lower* bonus for intermediate values: +1 for Move 3-4, +2 for Move 5-6, +3 for Move 7-9, and so on.

Heroes can also try two tricks that give modifiers:

Hide: If there's a hiding place around, they can use Stealth or a flashy stunt to duck into it and let the zombies rush past. Make the Stealth or stunt roll immediately, treating it as a Quick Contest against the zombies' effective Per, as explained in *Who Notices?* (pp. 113-114). If a *group* tries this, roll once against the lowest score – but not everyone needs to use the same skill. Win or lose, the heroes have -10 in the upcoming Quick Contest of DX, plus a bonus equal to their margin of victory or a penalty equal to their margin of loss in the hiding attempt.

Outmaneuver: If there's an obstacle around, they can attempt a stunt under *Mobility* (pp. 121-122) to put it between them and the zombies. If a *group* tries this, use the lowest roll among them – but if several stunts would work, they need not all use the same score. If the heroes fail the roll, they automatically lose this particular Quick Contest of DX by the same margin. On a success, though, they get +1 in the Quick Contest per two points of success or fraction thereof: +1 for 0-2, +2 for 3-4, +3 for 5-6, etc.

Then roll the Quick Contest. Each point of victory for the heroes increases the gap by the lowest Move in the group. Each point of victory for the zombies narrows the gap by *their* Move. A tie changes nothing. However:

- If the gap closes to 0 or less, the zombies overrun the heroes and combat begins.
- If the gap exceeds 60 times the zombies' Move, the zombies break off the chase.
- If the GM ruled that there was guaranteed escape (elevator, running vehicle, etc.) a fixed distance from the starting point, then each Quick Contest where the heroes run rather than hide moves them 10 times their lowest Move toward it. If they cover the entire distance without the gap closing to 0, they get away, ending the chase.
- If the heroes elected to hide *and* won the Quick Contest of DX despite the probable penalty, they escape *for now*. The zombies will keep searching, but that's a question of Stealth, not speed.

HIDEOUTS AND VEHICLES

Measures to keep *people* out of or inside buildings (or vehicles) work equally well against *zombies* – often better, as few zombies can defeat locks or traps. Such defenses include vault doors and bulletproof glass (as seen in *Resident Evil*), and landmines (as shown in *28 Days Later*). However, zombies are persistent and rarely alone, and smart survivors will account for this when choosing fortresses and transportation.

Horde Strength and Basic Lift

Structures with foundations are safe from hordes. Such buildings have openings, though, and anything that *isn't* anchored can be upended. When zombies mob barricades, flimsy shacks, vehicles, etc., the results depend on how many of them can bring strength to bear.

Find target SM on the *Size and Speed/Range Table* (p. B550). Read across to "Linear Measurement," ignoring "yd": 2 for SM 0, 3 for SM +1, 5 for SM +2, and so on.

Square this number to determine how many zombies can push, pull, or batter an object of that size: 4 for SM 0, 9 for SM +1, 25 for SM +2, and so forth. Then determine two quantities:

Horde Basic Lift: Individual Basic Lift for racial average ST, multiplied by the number of zombies found above.

Horde Strength: The ST corresponding to Horde BL is simply racial average ST multiplied by the “Linear Measurement” found above.

Press of Flesh

If the object of the zombies’ rage is fixed rigidly in place, Horde ST can’t be used for individual blows but *can* slowly overwhelm the obstacle. Roll thrust crushing damage for Horde ST once per minute, subtract the target’s DR, and apply what’s left to its HP; for sample barriers, see the *Structure Damage Table* (p. B558). At 0 HP, the object must roll vs. HT (normally 12) every minute or cave in; at -HP, it gives way enough to admit zombies regardless.

If *average* damage can’t penetrate DR, don’t bother rolling for it – the barricade holds. However, if *maximum* damage could defeat DR, the object needs a daily maintenance roll (against Carpentry for wood, Machinist for metal, Masonry for stone, etc.) while under stress. This requires man-hours equal to the “Linear Measurement” for its SM. Each skipped or failed maintenance roll reduces HT by one. Roll vs. the new HT when this happens. Failure means zombies break in at some random time that day! Restoring each HT point is a major repair (see *Repairs*, p. B484).

Example: A mall entrance has SM +2, so 25 infected can press on it. At racial average ST 9, Horde ST is $9 \times 5 = 45$. Thus, they inflict 5d cr every minute. That does 17.5 points of damage on average, 30 points maximum. If the door is boarded over using 2” plank with DR 2, HP 29, it will be rolling against HT in two minutes, and worthless for sure in four. If crafty survivors weld 1” steel bars across it (DR 22), this won’t happen, but they must still put in five man-hours on any day when zombies challenge it, or after a few days it will collapse from a failed HT roll (against HT 11, 10, 9 . . .).

Like Ants

If the object is moveable but not moving (which includes any vehicle that isn’t under way), the horde will shove it along or flip it over – not crush it. Use Horde BL with *Lifting and Moving Things* (p. B353) to find the results.

Example: Those mall zombies, deterred by steel bars, catch the scent of human on the survivors’ bus and mob it. The bus has SM +6, so up to 400 infected could engulf it. The parking lot is much fuller than that! Individual BL for ST 9 is 16 lbs., so Horde BL is $16 \times 400 = 6,400$ lbs. The bus on p. B464 weighs 8 tons empty (LWt. - Load), or 16,000 lbs. That’s Medium encumbrance for the horde, who with Basic Move 5 can hustle it along at Move 3 – or overturn it.

Impeding Progress

If the object is moveable and *moving*, the horde can’t plant its many feet for a lift, but grasping hands and

Digging Out

A less-than-realistic use of zombie ST is for escaping graves. Assume that zombies self-exhume at a speed of BL/80 feet/hour; e.g., 0.25 foot/hour for a ST 10 zombie, meaning 24 hours if buried six feet deep. Halve or double speed for especially hard or soft soil.

crushed bodies will offer resistance. Find the zombies’ Move as if they were carrying off the target and subtract this from the object’s Move each second.

While the horde is interfering like this, the operator of a powered vehicle has two choices each turn:

- He may hit the gas and attempt to barge through (effective for heavy and/or armored vehicles). The vehicle is slowed as explained above, but the driver can use Acceleration each turn to speed up. In the process, his vehicle suffers solid hits from a number of zombies equal to the “Linear Measurement” used for the horde, *halved*. Find the average side-on collision damage (p. B432) that one zombie would inflict and subtract vehicle DR (attachments like dozer blades give *at least* +5 DR). If injury is greater than zero, multiply by the number of zombies struck.

- He may weave through the horde (advisable for ordinary automobiles) by making a Driving roll, modified for Handling. Success lets him subtract his margin from deceleration (to a minimum of zero) *and* apply Acceleration; work out collision damage as in the previous case, but reduce the number of zombies involved by margin of success. Failure by no more than Stability Rating means that full deceleration applies, Acceleration doesn’t, and there’s no reduction in zombie hits. Worse failure indicates a roll or other wipeout into the horde – don’t assess individual hits, just treat this as a collision with a soft, immovable object (p. B431), figured using Move at the start of the turn and ending with the vehicle stopped in the mob!

Whatever the driver’s choice and its outcome, zombies will suffer! Roll the *vehicle’s* collision damage against the horde. Each multiple of zombie HP eliminates one zombie.

Example: If the bus were moving when the mall zombies mobbed it, it would be slowed by Move 3 per second. If the driver hit the gas, he would have -3 to Move for the horde, +1 for the bus’ Acceleration 1, and thus -2 to Move that turn. As the bus’ SM +6 gives a “Linear Measurement” of 20, he’d strike 10 infected. At the bus’ Top Speed of 30, a zombie with 9 HP would inflict 3d damage. Against DR 4, each would do 6.5 HP of injury on average, for 65 HP total.

If the driver swerved, he would roll against Driving, at -2 for Handling. Success by 3+ would avoid deceleration, allowing Acceleration 1 to *increase* Move by 1; success by 2 would give -1 to Move, which Acceleration could offset; success by 1 would mean -2 to Move, for a net -1 with Acceleration; and success by 0 would still allow Acceleration, for -2 to Move. Success would also let the driver subtract his margin from the potential 10 solid hits, avoiding 6.5 HP of injury per point of success. Failure by up to 4 (the bus’ SR) would mean -3 to Move and 10 solid hits.

Worse failure would spell disaster – with ST/HP 100 at Top Speed 30, the resulting 30d damage would easily overcome the bus’ DR 4, burn through its 100 HP, and trash it!

Whether the driver rams, swerves, or wipes out, he rolls collision damage against the horde. That, too, is 30d, averaging 105 points of damage. With 9 HP each, 11 zombies go down.

SPREADING THE FUN

Not all forms of zombification are catching, but many are – and even in settings where *none* are, influences ranging from cursed ground to space dust can result in zombies.

DEAD OR ALIVE?

First, choose whether the toxic waste, virus, curse, etc. turns the *dead* or the *living* into zombies. For the purpose of this question, it’s unimportant whether the dead return as undead (like Judgment’s Legionaries) or awaken to a strange new life (like ReViv™-ified), or whether the living exposed to the zombifying force join the undead hordes at death (like B-movie ghouls) or remain alive but zombified (like infected). These details are topical for Chapter 3, which shows how to build zombies that match these and other descriptions.

After making this choice, it’s time to determine what subset of the target group is prone to zombification.

The Living Turn

Options for living victims include:

- Those attacked but not slain by zombies with Dominance, Infectious Attack, or Infectious.
- Anyone who so much as gets near a zombie with Dominance (No Injury Required) or Infectious.
- Anyone in an afflicted area; e.g., a biohazardous “hot zone” or a town with tainted drinking water.
- Everyone! The “afflicted area” is the entire world. Again, space dust or a global pandemic would work.

The Dead Walk

Common possibilities for the dead are:

- Those killed by zombies with Dominance, Infectious Attack, or Infectious.
- Corpses exposed to Infectious zombies, whether or not zombies did the killing.
- Corpses left in affected areas; e.g., on cursed ground or in toxic runoff zones.
- All corpses! This is the previous case given global scope – perhaps cometary dust, a global pandemic, or Judgment Day reanimates *all* dead.

EXPOSURE AND RESISTANCE

Next, specify what constitutes “exposure” and what dice rolls, if any, are required when that happens. Many suggestions appear below. Rolling is only mandatory for PCs and key NPCs. In a zombie apocalypse, assume that nameless

NPCs *will* turn if exposed. If zombification is meant to be rare – or a bittersweet reprieve from death – the GM may reserve it for the interesting few. A character can’t opt out of a roll but *can* influence the odds (to avoid turning or to embrace zombiedom) using Luck, options from **GURPS Power-Ups 5**, etc.

Living Victims: Zombifying Forces

If zombification menaces everyone in an area – perhaps the whole world – regardless of exposure to zombies, then first decide what it is:

Biological: Bacteria, prions, viruses, and so on. Model this with *Disease* (pp. B442-444). Degree of exposure is usually important, meaning that *Contagion* (p. B443) adjusts HT rolls.

Chemical: Toxic waste, particles from space, etc. Model this using *Poison* (pp. B437-441). If degree of exposure matters, *Dosage* (p. B438) will affect HT rolls.

Curse: A divine judgment pronounced on a town or something similar. This typically leads to Will rolls instead of HT rolls. Magic Resistance and Magic Susceptibility would logically affect a magical influence, while Mind Shield might help against purely mental one.

Radiological: Fallout, radioactive space dust, and the like. Track “Z-rads” separately from mundane radiation. Make HT rolls after each exposure, modified for total dose as in *Radiation* (pp. B435-436).

Next, decide on the stuff’s mode of delivery or vector. Physical threats are generally blood, contact, digestive, or respiratory. Curses and sci-fi radiation traditionally *are* – you’re either in the area of effect or you aren’t.

Finally, settle on the resistance roll. For physical phenomena, the HT to HT-6 range recommended for disease is best. For curses, use Will to Will-6. Weird examples may swap these: a madness-inducing infection or toxin could trigger Will rolls, while a curse similar to a Body Control spell might require HT rolls. Regardless, failure means eventual zombification; for contagion, poison, or radiation, this is often *instead of* effects commonly associated with mundane hazards.

Living Victims: Exposed to Zombies

Some zombies carry a curse or a plague to which brief exposure will suffice. Where Dominance (No Injury Required) represents this, the conditions specified for that ability determine what “exposure” means: coming within a fixed distance, a touch on bare skin, etc. If this happens, the victim must make an unmodified HT roll to resist a disease or a straight Will roll to shrug off a curse.

For zombies with Infectious, the guidelines under *Living Victims: Zombifying Forces* (p. 124) apply – exposure just happens to involve zombies instead of something in the environment. Once again, the modifier to the HT or Will roll can be anywhere from 0 to -6. Further modifiers might include degree of exposure (use *Contagion*, p. B443), but the GM may replace these with case-specific adjustments; e.g., a penalty when the victim's *head* is the point of exposure (the brain being the usual target!).

In all cases, a failed resistance roll means infection.

Living Victims: Savaged by Zombies

While most zombies that transmit contagion do so by attacking, not all kill – some merely injure their prey and leave the rest to infection, which might turn the victim into a zombie directly or kill him first. If this involves Dominance without Fatal Beating or No Injury Required, or Infectious Attack without Fatal Beating, then roll 3d vs. HP of injury from infected attacks. “Success” means infection. Resistance involves rolling *higher* than the injury amount.

Zombies with Infectious *can* use the same rule – what differentiates Infectious from Dominance or Infectious Attack is what side the new zombie fights on, not dice rolls. If the GM prefers, though, such infection might use a contagion or curse roll, as described in *Living Victims: Zombifying Forces* (p. 124). Another flavorful option is to have it work like *Infection* (p. B444): if the zombie inflicts at least 1 HP of injury on a living person via direct, body-to-body contact (biting, skin-on-skin punching or rending, etc.), the victim must roll vs. HT to resist, with either the **Basic Set** modifiers or those below.

Modifiers: +3 for crushing damage, or 0 for cutting or impaling; -3 for a bite, regardless of damage type; from 0 to -6 for infectivity (GM's decision).

Failure to resist means the victim is infected.

Dead Bodies: Killed by Zombies

A few zombies kill their victims, who then get up as zombies. If this involves Dominance or Infectious Attack with Fatal Beating, the roll is against HP of injury from infected attacks. This will almost surely succeed unless the zombie delivers only the last few HP that kill a sorely wounded target – or unless the roll is 17 or 18. Here, “success” means infection.

If the zombie has Infectious, the GM has many more options, as the zombie won't be gaining a useful ally and what's “fair” doesn't matter much to a dead victim:

- *No roll at all!* Be it a curse or a plague, everybody killed by zombies becomes a zombie. This is quick and easy.

- *Resisted by HT.* The affliction is a disease, and what's left of a healthy victim's immune system can shrug it off. Failure means zombification.

- *Resisted by (20 - HT).* The affliction is a form of low-grade resurrection that works best on the healthy – the sickly can't survive the shock of dying and returning. Failure means zombification.

Splatter

When PCs battle zombies, it's important to establish whether they're exposed to contagion. This is easy if the zombie has Dominance or any form of Infectious that relies on a specific attack: If the conditions noted for the ability are met, then you've been exposed. Otherwise, you're safe.

However, it's a staple of horror fiction that *some* zombies need only get the tiniest bit of gore on you to expose you. This is a function of a suitably defined form of Infectious. Handle exposure using *Living Victims: Exposed to Zombies* (pp. 124-125). If the GM desires extra detail, he can use the following rule to assess a HT modifier instead of selecting one of those under *Contagion* (p. B443).

Whenever any of the following events happen to a fighter in combat, make a tally mark (if the event meets two conditions, count it *once*):

Strike, grapple, or parry a zombie in unarmed combat.

Zombie injured by cutting, impaling, or piercing damage within one yard.

Zombie injured by explosion within yards equal to explosion's damage dice (explosions that injure many zombies count as multiple events).

Zombie suffers dismemberment within two yards.

Zombie suffers single injury of 10×HP or more within two yards.

Zombie with Fragile (Brittle) dies within two yards.

Zombie with Fragile (Explosive) ruptures, inflicting injury.

After combat, look up the tally in the “Shots” column on the table under *Rapid Fire* (p. B373), find the corresponding bonus, and add it to 8. Then roll 3d against the total. Success means that combatant is hit with one splatter plus splatters equal to margin of success.

Anyone hit gets *one* Dodge roll against the grue, reflecting how well he ducked splashes during the fight. Use basic Dodge – don't worry about modifiers that might have applied in battle. Success avoids one splatter plus splatters equal to margin of success.

Should any splatters hit, roll for their hit locations (p. B552). A person struck anywhere without *sealed* armor, biohazard gear, or similar protection has been exposed. Make a single HT roll, modified for the zombie plague's infectivity (usually 0 to -6) plus another -1 per splatter that hit unprotected body parts. Add an extra -1 if any of these struck the unprotected *face*. Failure means infection!

If bites also lead to infection, consult *Living Victims: Savaged by Zombies* (above) and make the *harder* of the two HT rolls.

- *Resisted by Will.* The affliction is a curse, and the spirit of a strong-willed victim can resist it. Failure means zombification.

- *Resisted by (20 - Will).* The affliction is a double-edged sword that grants strong-willed victims the opportunity to return for vengeance – as monsters. Failure means zombification.

- *Roll vs. HP of injury.* Exactly like Dominance or Infectious Attack. Success means zombification.

- *Roll vs. target number.* A flat percentage of those killed by zombies turn. This suits brute-force influences that interact with dead meat and leave mind, spirit, etc. out of the equation. Assign odds on 3d: 6 or less, 10 or less, etc. Success means zombification.

If there's a roll, the GM may optionally apply modifiers. The following suggestions assume *resistance* rolls (*failure* means zombification). If *success* means zombification, then bonuses become penalties and vice versa; e.g., when rolling against HP of injury, someone who died of 20 HP of wounds would treat the +3 for each of dying cleanly and being embalmed as -3, and thus turn on 14 or less.

General Modifiers: 0 for a messy death (gnawed and left to bleed out) or +3 for a "clean" one (decapitation, neck snap, etc.).

Curses: -3 for murder, suicide, or wrongful execution, -2 for dishonorable death in combat, -1 for lawful execution, 0 for honorable death in combat, +1 for accident, or +3 for natural death; -3 if funerary rites willfully denied, -2 if overlooked, -1 if hasty or partial, 0 if full, or +1 to +10 if grave/body is proofed against curses*; 0 to -6 for curse's power.

Plagues: -3 if the body was left to rot, 0 if buried, +3 if embalmed, or +4 to +10 if proofed against zombie plague (GM decides)*; 0 to -6 for infectivity.

* Alternatively, replace this modifier with margin of success or failure on a suitable skill: for a curse, Religious Ritual of the priest who presided over the funeral; for plague, Hazardous Materials (Biological) of the cleanup crew; in either situation, Professional Skill (Mortician) of the mortician; and so on.

Dead Bodies: Zombifying Forces

If people who die of *any* cause (bad heart, gunshot wounds, etc.) reanimate, then first establish what degree of exposure is required; e.g., zombies must have gnawed on the person in life (as with plague ghouls), zombies need merely walk within two yards of the cadaver, or the corpse has to be left in the Cursed Forest or evil burial ground. This sort of thing frequently has a time element – the one day a year when the dead arise, dying at exactly midnight or during the full moon, etc. In a zombie apocalypse, *all* corpses are likely to be candidates!

Next, set the roll to become a zombie:

- *No roll at all!* Every corpse left in the right conditions becomes a zombie.

- *Roll vs. HT.* The hardest folk are likely to survive the transition.

- *Roll vs. (20 - HT).* Sickliness aids the conversion.

- *Roll vs. Will.* The strongest-willed people are itching to return.

- *Roll vs. (20 - Will).* The strong-willed loathe zombiedom, and can often avoid it.

- *Roll vs. target number.* A flat percentage of dead people zombify.

In all cases, *success* means the victim turns.

Again, the GM may opt to apply modifiers. Those noted for *Dead Bodies: Killed by Zombies* (pp. 125-126) work – just remember to treat bonuses as penalties and vice versa, as this is a roll where *success* means reanimation. For instance, a murder victim who's willfully denied funerary rites would treat the -3 for each of these things as +3; if there's a Will roll to become a vengeance-seeking zombie, he would roll at Will+6.

As with *Living Victims: Zombifying Forces* (p. 124), there may be further modifiers for infectivity and/or dosage. These, too, are reversed: high infectivity or dosage might give a bonus; low infectivity or dosage, a penalty. For instance, a corpse irradiated with 800 "Z-rads" would turn the -5 to HT for 800 rads into a +5 on his HT roll to return.

The GM may elect to add another +1 to +3 for someone killed by zombies, even though that fate isn't necessary for zombification to occur in this case. In most tales where the dead rise regardless of cause of death, victims of zombies get up first!

Dice of the Dead

The GM with *Zombie Dice* might want to skip numbers and modifiers when it comes to checking whether corpses zombify. For one body, chuck the full set – the stiff gets up if there are more brains than blasts. For lots of corpses, roll 1dZ per cadaver and have a brain mean reanimation. Green dice give 1 in 2 odds (10 or less); yellow, 1 in 3 (not quite 9 or less); and red, 1 in 6 (approximately 7 or less). Rolling all 13 dice for 13 cadavers is about the same as rolling 9 or less on 3d for each.

TRIGGERS AND TIMELINES

Now specify how quickly zombification sets in when the dice roll (if any) indicates that it will. Processes that affect dead bodies and those that "turn" living people differ somewhat here.

Zombification of the Living

For a process that turns the living into zombies – whether it leaves them alive-but-transformed or kills and then reanimates them – decide whether the clock starts ticking on *exposure* or *after a trigger event*:

- If it starts on *exposure*, the countdown to zombiedom begins immediately. Symptoms (pp. 128-129) may show during this time – although the earliest symptom of many varieties of zombification is "You're a zombie!"

- If there's a *trigger*, then exposure plants a condition that will start the countdown. Specify this in reasonable detail; good examples are going to sleep, awakening, receiving a potentially fatal injury (-HP or worse), and contracting a mundane disease. In this case, it's more dramatic to make any roll required at the instant the trigger condition is met.

In either case, schedules for the countdown include:

Seconds: Zombification on a combat timescale – there's little or no delay! Dominance (No Onset Time) and Infectious Attack (Instant Karma) start on exposure and take just a second. Zombification on exposure rarely works this fast otherwise, and Infectious never does, as it isn't intended to influence combat. Zombification with a trigger, whatever its justification, is another matter; where a trigger effectively replaces a long countdown time (e.g., "on going to sleep" is comparable to hours), onset time may be mere seconds.

Minutes or Hours: Zombification on the timescale of noncombat adventuring activities (such as planning, sneaking around, and treating injuries) and cinematic diseases. This is common in movies, where the process waits long enough for significant dialog. It's a good option for fast-paced action games and horror. "Hours" is longer than "minutes," but the salient feature of both is "long enough to let doubt breed, but not long enough to develop a cure."

Days: Zombification on the timescale of downtime activity or relatively uninteresting events; e.g., long-distance travel, study, or working at an ordinary job. This is typically *instead* of a trigger; for instance, Dominance and Infectious Attack count 2d days from exposure, unless enhanced to work faster, although the GM is welcome to adjust things within that range (three days and three nights, a week, etc.). Variable days after exposure also works best for anything similar to a realistic disease; 3d+1 days suits an Ebola-like condition, while 2d weeks fits a rabies-like one.

Zombification of the Dead

A process that reanimates dead bodies might trigger *on death* or *on exposure*:

- If it starts *on death*, then dying starts a countdown to zombification. In situations where "killed by zombies" constitutes exposure, death is the same as exposure. But it's quite possible for exposure to be nonlethal, and to turn someone into a zombie when he dies days, even decades down the road.

But It Didn't Bite Me!

Many an epidemiologist would agree that germs can be insidious. Dabblers in the occult too often learn that the same is true of black magic.

Living Carriers

A curse, plague, etc. that doesn't instantly transform the living may turn those who are in the process of becoming zombies into carriers of that contagion. This is never true for Dominance (which is priced on the assumption that the zombie must create each "ally" personally); otherwise, it's up to the GM. Work out how carriers spread the condition just as you would for zombies. The means by which carriers infect others may differ radically from how zombies propagate the same infection, though! Someone who was bitten might be able to spread zombie pox by coughing, performing first aid, sharing a sandwich, kissing . . .

Protean Plagues

Preventing Exposure (pp. 119-120), *Exposure and Resistance* (pp. 124-126), and several other rules assume that a single vector for contagion is the norm: goo in face or on a wound (blood), polluted water (digestive), insect or zombie bites (follow-up), particles inhaled (respiratory) or touched (contact), and so forth. A hallmark of zombie fiction – and some real diseases – is the pathogen that jumps between vectors, thwarting countermeasures and cures. When and how it changes is up to the GM, who might opt to roll dice whenever the PCs enter a hot zone. A fun possibility involves **Zombie Dice**: three shotgun blasts means a change, using green dice for most plagues (freak mutation), yellow ones for buggy inventions (unexpected consequence), and red ones for engineered weapons (intended effects). Perhaps a change *also* turns green to yellow, or yellow to red, next time!

- If it starts *on exposure*, then the countdown starts when a dead body is exposed to the zombifying curse, plague, or whatever. In situations where this influence is present in the environment where someone is killed, his corpse is exposed on death, making on exposure and on death indistinguishable.

In either case, schedules for the countdown are the same as those for zombification of the living, but require different notes:

Seconds: If Fatal Beating is involved, Dominance (No Onset Time) or Infectious Attack (Instant Karma) reanimates almost instantly on death. Otherwise, zombification on death rarely works so fast – least of all when Infectious is involved. Zombification on exposure *might* work this fast for powerful curses.

Minutes or Hours: This is typical of most forces that reanimate the dead, on death *or* on exposure. For comparison, the Zombie spell takes a minute.

Days: Dominance and Infectious Attack with Fatal Beating but no modifiers to hasten them work this way on death, requiring 2d days. Delays in days also suit quasi-realistic influences that work on exposure; e.g., self-replicating nanomachines, or bugs colonizing a cadaver (which aren't realistic, but real-life insects could easily take up to *four months* to build a corpse-sized nest).

Setting the Schedule

Once the general timescale is settled, note its units (seconds, minutes, hours, or days) and get specific. Schemes include:

Flat: This is quickest and easiest! Pick a fixed number within the desired range: 10 minutes, two hours, seven days, or whatever feels right. This is always one second for Dominance (No Onset Time) or Infectious Attack (Instant Karma). When using a real-life disease's incubation time as a model, the average will do – zombies don't require high realism.

Variable: Roll dice to add fear and uncertainty. For seconds or minutes, more than 17d is really minutes or hours, respectively; for hours, more than 7d-1 is really days. For a wide range, use a small number of dice and a large multiplier; e.g., 1d×6 instead of 6d. For an *almost*-predictable time with a frustratingly tricky error, convert all but one or two dice into adds (each die equals +3.5); e.g., 1d+18 instead of 6d.

Margin-Based: If there was a roll to become a zombie, the margin of failure to resist or margin of success to transform might subtract from a flat or variable time, down to some minimum (usually *one* second, minute, hour, or day).

Attribute-Based: Or just use some function of HT or Will to determine time. If high scores resist zombification, then

use a positive multiple of the attribute, possibly adding a flat or variable interval: 2×Will seconds, (HT - 10) minutes, (HT + 1d) days, etc. If a good score facilitates the process, then have a negative multiple subtract from a flat or variable time: (20 - Will) minutes, (6d - HT) hours, (100 - 5×HT) days, etc. Again, set a minimum.

SYMPTOMS

Once zombie contagion afflicts a living person, he'll become a zombie at the end of the onset period. There may be *no* symptoms in the interim, but this needn't be the case. Classic alternatives, which can be combined, include:

Cosmetic Changes: The victim acquires progressively nastier outward signs but is still a human . . . until the end, when he changes. This seems to happen a lot in zombie movies! While specific Appearance and/or Unnatural Features levels aren't required, it can be fun to introduce such things gradually ("Every 1/4 of the onset time that passes, the victim loses an Appearance level and gains Unnatural Features 1.").

Gradual Zombification: The victim gains the zombie template a little at a time. As such templates vary so much, this requires GM oversight. Typically, subtle traits appear before severe ones, usually in the same order for everyone.

If Thine Eye Offends Thee

If zombification isn't instant and relies on bites or contact, then *cutting out* the exposed area might halt the process. The GM decides whether this is true and whether zombie contagion has been around for long enough for the truth to be known. Experts might recall this on a successful roll against Biology or Diagnosis for pathogens; Ritual Magic, Thaumatology, or Theology for curses; or a suitable Hidden Lore specialty. Knowing isn't a prerequisite for *trying*, though – deciding whether to chop has spiced up many a zombie flick!

If this works, it becomes important to note hit location when zombies attack. In detailed combat, this is standard. When using *Horde Action* (pp. 114-117) or *Splatter* (p. 125), hit location is rolled randomly (p. B552). Out of combat, it always seems to be a hand or an arm, bitten when the hero reaches under the bed for his gun, fumbles for the light switch, etc.

The GM decides how rapidly contagion spreads through the body. A generic suggestion: at up to 5% of the condition's delay time, localized excision works; up to 10% calls for amputation of the affected part; and anything longer is too late. For a hand or a foot, this might become 5% for excision, 10% to lose the extremity, or 15% to lose the limb; e.g., if infection turns the living in an hour, a surgeon would have three minutes to excise flesh, six minutes to amputate a hand, or nine minutes to remove the whole arm. For parasites, excision might work right up to the end.

The procedure requires a Surgery roll; apply -3 for excision from the head or chest. This takes an hour, so

fast-acting infection means haste penalties (p. B346). Modifiers for equipment, anesthesia, etc. also apply. Success inflicts 2d injury to the head or torso, or amputates a limb or an extremity, and halts infection. Failure inflicts 3d injury regardless of location, amputates a limb or an extremity, but doesn't stop infection. Failure leaves the option of a more serious amputation, time permitting.

Alternatively, heroes bent on amputation can use cutting attacks. This is fast – each blow takes a second at most. Roll to hit at +4 (a Telegraphic Attack, in **GURPS Martial Arts** terms), but with the usual hit location penalty; the attacker may use All-Out Attack for +4 to hit or +2 to damage. For an unconscious target, there are no other complications. A conscious, restrained one is in close combat: -2 to hit, and misses strike the restraining object or person on 9 or less. A conscious, unrestrained subject must roll a Fright Check; failure means he attempts his best active defense, at +2 because he knows what's coming. Dismemberment (p. B421) removes the body part and the danger.

Either way, if *Living Carriers* (p. 127) applies, then so does *Splatter* – treat the whole affair as a single splash on everyone within two yards. Wise surgeons take precautions.

For infection that doesn't zombify until the victim sleeps, the time limit is the patient's ability to stay awake. Surgery must be done without anesthetic, for an extra -2, while weapon attacks face the complication of restraint or the risk of a flinching target.

For instance, the GM might split a template into six parts and have them afflict the victim every 1/6 of the onset time. If this is the consequence of a supposedly beneficial experiment, the first one or two sets of symptoms might be invisible and *positive* . . . followed by a rapid decline.

Conventional Sickness: The victim rolls regularly against HT, usually at a penalty, as he would for cyclic disease or poison. The interval should be on the same scale as onset time; e.g., daily for something that takes days. The roll need not have anything to do with the one for zombification itself – a curse resisted by Will might cause physical symptoms resisted at HT-6. Each failure drains FP or HP, from 1 point to 1d points or more. Standard disease symptoms (coughing, nausea, ST loss, etc.), cosmetic changes, and/or gradual zombification may set in at 1/3, 1/2, and 2/3 of FP or HP. The GM could even waive onset time in this case and have zombification occur only when the victim hits 0 HP or dies of his illness, however long that takes.

EXAMPLES OF ZOMBIE CONTAGION

The table below spells out the examples from Chapter 3 according to these rules.

Example: The specific case, with a reference to the page where it's described.

Cause: The trait (Dominance, Infectious Attack, or Infectious) behind the contagion, or "Zombifying Force" if environmental.

Subjects: Whether the contagion zombifies the living or dead.

Exposure: The event or action that infects the subject.

Roll: The roll, if any, for the effect.

Trigger: When the countdown to zombification begins.

Delay: The length of the countdown. If a formula gives 0 or less, treat it as 1.

Notes: Notes on exceptions, symptoms, etc.

Zombie Contagion Table

Example	Cause	Subjects	Exposure	Roll	Trigger	Delay	Notes
Buzzing Corpse (pp. 98-99)	Zombifying Force	Dead	Colonization of corpse by corpse-bugs	None	Exposure	2d+20 days	
Cloud of Infection (p. 52)	Dominance	Living	Breathing within two yards	Resisted by HT	Exposure	1 sec.	
Crazy (p. 101)	Infectious	Living	Approaching within two yards	Resisted by HT	Exposure	Will+14 hours	[1]
Fast Foes (p. 62)	Infectious Attack	Dead	Killed by zombie	HP of injury	Death	1 sec.	
Fast Reanimation (p. 52)	Dominance	Dead	Killed by zombie	HP of injury	Death	1 sec.	
Infected (p. 97)	Infectious	Living	Bitten by zombie	HP of injury	Awakening	None	[2]
Infected Touch (p. 52)	Dominance	Living	Touch on skin	Resisted by HT	Exposure	1 sec.	
Infester (p. 99)	Infectious	Living	Injected by zombie	Resisted by HT	Exposure	HT-10 days	[3]
Memetic Zombification (p. 52)	Dominance	Living	Hearing babble within two yards	Resisted by Will	Exposure	1 sec.	
Plague Ghoul (pp. 90-91)	Infectious	Dead	Wounded by zombie	None	Death	HT-10 min.	[4]
Radiation Ghoul (p. 91)	Infectious	Dead	Irradiated by zombie	None	Death	HT-10 min.	
ReViv™-ified (p. 103)	Infectious	Dead	Contact with zombie	None	Exposure	1d days	
Toxic Ghoul (p. 91)	Infectious	Dead	Injured by corpse toxin	None	Death	HT-10 min.	

Notes

[1] Roll has special degree-of-contact modifiers.

[2] Produces cosmetic symptoms.

[3] Roll takes hit location modifiers.

[4] If Fast Reanimation doesn't occur first.

Become a zombie today!

A BETTER TOMORROW

It's practically a rule that you can't cure a zombie. You might lop off an infected body part to prevent contagion from gaining purchase (see *If Thine Eye Offends Thee*, p. 128) – and you can bless, dissolve, incinerate, or stake corpses to keep them from returning as undead, if that's what zombies are – but such resorts are "preventative medicine." Efforts to restore a zombie to its former self almost

always have one of two outcomes: they fail, or they *seem* to work, only to cause worse problems.

Still, there are exceptions. In particular, the GM might want to allow PCs to be cured, though this has ramifications similar to permitting resurrection: life becomes cheap, and death (not to mention *undeath*) loses its horror.

BETTER DYING THROUGH CHEMISTRY

In most fiction, existing medical methods – antibiotics, antivirals, chelating agents, etc. – cannot cure zombies. If they could, there wouldn't be much of a story! Unless the GM wants a boring campaign, then, it's best to rule that no drug in **GURPS Low-Tech, High-Tech, Bio-Tech, or Ultra-Tech** can reverse zombification.

However, the quest to discover a counteragent for a zombie toxin or pathogen is a common fictional pursuit. This customarily fails, killing the patient . . . or mutating the zombie into a scarier threat, often one with even more virulent contagion and even less regard for human life. Thus, the GM is in good company if he decides that such research is doomed to fail. Then again, games aren't movies or novels, and the GM may want to give the PCs a fighting chance. The only way for them to learn the truth of the matter is to try.

If it's possible to treat zombies, the GM must decide whether the remedy is rational, and amenable to *New Inventions* (pp. B473-474), or weird, and a job for *Gadgeteering* (pp. B475-477). This detail is a secret! Gadgeteers can develop either kind of treatment, while mundane inventors are fated to fail if mad science is required. In all cases, the "invention" or "gadget" is usually a drug or a course of therapy, not a gizmo.

If treatment is impossible, then inventors and gadgeteers alike are doomed to failure. The only difference is that the latter will learn the truth sooner, as they work faster.

All attempts to beat zombification with science (or Science!) use the standard rules for inventing things, subject to the notes below.

Tech Level

The research's minimum TL is that of whatever caused the zombies in the first place: TL6 if the zombies are revived Nazi technology (shades of *Shock Waves*), TL8 if they're due to TL8 genetic engineering, TL12 if they're caused by a galaxy-crossing bioweapon fired at the Earth by TL12 aliens, and so on. If the zombies are supernatural, but science can still treat them, use the setting's TL+2, which means that gadgeteering is *required*.

Required Skills

The "invention skill" is the *lowest* of three skills:

- Physician (Esoteric Medicine will do for supernatural zombies).
- A skill specific to the cause of the zombies. Pathogens demand Biology, or Expert Skill (Epidemiology) if battling a zombie pandemic; toxins call for Chemistry; radiation necessitates Physics; nanomachines use Engineer (Nanotechnology); and supernatural causes require Occultism or Thaumatology.
- A skill pertinent to the nature of the cure the GM has in mind: Alchemy for a potion, Bioengineering (Vaccines) for a vaccine, Engineer (Nanotechnology) for nanomachines, Pharmacy for any other drug, Thaumatology for a spell, or Weird Science for something like a strange ray.

A team can collaborate to bring the right skills together, but they still use the lowest of the three.

Complexity

The complexity level used to determine costs, minimum skill levels, and difficulty modifiers depends on the goal:

Average: A *suppressant* that prevents exposed victims from turning.

Complex: A *vaccine* that immunizes the living against zombification.

Amazing: An *antidote* that restores the zombie to his former self.

Concept Roll

All the usual modifiers (for complexity, TL, etc.) apply to this roll. In particular, a gadgeteer trying to develop a cure for a supernatural condition – which counts as two TLs higher – is at -10. Protean plagues (p. 127) give an extra -2. Outcomes are as usual, except that if no cure is possible, critical success at this stage reveals as much before resources are wasted on the next step.

Prototype Roll

Time requirements *might* be as given in the **Basic Set**, but these are prone to cut short a long-term campaign. Realistic drug development is slow, tedious work. The GM may opt to read "days" as "weeks" and "months" as "years" – and "hours" as "days," for quick gadgeteers – meaning that a mundane inventor would require 3d years to cure zombies (multiplied by number of attempts but divided by staff size), and even a quick gadgeteer would need 4d days.

Here, too, all the usual modifiers apply: those for Concept rolls, plus any bonuses for assistants or penalties for lousy facilities. Outcomes use the standard rules, with these exceptions:

- *Critical success* confirms beyond reasonable doubt that a cure is impossible, when that is the case.
- *Critical failure* should suit the research. Rather than blow up the facilities, it turns out a suppressant that accelerates the transformation right there in the lab, a vaccine that infects the test group and causes an outbreak, or an antidote that mutates the zombie into a scarier monster. For research involving contagion, critical failure should *also* endanger the inventor(s), who must roll against an appropriate Hazardous Materials skill. Success indicates mere exposure, allowing the usual resistance roll. Failure means *infection*.

Bugs

If the dice indicate an invention with bugs, choose ones that suit medical research – and as zombie treatments are campaign-changing and never routine, they deserve more than a few rolls on the *Gadget Bugs Table* (p. B476). A flawed suppressant might cause unpleasant side effects (fatigue, afflictions, or injury), require ever-larger doses, or lead to Addiction. An imperfect vaccine could grant the recipient immunity but turn him into a carrier, saddle him with disturbing zombie traits (Lifebane, Unnatural Features, etc.), or weaken his constitution (reduced HT, Susceptible to Disease, or Short Lifespan).

And a zombie “cured” by a buggy antidote may remain a carrier, or have Bestial linger as Stress Atavism.

THE DISEASE IS THE CURE

In some tales of zombie contagion, being exposed and resisting indicates immunity. The GM may rule that when rolling to resist becoming a zombie, critical success – or even *any* success – denotes immunity, but that’s a little too easy. A more dramatic option would be to have people whose *very first* resistance roll comes up 3 (or 18, if “success” means zombification) be naturally immune.

This raises the specter of using such a person’s immunity as the basis for a cure, be that a conventional vaccine prepared from antibodies or an alchemical elixir that exploits the magical law of contagion (see *GURPS Thaumatology*, p. 14). If the GM is inclined to let this work, the process should follow the rules under *Better Dying Through Chemistry* (pp. 130-131). Such research is traditionally ghoulish and *kills* the “donor” – a failed experiment means finding a new subject.

Equally traditional and ghoulish is desperately injecting the immune person’s blood (or brain extract) into oneself. That *might* work . . . roll just as if the recipient had been exposed to zombies, with the usual penalty for curse strength or infectivity, plus a further -3 for injecting untested crud. Any success gives him immunity! Failure means the shot counts as exposure, and he’ll turn into a zombie. Critical failure means a terrible immune response that kills him (he may well return as an *undead* zombie).

REVERSE THE CURSE

Zombie-ism caused by bona fide supernatural curses is sometimes undoable. Against straightforward magic, including the Zombie spell, only Remove Curse (*GURPS Magic*, p. 126) will do – other countermagic (notably Counterspell and Dispel Magic) isn’t up to the challenge. If the malediction is divine, then wizardly workings of Remove Curse won’t suffice; a spellcasting priest must do the job. Either way, this means *winning* a Quick Contest against the curse’s effective skill level. Should this be unknown for some reason, the GM must exercise judgment or just roll dice: 2d+10 for a wizard, but at least 2d+20 for a deity.

If the curse takes the form of possession by demons or other spirits, similar guidelines apply but the necessary spell becomes Dispel Possession (*Magic*, p. 49), which might be resisted by the spirit rather than by a spell. The Exorcism skill (p. B193) should also work, and is more likely to succeed for holy folk. In either case, a spirit resists using the higher of the zombie’s *racial average* ST or Will. This is a measure of the possessor’s power over the zombie. While individual zombies might have higher scores, they’re

The Cure Is the Disease

In the movies, zombie plagues sometimes originate from attempts to develop cures for illnesses; the ReViv™-ified (pp. 103-104) are a tribute to such tales. This suggests an interesting way to kick off a campaign: It all started with the cure for some other disease! If the campaign features weird science, zombies might be the result of a critical failure when using rules similar to *Better Dying Through Chemistry* (pp. 130-131) or *The Disease Is the Cure* (above) to defeat something as scary as Ebola or as mundane as the common cold. Pandemics work best – what better time for the zombies to strike than when the world is in the throes of influenza?

A related possibility is somebody developing a zombie disease as a cure for a *different* zombie plague. After all, the infected (p. 97) are sickly, dying, and actively vicious, so turning them all into ReViv™-ified – healthy, long-lived, and merely animalistic – would be an improvement, right? Handle this as inventing a cure using skills relevant to the origins of each kind of zombie; e.g., the infected-to-ReViv™-ified transition would require Physician, Biology, and Engineer (Nanotechnology). If it works, the inventor now has the means to infect everyone with something different. Whether he actually does so depends on his ethics, not the dice.

unlikely to use these to aid their tormentor, and while the possessor is doubtless more powerful, a zombie represents a small fraction of its influence.

Alternative magic systems like those in *GURPS Thaumatology* should use the closest equivalents to the above spells. The only hard-and-fast rule is that if such sorcery offers specific tools for dispelling curses or possession, these are *required*; general-purpose countermagic won’t work. Otherwise, reversing a curse is a job for whatever is capable of dispelling other workings – something that ends mind control will often suffice for a living person, while an effect that dispels necromancy ought to work on the undead. For example, a Path/Book magician would need a Cleansing ritual (*Thaumatology*, p. 157) to cancel a curse or an Exorcise ritual (*Thaumatology*, p. 161) to end possession, while a wielder of Realm magic (*Thaumatology*, pp. 188-192) might perform a level 2 working in whatever Realm seems appropriate to the affliction, be that Magic, Mind, Necromancy, or Spirit.

Sometimes, nonmagical means will do. The belief that Vodou zombies (p. 102) can be laid to rest by the taste of salt offers a great example – this needn’t be implemented as a Weakness, and may well be a “cure” for a zombie curse. This sort of thing assumes that the subject *wants* to be truly alive or dead, not suffering the half-life of an enchanted thrall or the undead, and usually involves some sort of quest to find suitable items or lore. At a minimum, the GM should require a Hidden Lore, Occultism, or Religious Ritual roll to put such measures into practice – and the curse may contest this just as it would magic. If the PCs lack even these resources, a Research roll, requiring access to an occult library and at least a day’s work, might find something useful.

However the cure is implemented, the outcome depends on the zombie. A living one is typically restored to his old self.

An undead one becomes an ordinary corpse, which is often preferable to hacking it to bits, and makes *The Big Reboot* (below) more likely to succeed. With *very* high-end magic, like Realm workings, it might even be possible to transform the undead directly into the living!

One-Step Magical Cures

The above guidelines are for zombies caused by curses. Cinematic zombies are only rarely cursed, though – they’re more often the result of bizarre diseases and toxins. These sorts of things almost never coexist with magic, or at least fantasy magic, but if they do, then it’s reasonable to ask whether a quick-and-easy Cure Disease or Neutralize Poison spell (or its equivalent, in another magic system) would instantly restore a living zombie to his former self.

There’s no One True Answer to this question. If magic is rare, even secret, and PCs who wish to use it must pay many points for an Unusual Background or an illuminated Patron, or spend lots of time and money questing for a wizard, then it should work just like that: take 10 minutes, spend 4 energy, cast Cure Disease on Jane the Infected, and get back Jane the Unfortunate Epidemiologist. It fits the spirit of “crossover” fiction – particularly in the comics – that magic is as capable as weird science (and difficult to distinguish from it).

If magic is common, the answer becomes more nuanced. When the GM of a **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy** campaign that features hordes of fantasy undead tosses in zombie plagues and toxins for variety, intending zombification to be a combat hazard akin to a Flesh to Stone spell, one-step magical cures should work – though they might demand *clerical* magic and involve generous temple donations. On the other hand, in a serious horror-fantasy campaign, some of the horror may emanate from the knowledge that magic *can’t* undo zombification; at best, it can purge the plague or poison from the dead, allowing *The Big Reboot* (below). A genuine cure would be a major quest.

Whatever the situation, zombification is *weird* next to conventional disease, poison, radiation, and so on. Both Cure Disease and Neutralize Poison specify -5 to skill if the caster isn’t clear on what he’s treating. This should apply to *all* one-step magical cures. Getting rid of this penalty may require a roll against not Diagnosis or Poisons, but a

specialized skill such as Hidden Lore (Zombies). The GM could even require development of an entirely new spell for the purpose, using the invention guidelines under *Better Dying Through Chemistry* (pp. 130-131) and requiring research mages skilled in Esoteric Medicine, Thaumatology, and one of Biology, Chemistry, etc.

THE BIG REBOOT

In settings where bringing the dead back to life is possible, a brute-force “cure” is an option: Kill a living zombie or lay a dead one to rest, and then resurrect the corpse as his old self. Means of accomplishing this include the chrysalis machine (**GURPS Bio-Tech**, p. 133), reanimation nanomachines (**Bio-Tech**, p. 163), the Resurrection spell (**GURPS Magic**, p. 94), Persephone elixir (**Magic**, p. 218), and the Resurrection ability (**GURPS Powers**, p. 151). There are limits, however:

- If zombification is due to something that remains in the body – parasites, pathogens, toxins, radiation, etc. – this must be purged first, unless the method of resurrection states that it cures such things (none of the above do!). If technological resurrection is possible, this means administering whatever ultra-tech deals with the problem. A magic-user may have to cast Cure Disease, Cure Radiation, Neutralize Poison, or another spell, possibly at -5; see *One-Step Magical Cures* (above). Omitting this step means that resurrection fails on a formerly undead zombie, or returns a formerly living one to life . . . as a zombie.

- If zombification is a curse that isn’t lifted at death, this must be ended. See *Reverse the Curse* (pp. 131-132), and note how long the process takes. The clock may be ticking . . .

- Be aware that time is of the essence for everything but the Resurrection ability. The longer the patient is dead, the lower the odds that this gambit will work. For resurrection purposes, undead zombies have been dead since their *original* death. Someone who died 10 years ago has been dead 10 years, whether he was zombified at death, a year later, or last week – and whether his zombie was killed last year, last month, or five minutes ago.

- Where the resurrection process depends on the body being more-or-less intact (like the Resurrection spell and ability, and Persephone elixir), the zombie can’t have reached -10×HP at any point. Keep track of total injury used to put down the zombie, even if the zombie has Fragile (Unnatural) and “dies” at -HP. Zombies with Fragile (Brittle) or Fragile (Explosive) are out of luck – their demise leaves nothing to resurrect. Finally, if someone is killed, zombified, and re-killed as a zombie, *total* injury from *both* deaths is what matters.

- Where the resurrection process depends on an intact brain (true of both the chrysalis machine and reanimation nano), the zombie can’t have been put down by skull injury – and if it’s undead, the *original* death can’t have involved that, either. Here, too, zombies with Fragile (Brittle) or Fragile (Explosive) are doomed.

Turn and Face the Strange

People doomed to become zombies may attempt to cheat Fate by changing bodies through ultra-tech uploading, a brute-force brain transplant, mad science (brain in a jar!), the Possession advantage (or a psi ability based on it), or spells like Exchange Bodies and Soul Jar. Outcomes vary widely. A disease *might* stay with the old body, meaning the new one will be safe, but an infected brain can’t be reused – the mind must be copied to a new brain. Memes infect the mind; try inducing amnesia instead. Curses traditionally afflict the soul, and persist while the victim is recognizably himself in body *or* mind. Still, if a curse has an effective skill level, the GM may give body-swappers a chance to elude it; treat this as a Quick Contest between it and the psi ability, spell, or Surgery skill.

In all cases, *one* try is allowed. If the conditions aren't right (e.g., the subject was too injured or dead for too long) or a roll fails, the patient is just plain gone. Critical failure on the roll to resurrect an ex-zombie is inevitably disastrous: the caregiver is exposed to contagion, where applicable, and it's likely that the zombie gets up – possibly with extra ST, Unkillable, Infectious when it formerly didn't have it, etc. – and goes on a rampage.

Resuscitation

Killing a *living* zombie in order to try mundane *Resuscitation* (p. B425) is trickier. As with resurrection, the cause of zombification must be purged – and if medical cures don't work on the living, they're unlikely to affect the dead. Still, death lifts some curses, and a parasite that's immune to drugs might die if the host does. It might be worth a try.

For resuscitation to work, the zombie should be killed by drowning, asphyxiation, or heart attack. This requires it to be susceptible to these dangers – zombies with *Doesn't Breathe* won't suffocate, and drugs that stop the heart aren't likely to work against high HT, *Resistant to Metabolic Hazards*, etc. Alternatively, do enough damage to slay it and hope that this merely inflicts a mortal wound (p. B423).

Then roll the dice. Success revives the victim, who *might* now be his old self. If his condition was caused by something that hasn't been purged, however, he'll still be a zombie. Critical failure brings the bad effects noted for resurrection.

Attempting to resuscitate an *undead* zombie is hopeless. If a bleeding-heart hero tries, let him roll. Critical failure here tends to mean exposure to ordinary disease, or just a Fright Check-worthy explosion of maggots or liquefied innards.

ZOMBIFICATION

Creating zombies is rarely heroic work. When it's the doing of villains, the GM need only flash a little crazy eye and proclaim "Let there be zombies!" But a certain kind of player is fascinated with the notion of becoming a zombie-master, which calls for rules. The details of zombie creation are also sometimes relevant to fighting or curing zombies.

SUPERNATURAL ZOMBIFICATION

In settings where zombies coexist with people who wield supernatural gifts, the two tend to be linked – zombies are the minions of necromancers, sinister clerics, etc. No one category of zombie or occult power (or connection between the two) is *prescribed*, but consistency is best served by starting from existing examples in *GURPS Magic*.

Magical Constructs

If a wizard desires a construct, he must cast the Golem enchantment (*Magic*, p. 59) on a handmade artificial body. This costs 250 energy points, adjusted upward or downward by two energy points per character point above or below 0 points, with a minimum of 130 energy points. This prescription makes customization easy; e.g., a 25-point corpse golem (p. 92) costs 300 energy points to animate. The GM may set a limit, but this isn't really necessary – a 250-point monster seems overpowered only until one realizes that it costs 750 energy points, requires 750 mage-days of work to enchant, and could perish on its first outing.

Magical Undead

A wizard who wants an undead slave should cast the Zombie spell (*Magic*, p. 151) on essentially intact remains. This costs 8 energy points and raises one of the undead under *Necromantic Reanimates* (pp. 99-101). While the reanimated corpse is the baseline zombie in *Magic*, the same energy will raise a reanimated mummy or skeleton.

Unlike the Golem spell, though, *Zombie* provides no guidelines for customization.

For variant undead, then, adapt the scaling for golems: 1/125 of basic energy cost per character point of variation from baseline, to a minimum of half basic energy cost. For a basic energy cost of 8 and a baseline zombie worth -143 points, this becomes:

$$\text{Energy Cost} = 8 + 0.064 \times [(\text{Template Cost in Points}) + 143]$$

Round fractional energy costs of 0.5 or more *up*. Minimum energy cost is 4. In tabular form:

Template Cost	Energy Cost	Template Cost	Energy Cost
Up to -198 points	4	-103 to -89 points	11
-197 to -183 points	5	-88 to -73 points	12
-182 to -167 points	6	-72 to -58 points	13
-166 to -151 points	7	-57 to -42 points	14
-150 to -136 points	8	-41 to -26 points	15
-135 to -120 points	9	-25 to -11 points	16
-119 to -104 points	10	-10 to 5 points	17

Using the *GURPS Zombies* template costs, then, the *Magic* zombie (-143 points) and skeleton (-139 points) both cost the usual 8 energy points. See *Prepared Corpses* (p. 134) for how to handle the mummy.

This rule is intended to help the GM assign fair energy costs to new zombie templates of *his* creation. He decides what maximum template cost can be, but a cutoff of 0 points is strongly recommended. Greater undead worth positive points should be Allies bought with character points, not energy points.

Variant Templates

The GM may permit players to tweak *existing* templates when their PCs cast *Zombie*: adjust the template's traits, calculate its revised character point cost, and then look up the associated energy cost. The GM decides what's allowed, but maximum template cost still shouldn't exceed 0 points (costing 17 energy points).

Moreover, all changes should suit a mindless corpse (e.g., no getting rid of Slave Mentality or Legally Dead), and 0-point features such as Affected as Dead can *never* be removed. Reasonable additions include ordinary physical abilities available to humans (e.g., extra ST, HT, or HP) and further forms of Injury Tolerance.

Example: A zombie-master wants his servants to have Injury Tolerance (Independent Body Parts) [35]. This fits zombies in horror, so the GM approves. Adding 35 points to the -143 points for the reanimated corpse template gives -108 points. Thus, this casting of Zombie costs 10 energy points.

Prepared Corpses

The Zombie spell is *fast*, raising a permanent servant in a mere minute. To encourage necromancers to muck around with corpses, the GM may subtract the number of days of full-time mortician work *by the caster* from the character point cost used to calculate energy cost, to a limit of -70 points at 70 days (roughly the time needed to prepare a real-world mummy). That's approximately -1 to energy cost per two weeks' work. Minimum energy cost is still 4.

Example: The Zombie spell costs 8 energy points, but a mummy (-82 points) ought to cost 12 energy points to reanimate. This is fair for a found mummy – mummification is a rite that combats undesired reanimation. However, as the reanimated mummy and corpse templates differ by 61 character points, the GM could rule that 61 days of work prepare a mummy that can be animated for 8 energy points, or even allow the maximum 70 days (effective cost -152 character points) to reduce energy cost to 7. Using the approximation, reducing 12 energy points to 8 would demand eight weeks' work.

Resistance Is Futile

Zombification of the dead is rarely resistible; the GM may opt to dispense with the possibility if the zombie-maker succeeds at all the necessary skill rolls. Enslaving the living is another matter. Everything under *Supernatural Zombification* (pp. 133-135) that can affect the living – and *magic* invented using *Technological Zombification* (pp. 135-136) – offers a Quick Contest to resist (see *Resistance Rolls*, p. B348). Where the living are exposed to new plagues, dosed with novel elixirs, and so on, they get a straight HT or Will roll to resist, with a penalty for effectiveness or infectivity equal in magnitude to the inventor's margin of success on the Prototype roll, to a limit of -6. For further details, see *Exposure and Resistance* (pp. 124-126).

Mass Zombie

To find the revised base energy cost for the Mass Zombie spell, work out energy cost as for Zombie and subtract one. Thus, those zombies with Independent Body Parts (energy cost 10) would raise the base cost of Mass Zombie from 7 to 9, while a tomb full of random mummies (energy cost 12) would make it 11. Cast with the reduction for prepared corpses, the spell affects only corpses that have been

prepared by the caster – or by one of the casters, for a ceremonial casting.

Living Zombies for Wizards

A magic-user can acquire a permanent living “zombie” via the Enslave spell (*Magic*, p. 141). Casting this costs 30 energy points, and confers a template that amounts to Duty (15 or less; Extremely Hazardous) [-20] and Reprogrammable [-10]. As for the mental connection, that's a trait of the wizard, not the slave.

The GM may wish to allow variation here, too, but this works differently. Mental traits on a zombie template reflect programming. The Zombie spell creates a servant from a dead body that lacks free will, and adding free will (say, by removing Slave Mentality) would be difficult, raising energy cost. For living zombies, on the other hand, the greater the extent to which existing free will is denied, the more the caster benefits.

If the GM opts to allow living zombie templates to result from Enslave, it's easiest to add up the character point cost of the *mental* disadvantages inflicted and set energy cost equal to that. If mental advantages are added, tack on an extra energy cost equal to their value. The GM decides what's permitted, but Duty, Reprogrammable, Slave Mentality, and Zombie Motivation always fit, as do Indomitable, Single-Minded, and Unfazeable.

Variant Spells

The GM may allow spells that reanimate and bind more powerful undead zombies. Each form of walking dead calls for its own spell, assigned stats as follows:

College is Necromantic.

Class is Regular.

Duration is permanent.

Cost is whatever it would cost to use the Zombie spell to raise a zombie with that template, *plus* the cost of any added programming, using the guidelines for the Enslave spell. For a mass version, base cost is one less than this and minimum radius is two yards.

Time to cast is one minute for one zombie, or minutes equal to radius for a mass version.

Prerequisites are Zombie, plus anything the GM feels especially suits the specific zombie. The mass version requires the regular version instead.

Example: A necromancer wants to raise lurchers (p. 96) instead of basic zombies, and have them be servants with Duty (15 or less) [-15] and Reprogrammable [-10]. The lurcher template costs -61 character points, so energy cost starts at 13 points. To this the zombie-master must add 25 energy points to program a hateful, evil monster to serve. Final energy cost is 38. As lurchers are unusually strong and capable of bursts of speed, the GM makes the prerequisites Haste, Might, and Zombie.

Other Rites

Not every campaign uses *GURPS Magic* – many GMs prefer alternative magic rules like those in *GURPS Thaumatology*. For variant systems that still involve spells with standard energy costs, most of the above remains true.

The only change of importance is in prerequisites, which may differ for clerical magic or give an extra -1 or -2 to cast for ritual spell magic. Be warned that high energy costs for powerful zombies won't deter crazier casters who use threshold-limited magic or assisting spirits!

For Path/Book magic, zombie animation involves Command the Bodies of the Dead (*Thaumatology*, p. 163). When creating *higher-powered* variant zombies, every +10 character points or *fraction thereof* gives an additional -1 to skill for effect shaping or +1 to base cost for energy accumulating. For *weaker* undead, every *full* -10 character points gives +1 to skill or -1 to base cost, but this can never make the skill penalty less severe than -3 or reduce cost below 6 points. For instance, the reanimated mummy (-82 points) is 61 character points more costly than the standard reanimated corpse (-143 points), so effect shaping takes a penalty of -14 instead of -7, while energy accumulating needs 19 points instead of 12.

For flexible magic systems (symbol, syntactic, etc.), if the working would be sensitive to character point costs, use the template's cost at the relevant step. If not, the GM may require a higher-than-usual difficulty or degree of control to move away from a "stock" zombie; e.g., added resource costs or skill penalties equal in magnitude to roughly 1/125 of the basic requirements per added character point, or just a Realm level one higher than usual for the additional control. If such powerful magic can accomplish almost *anything*, fine distinctions between zombies might be of comparatively little consequence.

In all cases, if the magic system offers a method of building and enchanting golems or similar constructs, compare its energy costs, skill penalties, time requirements, and so on to the recommendations above, and use the more favorable of the two.

Finally, treat *alchemical* zombification as if it were technological (see below).

TECHNOLOGICAL ZOMBIFICATION

The other traditional tool for creating zombies in fiction is unorthodox research. This usually means weird science, but alchemists get in on this game, as do wizards who have to invent entirely new spells (see *Variant Spells*, p. 134). To start off, decide what's being invented:

- A *construct* that must be assembled one zombie at a time.
- A *process* (injection, machine, spell, or therapy) that quickly transforms the living or dead into zombies, but still requires one application per zombie.
- *Contagion* (transmissible curse or plague) that can thrive in the world on its own.

If someone wants to invent one of the zombies from Chapter 3, the GM decides what class of invention it belongs to; for instance, in most game worlds, a galvanoid (p. 92) would be a construct, Soldier X would be a process (p. 104), and a whisperer (p. 103) would result from contagion. It's rare for zombies to fit comfortably into multiple categories, but if one does, use the *most expansive* class to

assess costs – contagion supersedes process, and process outranks construct. Some zombies won't be suitable as inventions; e.g., a setting would have to be extremely strange for mortals to create Judgment's Legionaries (pp. 93-94).

If the template is genuinely original, the GM designs it with input from the inventor's player. The player can specify type – e.g., "construct" or "infectious undead plague zombie" – and origin (drugs, magic, virus, etc.), and request abilities ("I want it to be strong, have Pestilent Wounds, and not be Berserk."), but that's all. There's no way to guarantee that the project won't prove extremely difficult or costly.

Once that's decided, use the rules under *Better Dying Through Chemistry* (pp. 130-131) with the changes below. Usually, gadgeteering is the only option – ordinary inventing *cannot* create zombies! However, this decision depends on the game world, not the rules.

Tech Level

For non-supernatural zombies, this is whatever fits the campaign: TL5 for Gothic and steampunk constructs, TL6 for mad Nazi science right out of *Shock Waves*, TL7 for Cold War secret projects, TL8 for a modern apocalyptic plague like in *28 Days Later*, TL9-10 for bleeding-edge biotech such as that of *Resident Evil*, and TL11+ for dry nanotech. The GM may wish to specify a divergent TL (p. B513), which will give researchers from "conventional" TLs an extra -2.

For supernatural zombies, TL isn't an issue. Apply -10 to skill rolls instead.

Required Skills

The "invention skill" is the lowest of *three* skills for non-supernatural zombies or the lower of *two* for supernatural ones (which suffer that big skill penalty instead):

- Weird Science, for *non-supernatural* zombies only.
- A *theoretical* skill for the invention's mode of action: Biology for gene therapy or grown constructs, Biology or Expert Skill (Epidemiology) for pathogens, Chemistry for classic serums, Expert Skill (Memetics) or Psychology for memetic plagues, Occultism or Theology for something like Vodou, Physics for machines that create zombies with electricity or radiation, Physiology for assembled constructs, or Thaumatology for spells or alchemy.
- A *practical* skill for the work: Alchemy for a magic potion, Bioengineering (Genetic Engineering) for a gene therapy or a pathogen, Bioengineering (Tissue Engineering) for grown constructs, Brainwashing for a meme, a suitable Engineer specialty for a machine, Herb Lore for Vodou drugs, Pharmacy for a mad-science serum, Surgery for assembled constructs, or a related spell (usually *Zombie*) for a curse or a spell.

Complexity, Cost, and Time

Constructs are typically somewhere between Average inventions and Complex ones, while most *processes* and *contagion* fall between Complex and Amazing. These are broad strokes, however; it's more fun to shade difficulty, costs, and times somewhat.

Setting aside for the moment whether the zombie is supernatural, or living, undead, or a construct, find the energy cost corresponding to the zombie's template cost according to the formula under *Magical Undead* (pp. 133-134). After that, multiply energy cost by \$10,000 to find base facilities cost for a *construct*, by \$25,000 for a *process*, or by \$50,000 for *contagion*. Then consult the table below to determine skill modifier from facilities cost. A suitable existing setup divides facilities cost by 10 as always, but this has no effect on the cost used to determine modifier or complexity.

Facilities Cost	Gadgeteering Modifier	Invention Modifier	Complexity
Up to \$100,000	-2	-10	Average
Up to \$175,000	-3	-12	Average
Up to \$250,000	-4	-14	Complex
Up to \$325,000	-5	-16	Complex
Up to \$400,000	-6	-18	Complex
Up to \$475,000	-7	-20	Complex
More than \$475,000	-8	-22	Amazing

All *other* modifiers to Concept and Prototype rolls apply – and add an extra -2 for contagion that's a deliberate protean plague (p. 127). Likewise, each Prototype roll has its usual time requirement, corresponding to the complexity on the table. The cost of each run at a prototype is 5% of facilities cost. A successful prototype yields one construct, and is all that's ever required for contagion or an "informational" process like an alchemical recipe or a spell. If the GM is inclined to allow mass production instead of treating each zombie as a prototype:

- *Constructs* cost 0.5% of base facilities cost per unit to produce. Animation time is an hour per \$100 of unit cost.
- *Processes* cost 1% of base facilities cost per unit for machines or 0.5% per dose for substances. Time needed to build or concoct this is an hour per \$100 of unit cost. For an alchemical elixir, the GM may wish to treat unit cost as ingredients cost and scale times to typical alchemical recipes by assessing a week per \$100 of ingredients cost.

Prototype and production costs are never reduced for existing facilities, either. Just as important, they *do not* cover corpses or test subjects to zombify – only labor, hardware, and/or ingredients. Exhuming the dead, lying to volunteers, caging prisoners, and so on has its own financial or social cost . . .

Quick gadgeteers get the usual reductions in time and expense here. If they scrounge to save money, the Scrounging roll is the gadgeteering modifier with an extra -2 (that is, -4 to -10). This can make even powerful zombie plagues very cheap to invent – which is 100% true to the source fiction!

Complications and Bugs

Critical failures when developing prototypes should have consequences that befit the work. For constructs, the result is either being shut down by horrified lawmen (or villagers with torches) or having one's facilities destroyed by a rampaging monster. A process or contagion that could affect the inventor does; he receives a resistance roll only if he first succeeds at a suitable Hazardous Materials roll.

Other processes, especially alchemical ones, blow up the lab – although in the case of *occult* research, the details may involve divine wrath or a summoned demon.

Bugs should generally take the form of undesirable traits on the zombie template, not rolls on the *Gadget Bugs Table* (p. B476). Dread, Fragile, Weakness, and Vulnerability are good choices. Not all bugs lower template cost! Reprogrammable or some similar means of ensuring obedience might go missing, and Intolerance (The Living) paired with ST+10 may increase point value but get the inventor killed. For contagion, suitable bugs include the wrong vector (e.g., respiratory when a blood agent was desired) or even an *unintended* protean plague (p. 127).

The process has elements in common with a voodoo recipe.
– Lucius Shepard, *Green Eyes*

Sample Inventions

Galvanoid: A galvanoid is a construct with a 107-point template. The GM deems it a TL(5+1) invention that needs Physics for the electricity, Surgery for the sewing, and Weird Science to smooth over the seams. The energy formula gives 24, so new facilities cost is \$240,000. For a gadgeteer, a galvanoid gives -4 to skill and qualifies as Complex, requiring 1d months and \$12,000 (and countless corpses!) per Prototype roll. Once this succeeds, the GM *might* permit the gadgeteer to build further galvanoids at \$1,200 and 12 hours apiece – though a full 1d months and \$12,000 per creature better suits fiction.

Soldier X: Soldier X is a process that gives a 242-point template. Seeking a late 1970s B-movie feel, the GM calls it a TL7 serum that requires Chemistry, Pharmacy, and Weird Science. The energy formula gives 33, making new facilities cost \$825,000. This gives a gadgeteer -8 to skill, and this Amazing invention would need 3d months and \$41,250 per Prototype roll. The GM feels it's amenable to mass production: \$4,125/dose, taking 41.25 hours (about a workweek) to cook up.

Reanimated Corpse: An elixir that produces reanimated corpses is also a process – one that raises the standard -143-point fantasy zombie. It's a supernatural innovation: no specific TL, but -10 to skill. The GM requires Alchemy and Thaumatology. Energy cost is 8 (like the Zombie spell), so new facilities cost is \$200,000. A gadgeteer would have another -4 to skill, and the Complex invention would require 1d months and \$10,000 per Prototype roll. The resulting elixir recipe would involve \$1,000 in ingredients and 10 weeks of brewing, and zombify any corpse it's poured on.

Whisperer: Whisperers, at 29 points, are the consequence of contagion. The GM feels that a memetic plague is a TL9 creation that uses Brainwashing, Expert Skill (Memetics), and Weird Science. Energy cost is 19, making new facilities cost a cool \$950,000. This Amazing invention would give -8 to skill, and require 3d months and \$47,500 per Prototype roll. Should it succeed, though, the plague would be ready to spread!

CHAPTER FIVE

ZOMBIFIED CAMPAIGNS

Fifty years after the triumph of the Revolution, a new revolution is about to begin.

– Tagline for *Juan de los Muertos*

Before creating zombies – much less having players generate characters – the GM has some important decisions to make regarding the game world, and about the

zombies’ and PCs’ place in it. It might seem strange to explore such topics *after* everything else . . . but captivating zombie-themed adventures and campaigns are built on a solid understanding of zombie origins, capabilities, and interactions. The resulting design choices, in turn, influence the kinds of monsters and heroes that make for engaging stories.

ZOMBIES, ZOMBIES EVERYWHERE

One of the most important things the GM must decide is how zombie-ridden the game world is. A campaign that’s mostly about something else – with zombies as guest stars – is a completely different beast from a full-on **GURPS Zombies** campaign. And there’s no One True Way to run the latter.

If the zombie’s job is to herald the *real* bad guy, then it needn’t be impressive. It can show up for long enough to be chopped up or gunned down, its appearance warning the PCs that their enemy is dabbling in the black arts or forbidden science, or has no respect for free will.

HOW MANY ZOMBIES?

It’s easy to assume that zombies come in hordes that have overrun the world – or will do so in short order – simply because that’s how a lot of recent fiction goes. However, it’s entirely possible to run a dedicated **GURPS Zombies** game where this *isn’t* the case. Conversely, a campaign can regularly feature zombies without using **Zombies** as much more than an occasional reference.

I, Zombie

There may be just *one* zombie. This option suits a variety of dramatic needs: the one-shot **GURPS Horror** adventure, the monster-of-the-week campaign (a common approach to **GURPS Monster Hunters**), and the “freak incident” in a mostly zombie-free setting that contains remarkable technology or abilities (**GURPS Bio-Tech** and **Supers** spring to mind). It works best when the zombie is the sole success of an illicit super-soldier program, the only surviving experiment of a mad reanimator, or some unexplained evil. Anything reproducible – never mind *contagious* – is unlikely to stop at a single monster!



Zombie Threat Levels

It would be wonderful to know exactly how x zombies of type y would affect a game world, but tactical assessments and epidemic models are highly setting-dependent, and complex enough to fill volumes. Worse, these topics overlap where zombies are concerned – especially when human nature gets involved. Here's what's certain:

- The higher a zombie template's point value, the bigger the danger. With few noncombat abilities to pad point totals – or disadvantages that zombie-hunters can't exploit – “points are power” is truer for zombies than for most characters.
- Highly infectious zombies that zombify everyone they meet (like whisperers) are more hazardous than those that spread through one-on-one attacks (like infesters), which are in turn more likely to spell apocalypse than monsters that can't transmit their condition (like galvanoids).
- Numbers matter! If everyone who ever died returns overnight, the world is doomed even without contagion.

The most practical approach is top-down – the GM picks the desired outcome and makes zombies powerful, contagious, and/or numerous enough to match, adjusting other campaign parameters as needed. Zombies that present a minor combat encounter in one world could be the seeds of the apocalypse in another, whether because weapons of the setting's TL can't affect them, natural immunity is rarer, or society isn't as organized. A million horrendously infectious, powerful zombies nuked to ash in a remote valley are ultimately a creepy footnote, while an army of 200 non-contagious, low-powered huntsmen reanimated by some evil shaman would be utterly apocalyptic for a TL0 settlement of 100 souls.

The GM must also be prepared to tweak events on the fly as they unfold. As p. B488 suggests, if an encounter is going badly for the PCs, the GM might give them a lucky break; if it's a yawner, he can increase the difficulty. Similar thinking applies to overall campaign direction. If the goal was a confined outbreak, yet the dice rolls and battles make it clear that apocalypse is brewing, the GM can shake things up; perhaps the Air Force sprays a cure, eliminating all but a few holdout zombies. If the intended apocalypse looks to be foiled too easily, the radio might crackle with reports of new outbreaks in distant cities, or deadly mutations. And so on – zombie plots are *famously* unfair and illogical.

It might exist solely to speak an ominous message from the villain and then self-destruct (perhaps into a swarm of bugs, *Prince of Darkness*-style). Any low-points zombie template will do, with Infectious deleted if the GM wants to remove all risk of a campaign-changing plague.

More often, however, the lone zombie is a serious foe, no less scary than a vampire or a psycho killer. This calls for a high-powered creature and/or lower-powered heroes with no special knowledge of their opponent. Such a zombie usually boasts Unkillable – if not Supernatural Durability – along with high ST, human-level IQ, and possibly “mutant” abilities. Good fictional precedents are Victor

Frankenstein's creature made stronger but less brainy, and Chuck Norris' opponent (Kirby) in *Silent Rage*. The galvanoid (p. 92) and Soldier X (p. 104) would both work – as would a souped-up corpse golem (p. 92), in a fantasy setting.

A fun twist in this sort of setup is to make the goal *capture*, not extermination. If FBI agents assigned to paranormal investigations – or a squad of temple guards – are tasked with “apprehending” a zombie discreetly, then even a low-powered specimen could be a challenge. It can't be stunned or intimidated, and it won't behave discreetly, yet the PCs must grab it intact without making a fuss. To double the fun in a higher-tech campaign, have the hunters' masters order full biohazard protocols, and exploit the fact that many *players* will assume that any zombie is infectious (which this one might be, if the GM is ready to switch campaigns if the mission fails). If nothing else, real heroes will start to wonder what their superiors are up to . . .

The Local Incident

A step up from the lone zombie is the zombie outbreak confined to a particular locale. Perhaps the zombies are sealed in a lab or a tomb (or *both*, as in the video game *Return to Castle Wolfenstein*). Maybe they've been “forgotten” in remote wilderness, as in *Død Snø* or *Shock Waves* (Nazi zombies appear to specialize in local incidents). Or they might be pouring out of an isolated Bad Place, whether a madman's castle or a haunted forest (*Versus*-style). Such zombies customarily do what monsters do best – namely, terrorize a small community – but nothing says they can't mind their own business until adventurers desecrate their tomb looking for treasure, or unwittingly break the bio-containment seals.

While apocalypse scenarios dominate recent horror fiction, the local incident is more traditional. In the classic zombie tale, what's horrific is that the world *looks* normal, the protagonists *aren't* expecting zombies, and when things go bad, the heroes are *not* in the same boat as everybody else – they can't get word out or call for help, at least not to anyone sane. That's isolating, claustrophobic, and a fine model for a **GURPS Horror** adventure. No less time-honored is the mad science experiment involving something like neuroids (p. 103), ReViv™-ified (pp. 103-104), or zombots (p. 93), whether it has gone very right (and the terror comes from the researcher's evil designs) or very wrong (what's scary is the utter chaos).

The local incident also makes for wonderful *fantasy* scenarios. If zombies aren't just generic monsters – and outside of “kitchen sink” RPG fantasy, they aren't – they might represent a predatory threat (such as ghouls, pp. 95-96) or a curse on a place, be it a tomb or a village (selfish dead, p. 95, work well). The PCs' job is saving the locals, defeating the monsters, and then finding the Bad Place in order to purge its evil (or pilfer its secrets!).

A group of wandering heroes might do this for a living, ending zombie outbreaks much as oil-well firefighters cap blazing blowouts. *Escaping* the incident could be the basis for an entire campaign, too – if the TL is low enough that there are no telephones or speedy vehicles to save the day, journeying to the mythical realm where the dead stay down could be a lengthy quest.

The question of “What makes zombies?” is extra-important here. If the zombies *can’t* transmit their condition, they should be scary in another way. Perhaps they’re powerful, or will continue to spill out of Hell until the PCs perform an exorcism or close a sinister portal (Judgment’s Legionaries, pp. 93-94, are suitable for this). They might spread through means other than contagion – a new drug causing face-eaters (pp. 101-102) to show up is plenty worrisome. Or maybe the zombies are former acquaintances, and each meeting means a Fright Check; both possessed thralls (pp. 94-95) and Vodou slaves (p. 102) fit this bill, and either might serve an evil master who needs stopping. If zombification is catching, the objective is usually containment first, everything else second.

The local incident allows the GM to invoke hordes and frantic chases without having to run a campaign where the PCs are perpetually short on gear and living in the ruins. It’s also an excellent starting point for a **GURPS Monster Hunters** campaign, as zombies are relatively weak menaces suitable for giving neophytes their baptism by fire. Finally, there’s the possibility of a campaign where the heroes are all that stands between zombies and the world. Failure means apocalypse, and this isn’t limited to contagious zombies – some hell-mouth or portal to the zombie planet spewing endless undead would be every bit as bad. Adventures in containment would revolve around cracks in the defenses, meddling villains seeking zombie armies, and fluctuations in the zombies’ numbers or capabilities.

Oh, Look – a Zombie

Dialing up the zombie headcount even more without letting them propagate – so that zombies are commonplace but not taking over the world – yields a completely different kind of campaign. The average person knows that zombies exist and won’t be surprised to see one; if he finds zombies scary, it’s in the same way that dangerous animals or menacing gang members are scary. The zombies might even be sufficiently well-behaved that the prevailing attitude toward them approaches blasé.

This is how zombies work in so-called “kitchen sink” fantasy that plunders every pre-modern culture for equipment, magic, and monsters. Zombies are just another monster, and come in two major types. First, there are servitors of various magic-workers (mainly priests and wizards),

which consist of corpse golems (p. 92) and necromantic reanimates (pp. 99-101), or things very much like these. Then there are nominally free-roaming zombies, like those under *Fantasy Monsters* (pp. 95-96), which exist mostly to fill out a hierarchy that has powerful undead (vampires, liches, etc.) at the top and undead slaves at the bottom. And undead they are – almost always.

In such fantasy, adventurers *expect* to encounter zombies when they kick in the tomb door, while the Dark Lord is *supposed* to field armies of skeletons. If there’s surprise, it’s when the zombies turn out to be weirder than usual (say, they’re buzzing corpses, pp. 98-99), or exhibit any motivation more complex than “slay the heroes” (such as when the selfish dead, p. 95, get speaking roles). Even then, the reaction is mostly “Oh, look – a zombie.”

This is also how zombies come across in post-apocalypse settings where the zombies *weren’t* the reason why the world ended, yet appear among the countless foes out to get the heroes, along with gangs, mutants, and killer robots. What changes from the fantasy picture is that they’re more likely to have weird-science explanations – like radiation ghouls (p. 91) or zombots (p. 93), or even Soldier X (p. 104) warriors frozen in ancient bomb shelters – and less likely to be undead. They’re almost never supernatural.

In either case, the zombies can be as numerous and powerful as needed. The goals are to provide the PCs with an adequate combat challenge and to expand the bestiary, not to scare the players or to see how long the heroes survive before they turn (or turn on each other). Since most people in the setting *know* about zombies, special skills for dealing with them (distinguishing types, determining weaknesses, maybe even finding cures) will exist; in fantasy, these will include spells for fighting and perhaps creating zombies. Zombies won’t be mysteries.

A totally different approach is found in the films *Cast a Deadly Spell* and *Fido*, and implied at the end of *Shaun of the Dead*: zombies aren’t monsters any more, but labor. They might be purpose-created for this – probably necromantic reanimates (pp. 99-101) or zombots (p. 93) if undead, or neuroids (p. 103) or Vodou slaves (p. 102) if living. Then again, they could be leftovers from an almost-apocalypse, pacified in a way that applies a Mitigator limitation to any offensive disadvantage; the zombie-control collars of *Fido* would be worth -60%, while Dr. Isaacs’ dodgy injections in *Resident Evil: Extinction* might rate -50%. If the zombies are *contagious*, this, too, needs an in-setting fix; pacification might suffice if contagion requires an attack (as with the infected, p. 97), but if zombification spreads to anyone who ventures too close (as with crazies, p. 101), immunizing humans makes more sense. And if only the dead rise, rapid funeral arrangements will do, whether that means incinerating the body or starting pacification measures.

Rain: All the people that were working here are dead.

Spence: Well, that isn’t stopping them from walking around.

– *Resident Evil*

Whatever the details, zombie laborers tend to be low-powered, while the heroes are often ordinary folks.

A nice thing about the “zombies as labor” approach is that zombies can be essential to the campaign’s flavor without automatically making the campaign all about the zombies. Handled properly, the zombies are no more intrusive than the robot laborers ubiquitous in science fiction stories – or even ordinary human servants. Of course, this *does* mean ensuring that the setting’s values are sufficiently different from those of our world that nobody recoils from the idea of exploiting mindless ex-humans.

Finally, when the setting history features a futuristic *non-zombie* apocalypse that puts zombies in the bestiary,

or a narrowly averted zombie apocalypse that changes the labor force, the GM gets to mix apocalyptic elements with another campaign style. He can justify widespread survivalism, and recast civilization in whatever mold suits campaign themes, yet present an orderly society with rules, where the PCs needn’t worry about becoming monsters.

Zombie Apocalypse!

The “default” for zombie fiction nowadays is that zombies have mostly or entirely overrun the planet – save, perhaps, for a few hidden sanctuaries on isolated islands or deep underground – and that humanity is at best barely hanging on, at worst wiped out.

There are several reasons why this *isn’t* the assumed option for **GURPS Zombies** campaigns, however.

First, this calls for the greatest amount of world design. The GM *can’t* simply look out the window, open a history book, or adopt an existing fictional background (e.g., **GURPS Banestorm**). He has to decide how long ago things went bad, what perished and what survived, and what conditions are like now. He must invent any gangs or enclaves that held out, make lists of available gear, set the effective TL in every possible field, and much more. That’s a lot of effort for a grim setting wherein the PCs might die or become zombies before they do much exploring.

Next, zombies that are infectious, powerful, or numerous enough to have plausibly caused this outcome are tricky to use. If they’re in the past, and there are no zombies today – no old-time, world-wrecking ones, anyway – then that’s a fine survival scenario but not a **Zombies** campaign. If scary zombies are still around, then the apocalypse is in full swing and either the players must accept the possibility of short-lived PCs or the heroes have to be capable enough to prevail. Not every gamer can invest in a character with no promise of a future, while a *guarantee* of survival dilutes what’s thrilling about an apocalypse. Striking a balance is difficult.

Lastly, the scope of possible activities is limited: surviving, fighting, and . . . well, that’s about it. The GM *can* construct social scenarios around survivor rivalries, and run stealth missions against the strongholds of the corporate or government labs that made the zombies, but the lack of a functioning society (or many functioning people) precludes a lot of adventure types and invalidates quite a few popular character archetypes. Nevertheless, the apocalypse can make for a powerful, memorable campaign.

The foremost decision the GM must make concerns the *kind* of apocalypse.

Friendly Zombies

GURPS Zombies assumes that zombies are monsters because that’s usually the case. Brain- and face-eating are truly monstrous behaviors, while even an unaggressive zombie is liable to *look* like a monster, whether it’s a shambling corpse with bugs spilling from its eye-sockets, a stitched-together abomination, or just unnervingly blank-faced. There are good reasons why zombies are closely associated with horror.

Still, there *is* precedent for zombie servitors in fantasy (pp. 143-144) and historical horror (p. 144). Such zombies are chattels at best, and while they might rate as Allies, they’re unlikely to be looked upon fondly just because Necros the Foul calls them “special friends.” Someone callous or evil enough to make mindless slaves out of people is liable to be feared as much as any zombie – a negative Reputation is likely – but the GM may wish to permit PC necromancers, *bokors*, mad scientists, etc. Chapter 2 talks about the necessary abilities and offers a template (*Zombie-Master*, pp. 41-43, while *Zombification* (pp. 133-136) explores the details of zombie-making.

Zombies might even be former loved ones, viewed much as pets would be – or much as *people* would be. In that case, they may rate as Dependents or be the subject of a Sense of Duty. Whether society tolerates this is a decision for the GM to make. If zombie labor is accepted, so might be zombie buddies; if not, then a negative Reputation is probable.

Zombies as Allies, Dependents, or zero-cost chattels are only rarely suitable outside of the campaigns described in *Oh, Look – a Zombie* (pp. 139-140), but this is ultimately the GM’s decision. If the GM does allow this, he must determine how society regards “tame” zombies and individuals who keep them. See *Are They People?* (p. 33) for traits for PCs with unorthodox attitudes toward zombies, and *Social Traits for Zombies* (p. 89) to learn what disadvantages the zombies need.

Finally, the GM who wants friendly zombies may adjust zombie templates to match. Tame zombies could be variants that lack – or merely have a magical or technological Mitigator (p. B112) on – such antisocial disadvantages as Bad Temper, Berserk, Bloodlust, Intolerance, Odious Racial Habits, and Uncontrollable Appetite. These changes would raise template cost, and thus the point cost for a zombie Ally and the energy cost of the Zombie spell. Zombies with programming in the form of Duty, Reprogrammable, and/or Slave Mentality wouldn’t need as many modifications. The GM might even choose to replace antisocial problems with equal points in programming.

Does it involve old-fashioned horror-film contagion, with B-movie ghouls (pp. 90-91) killing people, who return as zombies – or perhaps infected (p. 97) staggering around, biting everyone? Is it a flu-like pandemic causing crazies (p. 101), or an even less orthodox menace, like parasitic infesters (p. 99) or memetic whisperers (p. 103)? Does the “plague” have no effect on the living but get the dead up and biting, due to chemicals or radiation (B-movie ghouls again), nanomachines (like the ReViv™-ified, pp. 103-104), or perhaps insects (as with buzzing corpses, pp. 98-99)? And if the dead are involved, what does this mean – *corpses*, or damned souls pouring out of Hell (Judgment’s Legionaries, pp. 93-94)?

The GM also has to decide how far gone things are. Is humanity fighting a war, with the outcome still in flux? Did the zombies spread too fast – or over too broad an area – for battle lines, leaving humanity struggling to survive, perhaps behind the bulwarks of the military, emergency agencies, or big corporations? Did humanity *lose*, but enough survivors hold out to rebuild? Or is humanity done for, and the PCs are it?

Another question is that of scope. A true apocalypse is global – or interplanetary, or worse – but there’s no need to see it all, and this might not be possible if vehicles and telecommunications are long gone. The GM must decide how far things have spread: city, country, continent, world . . . This will in turn determine whether the PCs can travel to safety, summon help, and so on. Unlike *The Local Incident* (pp. 138-139), everybody is aware that things have gone wrong, and containment has all but failed.

Most important to the players is how the PCs fit into all this. Are they ordinary folks in a survival-horror scenario, all these tough questions answered by a valiant GM bent on making their short lives as vivid as possible? *Capable* people, like die-hard survivalists, facing numbered days but possibly holding out for long enough to call it a campaign? *Immune* survivors, like the protagonists of the *Left 4 Dead* video games, moving from battle to battle, seeking a cure or a rescue? High-end heroes – like Alice in the *Resident Evil* movies – for whom the apocalypse is an elaborate excuse to cut loose with violence, call it vengeance, and ignore social niceties? And can the players create replacement characters (p. 150)?

Whatever the GM’s decisions, the heroes won’t run out of zombies to fight or flee from!

How Many Types?

While *How Many Zombies?* (pp. 137-141) lists several zombie types suitable for each class of campaign, it tacitly assumes that the GM will pick just one option. This doesn’t have to be the case, however.

One Sort

Obviously, if there’s just one zombie (*I, Zombie*, pp. 137-138), you can have only one type. Even if there’s a local outbreak or a full-fledged apocalypse, however, the most common situation in horror stories is that all the zombies are of the same kind. This is vital when invoking fear of conformity (p. 8) – a rather common theme.

This approach offers numerous advantages. The most obvious one is that there’s far less preparation required

from the GM. He need only create (or choose) *one* zombie template, which in turn simplifies a great many things: If the zombie is alive, the complication of Injury Tolerance for the undead goes away; if it’s undead, there’s no need to puzzle out life support when zombies cross a lake underwater or stow away on the Space Shuttle. If it’s infectious, no effort is required to justify hordes; if it isn’t, there goes the hassle of contagion rolls. And so on.

There’s also less for the players to worry about. Only a small subset of the skills mentioned under *Discovering Zombie Flaws* (p. 35), *A Better Tomorrow* (pp. 129-133), and *Zombification* (pp. 133-136) will matter. If the GM tells the players up front, it’s cheaper and easier to build characters; if they find out in play, it’s simpler to *improve* characters. Either way, the players can spend more time on interesting strategies that work against zombies and less time trying to cover all possible bases, which can grow frustrating.

And sticking to one zombie type means that the campaign won’t have a “big game hunter” or “monster of the week” feel. While that sort of thing can be fun in a fantasy or *GURPS Monster Hunters* game, it’s distracting in a *GURPS Horror* narrative. The more energy the players put into categorizing and classifying, the less they’ll have left for caring whether the zombies and the scenario are scary. A campaign with one type of zombie will be more focused *because* players and GM alike won’t be dividing their efforts.

This doesn’t mean that individual zombies must be identical – that isn’t true even in the most conservative horror classics. Zombie templates are added to former people. A zombie linebacker *isn’t* the same as a zombie eight-year-old, and while many zombies have Bestial, Cannot Learn, and/or No Mental Skills, nothing says that a zombie ninja won’t be sneaky or that a zombie knight can’t swing a sword!

Many Sorts

Then again, variety is the spice of life. Multiple zombie types are possible at the level of *The Local Incident* (pp. 138-139) and above. A “bestiary” approach goes hand in glove with *Oh, Look – a Zombie* (pp. 139-140), and there’s certainly room for variation in *Zombie Apocalypse!* (pp. 140-141).

Like *One Sort* (above), this strategy offers many benefits. On the most fundamental level, the horror sacrificed by giving up an immersive focus on a unique zombie type can be repaid many times over in fear of the unknown. The players can’t *count* on defeating oh-so-predictable zombies with tried-and-true tactics. Even fearless monster-killers have cause to worry when their faithful undead-turning abilities or vaccine-dart guns have no effect . . . or when after years of treating zombie bites by slapping on a bandage or casting a quick healing spell, Father McGruder the NPC healer gets nipped and becomes a ghoul.

This approach also works around one of the less-thrilling aspects of zombie gaming, which is that the GM may find himself calling the shots for the same old mindless monsters all the time. Playing zombies that have new tricks – both in combat and outside it – is more *fun*. And as fun tends to be contagious (like the zombie plague), the players will likely rise to the challenge.

Indeed, the additional challenge is one of the biggest attractions here. Players of low-powered heroes get to put their ingenuity to the test, and should they prevail, they enjoy the satisfaction of having beaten long odds with sharp wits. Those playing high-powered survivors, monster-hunters, and similar capable PCs, meanwhile, get to use their wide range of abilities rather than see them sit idle on the character sheet. And whatever the power level, many gamers *relish* the challenge of having to adapt and develop novel strategies to cope with new kinds of enemies – a thrill the GM can share as he puts his own creativity to the test coming up with fresh puzzles.

This isn't without its difficulties, of course. Unless the campaign is episodic, like a *GURPS Monster Hunters* or *Action* game, or one where monsters need neither rhyme nor reason, as in *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy*, it's unwise to toss in new zombies willy-nilly. This means that in addition to the effort of designing lots of templates and dealing with their repercussions, the GM must come up with ways to link his creations into a coherent picture. Simple possibilities include using a single variety of zombie plus one or two zombie bosses (pp. 104-107); starting with a baseline template that defines core strengths and weaknesses, but adding whatever mutant abilities seem interesting; and sticking to one broad class of zombies, such as *Constructs* (pp. 91-93) or *Techno-Zombies* (pp. 103-104).

More complex is weaving a meta-plot around the zombies and then introducing them as the campaign progresses. Perhaps a crashed satellite causes corpses to get up, then a well-meaning biotechnologist tries to "immunize" people with a vaccine that turns the living into different zombies, and *then* the Army tries fighting the outbreak using super-soldiers which are basically zombies, too. Throw in *failed* Army experiments, dead super-soldiers revived by space dust, and mad scientists given new insights into mind control or viruses by the discovery of all these zombies, and the world could turn into a real zoo – but one that makes some sense. In zombie fiction, this seems to be what happens whenever *The Corporation* (p. 23) gets involved.

*Never seen anything like this before . . .
They're changing!*

– Bill, in Left 4 Dead

Still, meta-plot is never *required*. Theme may suffice. Fantasy RPGs have managed to reconcile everything that could conceivably fit under *The Cursed* (pp. 93-95), *Fantasy Monsters* (pp. 95-96), or *Necromantic Reanimates* (pp. 99-101) – and the occasional construct (like the corpse golem, p. 92) – with mumbled references to "magic" and "the gods." In short, if it's supernatural, it fits.

One final caution: Note that it was Father McGruder, the NPC healer, who got bit and turned – not a PC. If a new zombie type has the potential to change the campaign and, more important, the *heroes*, then give the players a chance

to figure this out. A challenge is fun; being told that after 99 zombie bites, the 100th turned your beloved character into a mindless skull-muncher, isn't. There's plenty of drama in close calls, but the drama in bait-and-switch mostly takes the form of bitter arguments around the gaming table.

They're Changing!

An in-between option common in recent movies (such as the *Resident Evil* series) and video games (e.g., *Left 4 Dead*) is zombies that start out all the same but change as time passes. Countless rubber-science explanations are possible: zombies experience periodic metamorphoses as part of their "natural lifecycle," or undergo sci-fi mutations caused by "unstable DNA"; newly created zombies are influenced by something found in only certain victims (gene, drug, etc.); or the zombie plague itself is mutating, and thus creating new sorts of zombies. Whatever the hokum, what matters is that while every zombie in a horde would have been of the same type at the beginning of the outbreak or apocalypse, this grows less and less true as the situation develops.

Used skillfully, this device combines the strengths of both *One Sort* (p. 141) and *Many Sorts* (pp. 141-142). Initially, the GM need only create one zombie template, and can devote his preparations to other details (say, the hefty world-building that a respectable apocalypse requires), while the players can focus on their characters' survival and the fact that *argh, there are zombies!* Before GM or players get bored with the same old same old, though, changes start showing up, keeping things interesting. The GM can phase in new zombie types slowly enough to avoid confusion and loss of focus, yet sufficiently quickly to sidestep monotony.

As for the details, the GM has many choices. One set of possibilities concerns how the zombies change. Perhaps initially there are no zombie bosses (pp. 104-107), but these show up over time. Maybe only zombie dogs exist at first, with the virus jumping to humans later, or vice versa – and if it carries a little genetic matter with it, *hybrids* might come along after that. Then again, it may be that all the zombies use the same template, with a tiny chance of each one being weird and acquiring additional traits, so that as the days tick by, more and more mutants appear. Or *all* of these could be true.

Then there's pacing. In a frantic campaign where time is of the essence – because the PCs are racing for the Safe Zone, to develop a cure, etc. – a fixed timetable works well. Perhaps

Day 1 brings standard, easily evaded shamblers, Day 7 is when the *boss* zombies show up, Day 14 marks when beasts start showing symptoms, and Day 21 is heralded by transgenic bosses with animal traits like monstrous claws and teeth. If the GM prefers metamorphosis or mutation, the *first* cohort of zombies might follow a nice timeline like this, but after a while there will be a mix, and it would be best simply to roll dice. And if zombies have a localized source – such as a damaged nuclear reactor, a portal to Hell, or a mad necromancer's lab – distance replaces time, with weirder zombies lurking closer to the origin.

Finally, there's obsolescence. The zombie population might evolve toward a steady state that resembles a *Many Sorts* setup, with lots of different, loosely related zombies wandering around. However, the reality could instead be closer to a timed series of *One Sort* situations, with earlier varieties of zombies dying off (perhaps thanks to traits like Self-Destruct and Terminally Ill), being squeezed out

by fitter zombies (who beat them to the food, or simply destroy them), or turning into more advanced zombies. Transition periods mean interesting events and encounters, such as a false reprieve when it merely *looks* like the zombie outbreak is over – or the spectacle of Zombie 1.0 battling scarier Zombie 2.0 for feeding grounds!

Dicing for Zombies

If using *Many Sorts* (pp. 141-142) or *They're Changing!* (pp. 142-143), the GM can let dice determine what type or "generation" of zombies appears. For instance:

Encounter Tables. From the dawn of RPGs come random tables like that on p. B503. The GM can roll to check whether an encounter occurs (e.g., "Roll 3d hourly; on 9 or less, zombies appear."), roll on the table for *what* shows up, and roll for numbers (e.g., "A horde of 2d×5 zombies."). If zombies are changing over time, then the frequency, nature, and size of encounters might change, too.

Ability Tables. For zombies that share a basic template with possible extra abilities, the GM might roll for the "mutations." This can follow a roll to determine whether a change occurs at all ("On 3-4 on 3d, roll for a mutation."). The GM could even roll 3d, look up the result under *Statistically Speaking* (p. 113), and have that fraction of the horde exhibit the change. If zombies are changing, then odds of a change, the percentage of zombies that have it, or the table of abilities might likewise evolve. The GM could make the schedule for change totally dice-driven.

Tables can be as fancy as the GM wants. An example for 3d:

3-4 – A survivor . . . who's unknowingly a carrier!

5-6 – Zombie dogs; roll 2d for number.

7-10 – Stage I zombies (-1 ST and Move); roll 2d×5 for number.

11-13 – Stage II zombies; roll 2d×5 for number. One boss per 20 zombies.

14-16 – Stage III zombies (+1 ST and Move); roll 2d×5 for number. One boss per 10 zombies.

17-18 – Mutation! Roll again for type and add a new ability. This result is cumulative.

Zombie Dicing

Zombie Dice are fun here, as the icons are evocative and each color has a different distribution of results. The GM might have a horde appear if, on a roll of all 13, brains outnumber shotgun blasts. To kill two birds with one stone, horde size could be a multiple of the difference; e.g., 13 brains means $13 \times 5 = 65$ zombies, while eight brains and two blasts is $(8 - 2) \times 5 = 30$ zombies. The GM might involve color, too, and have each red brain add a boss and each yellow one give a mutant – so if those eight brains were one red, two yellow, and five green, the 30 zombies would come with a boss and two mutants.

Instead, maybe a rare zombie shows up or a mutation occurs on three blasts on three dice – but the GM rolls red in hot zones (1 in 8), yellow in general (1 in 27), and green in "safe" zones (1 in 216).

If a mutation *does* occur, the GM might roll three yellow dice for type, with majority brains (7 in 27) meaning something mental, majority footprints (7 in 27) meaning movement, majority blasts (7 in 27) meaning an attack, and one of each (6 in 27) meaning a *weird* change.

ZOMBIFIED GENRES

While it would be fair to view "zombie fiction" as its own thing and thus to regard a *GURPS Zombies* campaign as distinct from, say, a *GURPS Fantasy* or *Horror* one, it's usually best to select a baseline genre that matches the themes you intend to use and the mood you hope to evoke. Zombies don't work the same way everywhere they crop up.

FANTASY

In fantasy, zombies are most often the necromantically reanimated servants of priests and wizards. Occasionally,

they're spontaneous – the result of a curse or a divine binding that compels them to discharge a task, guard a tomb, etc. They're only rarely apocalyptic, partly due to genre conventions (fantasy apocalypses involve demons, deities, and Elder Things, not mindless hordes) and partly because the best explanation for an apocalypse – contagion – is customarily curable with magic. Few fantasy zombies have weird-science origins, unless this means weird *alchemy*. They're almost to the last undead, except for the occasional oddity, like a buzzing corpse (pp. 98-99), added for variety.

Fantasy zombies can use horror themes – looking foul, triggering Fright Checks when encountered by surprise, overrunning villages, and eating the dead or the living – but the fear of zombies dominates that of *becoming* one. Fears of death, decay, cannibalism, and the afterlife (or its absence) are fitting, but fantasy zombies rarely symbolize conformity or criticize society. Mostly, they're fodder for heroes to slay. Still, the GM can vary the plot to keep things interesting: some zombies guard the treasure-filled tomb, others are sent into the village by a necromancer whom the PCs must defeat, and yet others call for the group's sages to research means of appeasing the dead and breaking the curse.

A word on zombie types: Undead in fantasy tend to be either evil, allowing individuals with True Faith to turn them, or neutral wizardly creations, unfazed by holy power but dependent on the magical kind. Thus, the GM may wish to give all *undead* zombies either something akin to the Unholy Dead meta-trait (see *Fantasy Monsters*, pp. 95-96) – at least Can Be Turned By True Faith – or Dependency (Mana). This doesn't apply to the stray buzzing corpse or swordpunk galvanoid included as a challenge, of course!

HORROR

Horror is zombies' native genre, and its monsters are more apt to be scary – and to represent terrifying things – than fantasy ones. Where fantasy zombies lurch toward their doom at the heroes' hands, horror zombies *bite* those hands when least expected. They overrun, they infect, and they pose a serious threat to the protagonists' life, sanity, and humanity.

Historical Horror

If the GM of a historical campaign is familiar with the myths native to the setting, he can select suitable zombies to evoke horror: solidified spirits similar to Judgment's Legionaries (pp. 93-94) or selfish dead (p. 95) for Roman *lemures*, a ghoul (pp. 95-96) modified with Morph for an Arabian *ghul*, Vodou slaves (p. 102) on a New World plantation, and so on. See *Historical Zombies* (pp. 11-14) for ideas. It's important *not* to give in to the urge to borrow tropes from fantasy (e.g., "turning the undead") or zombie flicks (brain-eating, creepy outstretched arms, etc.). Players who confront the zombies of real-world cultures with the bravado of fantasy sword-swingers or the self-assured head-shooting of modern-day heroes are in for a scary surprise – which is as it should be.

Important fears in this case are those of *becoming* a zombie and of the afterlife being different from what was promised, sometimes mixed with fear of cannibalism or disease (the conventional kind, not zombie plague). Social criticism is mostly off in the future, but the unfortunate zombie (p. 11) can serve a similar purpose if it's something like a Vodou slave or the materialized spirit of an angry ancestor. In those cases, fear comes not only from the zombies but also from people – be they greedy plantation owners or selfish individuals who've neglected their religious observances.

Contagion mostly doesn't fit, unless it's a transmissible curse passed around among the deserving. An apocalypse might work, though, if people were selfish or evil enough.

When the gods let the dead out to savage the living, and zombie legions are overrunning the world and slaughtering sinners, it's of little importance that the marauding hordes can't infect anyone.

Occult Horror

A common horror approach is the zombie as a manifestation of occult forces, whether that means The Devil, shamanic magic latent in burial grounds, or a cursed locale. Tales in this vein typically resemble *Historical Horror* (above) minus the folkloric accuracy; e.g., *Prince of Darkness* drags out both possessed thralls (pp. 94-95) and corpses reanimated by bugs in the service of Satanic evil, even though neither has much to do with Christian mysticism. This can be truly scary if the zombies were *friends* when last seen – it gets at the fear of becoming a zombie, raises disturbing questions about the afterlife and one's immortal soul, and can cause would-be zombie-killers to hesitate (it's definitely grounds for Fright Checks!). Whoever they used to be, occult zombies have a knack for showing up in dark places when people are alone.

Occult zombie apocalypses typically resemble the historical kind: a divine (or more likely *diabolical*) force throws open the gates of Hell or the afterlife, flooding the world with zombies. Contagion is rare with the exception of the contagious curse (*Braindead* handles this well). This malediction may *look* like disease – complete with an infectious bite – but part of the horror is that it defies medicine. In effect, the cursed bite is an up-close and visceral way to cast a deadly spell.

Be warned that zombie stories like these tend toward camp. *The Evil Dead* movies and *Braindead* are but two of many egregious examples. If that's the goal, great! Just be aware that this no longer conveys horror, so players may object when asked to roll Fright Checks on seeing zombies, or grouse about realistically punitive rules for using chain-saws as weapons.

Splatter Horror

What most zombie fiction *actually* achieves is a gore-fest. If there's one zombie, it goes around killing and dismembering like the classic psycho killer. If there's a local incident, almost everybody dies. If there's an apocalypse, the bodies are piled high and rotting – and the symptoms of any contagion are graphic, involving milky white or jet-black eyeballs, spider webs of infected veins, and vomiting. Heroes of all power levels slaughter zombies in gruesome ways that result in lots of blood, severed limbs, and guts snagged on nearby tree branches.

While this can run to camp, it can also be powerfully horrifying. There's fear of both zombies (which *will* kill you painfully and/or eat you alive) and *becoming* a zombie (a blood-spattered, corpse-strewn world begs for unfettered contagion). There's plenty of death, decay, disease, and cannibalism to dread. And the existence of zombies criticizes the heck out of society, their appetites portrayed like drug cravings, the speed of their spread showing the danger of close-packed cities, and their foulness (and often origin) speaking volumes about pollution.

To take the gore and the criticism up another notch, add totalitarian troops, shooting anyone who might be infected or who tries to leave the hot zone.

Where historical or occult horror calls for supernatural zombies, splatter relies on the weird-science sort: plague zombies, radioactive zombies, toxic-waste zombies, and all manner of zombies created by failed experiments and weapons of mass zombification (p. 23). It's all about keeping it in your face, and that doesn't just mean violence. You can't blame God, The Devil, or the old Indian burial ground for this one. *People* did this – our dollars and votes supported the corporations and governments responsible for the disaster.

Survival Horror

What a lot of zombie fiction is going for – even as it achieves splatter – is a hard look at survival in dire times. This is scary for many of the same reasons as splatter: you can be killed by or become a zombie, your allies are getting picked off, and if things continue that way for long, you'll have to face disease, death, and perhaps even cannibalism. The difference is that the zombies often aren't your biggest worry. *People* get scary, as the situation brings out the worst in them: supposed friends grow desperate and turn on you, while strangers go after your supplies or try to use you as bait. Long-term, there's also the fact that Death might not visit in the guise of bite or bullet, but as cholera or slow starvation.

Survival horror usually invokes something between a large local outbreak and a full-on apocalypse – though the latter *isn't* necessary, and many storytellers sharpen the fear by not revealing how far zombies have spread. These approaches depend on growing numbers of zombies, which customarily means contagion, and that's as likely to affect the dead (yielding B-movie ghouls, pp. 90-91) as the living (who become the infected, p. 97). It's trickier to arrange for survival horror in fantasy settings simply because fantasy heroes have too many ways to cheat both the survival (“I cast Create Water.”) and the horror (“I cast Bravery.”), but it *can* be done if the PCs are low-powered. What's hardest is building such a mood with just one zombie; this calls for a seriously powerful monster that none of the heroes can deal with. In all cases, a survival-horror campaign should be set up as such from the start, so that either the players are prepared to lose characters or the PCs have the skills and hardware to survive for at least a little while.

In a true apocalypse, the GM must think carefully about the specific *social* subtexts he wants to explore, because absent a working society, and possibly inventing their own society, survivors will face tough questions: Are individuals who are exposed treated, summarily executed, or exiled? Are zombies viewed as target practice or as unfortunate victims, to be dealt with respectfully? If there's a totalitarian enclave out there – run by a gang, charismatic leader, corporation, or government – is it better or worse to live under their boot?

Dramatic Bits (and Bites): Betrayal!

Most survival-horror stories feature at least one character sufficiently selfish, desperate, or tired of life to do something cold-blooded like run away with all the supplies, shoot the person who's too slow to reach the rescue helicopter, sell out the others to a powerful gang, or simply throw someone to the zombies in order to escape. When this is an NPC, it's straightforward: Let the PCs “read” him with Empathy, Body Language, or Detect Lies, or contest his Stealth with Per. When it comes down to the wire, roll for the action.

When a PC is being evil, things are trickier. There's an automatic trust among players, and there's no easy way for the other characters to detect a traitor when the first warning is a player using his turn in combat to spray everybody else with gunfire. Whether this is acceptable depends on the gaming group's “social contract.”

If *everybody* agrees from the outset that things will be exactly like in a zombie movie – that when the going gets tough, the weasels get going – then that's that. It'll be a cutthroat campaign, and a short one. If players do underhanded stuff only when it really would allow a PC to live longer at somebody else's expense, however, it'll also be a *memorable* experience. The GM should either forbid “virtuous” disadvantages such as Charitable, Selfless, and Sense of Duty (Companions), or have every -5 points

in such traits give -2 on all dice rolls for self-preservation at somebody else's expense.

If the idea is to survive as a team, though, it's inconsiderate to kick the other players in the teeth and run laughing. The GM can opt to tackle such situations with “That didn't happen,” but that's heavy-handed. Instead, consider declaring that there's a “karma rule” in effect: bald-faced betrayal fails for long enough to allow every other PC to notice and react *first* – the gun jams, the engine stalls, etc. If this leads to the traitor's demise, too bad. If not, he might just get away with murder. This, too, is true to many movies!

An alternative treatment is to offer everyone the option of taking Sense of Duty (Companions) [-5] over and above everything else, and enforcing this only to the extent that it means no betrayals. To sweeten the pot, allow the extra 5 points to buy abilities that aren't otherwise available. Anybody who wants to opt out may do so, but *this is common knowledge*. Team players will *know* who's acting skeevey and squirrely, and be able to take steps.

Ultimately, this is a “meta-game” issue. The group social contract is sacred, and anyone who cites genre conventions as an excuse to violate it needs to be invited out.

The GM's job isn't to address these questions, but to ensure they get asked, because much of the horror is in the answers.

*Do you really think for one second
those wimps at the Pentagon would
allow the regeneration of dead
soldiers, American soldiers?*

– Col. Perry,
in *Universal Soldier*

CONSPIRACY

When horror is dialed back to a dull ache and the PCs encounter zombies during an investigation where they *expected* something bad – though probably not zombies – one crosses into conspiracy. What's crucial here is that everything being equal, the zombies have an identifiable source and perhaps a cure; it's just that somebody went to pains to bury these things. Thus, zombies are surprising but not necessarily scary.

Often, the conspiracy is “somebody is making zombies” – traditionally the military or *The Corporation* (p. 23), which are one and the same if the conspiracy runs deep enough. In low-tech settings, this takes the form of people who dabble in black magic, despite the admonitions of the Pope, Mages' Guild, etc. A variation is “somebody *made* zombies,” which tends to be a hated group like the Nazis (as in *Shock Waves* and *Død Snø*). When such a secret project bursts into the world after being forgotten, that's horror; but when it's documented and quietly shelved, that's conspiracy.

Which leads to the other great theme: “somebody covered up zombies.” Then they hid the trioxin in a low-budget warehouse (see *Return of the Living Dead*) or forgot a vial of zombie plague sitting in a field (as in the dreadful *Day of the Dead 2: Contagium*). And *then*, somehow, it got released. The fantasy equivalent is zombies that are literally covered up, usually in shallow graves.

The best kinds of zombies for modern-day conspiracy are those with a technological sheen, like neuroids (p. 103), ReViv™-ified (pp. 103-104), Soldier X (p. 104), and zombots (p. 93). If they're contagious, they're likely to hint at *Weapons of Mass Zombification* (p. 23), like deliberately engineered crazies (p. 101) or whisperers (p. 103). However, conspiracies are by definition secret, so contagion shouldn't be sweeping the world in an apocalypse. Rather, it overtakes a village or a building, which is brutally quarantined by menacing authorities who aren't who they claim to be, in the style of *The Crazies* or *[Rec]*. Fantasy conspiracy can use any zombie type mentioned in *Fantasy* (pp. 143-144) – though a *real* conspiracy might involve the sorts that nobody believes possible!

Zombies don't represent fears here, although there's a latent fear of conformity hidden in the message that the zombie-makers are working on ways to control people. Usually, this is social criticism of the *Propaganda and Totalitarianism*

(pp. 9-10) variety. The heroes are neither victims nor survival-horror resistance. They're whistle-blowers, stumbling onto the secret and revealing it before the Secret Masters set the monsters on them . . . or turn them into the monsters.

ACTION

Not all “horror” and “conspiracy” are what they say on the tin. When heroes show *no* fear, are never at serious risk of becoming zombies, and investigate by kicking in doors and interrogating people at gunpoint, it's really action. This is a high-tech (TL5+) genre, the low-tech equivalent being *Fantasy* (pp. 143-144) in the *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy* mode. In all cases, an apocalypse is highly inappropriate – action stars *never* lose that badly – and zombies (though perhaps not their masters) are fodder.

Bad Guy of the Week

In action TV series that have “jumped the shark” – and in hastily conceived crossover flicks – it sometimes arises that ordinary action heroes (cops, spies, commandos, etc.) must fight the unnatural. A classic cinematic take on this is *Silent Rage*, in which a town sheriff played by martial-arts hero Chuck Norris faces . . . a mute killer reanimated in a way that would make Herbert West proud. Plenty of candidates for *Occult Horror* (p. 144) and *Splatter Horror* (pp. 144-145) drift into this zone when the makers stop caring about what's scary in order to focus on the stunts.

The short version: Start with *GURPS Action* (possibly alongside *GURPS Gun Fu*, *Martial Arts*, *Tactical Shooting*, and whatever else fits the desired action-realism level), have the players create bog-standard characters, and then pit them against whatever zombies lead to good fight scenes. Don't worry about whether these zombies make sense in an ostensibly realistic world; if Arnold Schwarzenegger can fight Satan with grenades and guns in *End of Days*, then the PCs can battle overtly supernatural zombies the same way. About the only rule is “Don't zombie the heroes!” – whether because the zombies aren't contagious or because the villain who created them left the vaccine sitting around.

This offers an excellent example of how to use *GURPS Zombies* without running a *Zombies* campaign. Last week's bad guy might be a terrorist; next week's, a gunrunner. The zombie(s) are just a break from the same old same old. Perhaps it'll be time travelers or grey aliens the next time the ratings are low.

Fearless Zombie-Killers

“Horror” adventures where the heroes far outstrip the monsters are action stories, too. These can be TL5-6 pulp-horror tales, TL6-7 “weird war” scenarios, TL7-8 bio-tech-gone-bad plots, or almost anything else. The only differences between this setup and *Bad Guy of the Week* (above) are that *every* bad guy is weird or outright supernatural – alien, demonic, magic-using, mutant, psionic, undead, etc. – and that the heroes make a career out of eliminating such foes. (When they need a break from routine, they take on those terrorists and gunrunners that the regular action guys usually hunt down.)

To run this kind of stuff, start with **GURPS Monster Hunters**, have everyone make a standard character, and then add whatever zombies are consistent with the weirdness you want to include in the setting. Again, “Don’t zombify the heroes!” is advisable, but now this can be accomplished by putting cures and countermeasures within reach of the savvy hunters’ own remarkable abilities. And again, zombies shouldn’t be the only foes the PCs face, though there’s something to be said for a **GURPS** “zombie hunters” campaign which takes *Oh, Look – a Zombie* (pp. 139-140) to its illogical extreme, the heroes eventually confronting every last zombie in this book and more besides.

FUTURISTIC Sci-Fi

Almost any of the previous genres could be hurled into the future. The earlier remarks would hold true, but with two additional considerations. First, avoid the supernatural, as it tends to clash with futurism. In the examples below, this means using the tech-tinged zombies suggested for modern-day conspiracy (p. 146). Second, think about how to make the zombies menacing in the face of ultra-tech combat gear.

Post-Apocalypse

The obvious futuristic possibility is that an apocalypse has come and gone. It might not have been a *zombie* apocalypse, but if it was, the zombies either won or did so much damage that the human victory was pyrrhic and weakened civilization to crumble under other strains. Regardless, the world is now a wasteland – with zombies, but also boasting enough ultra-tech relics that this isn’t *Historical Horror* (p. 144) with new myths.

The baseline model here is *Survival Horror* (pp. 145-146), except that far more of the horror comes from gangs, starvation, ordinary disease, etc. If society has started to rebuild, the emphasis may be on the survival more than the horror. As long as there are zombies out there, though, the horror never quite goes away.

Other genres can work, too. If the setting is grim and life is cheap – like in a 1980s movie with pointy hair, armed motorbikes, and people playing football with dog skulls – it can have overtones of *Splatter Horror* (pp. 144-145), emphasizing cannibalism, warlords who keep pet zombies as gladiators, and improbable drugs that create face-eaters (pp. 101-102). If there are secret vaults of high-tech splendor tucked away, perhaps occupied by whoever made the zombies, see *Conspiracy* (p. 146). Either of the previous possibilities provides oodles of social criticism in the bargain.

If the heroes are tough enough, it’s action! See *Bad Guy of the Week* (p. 146) if typical foes consist of gangs (and troops from the secret vaults), *Fearless Zombie-Killers* (p. 146-147) if the opponents are killer robots, mutants, and the occasional face-eater or radioactive zombie. The ultimate inspiration for the latter is the **Fallout** video-game series.

It *might* just be worth trying *Fantasy* (pp. 143-144), if the apocalypse chopped off a few TLs, society hasn’t rebuilt past TL3-4, and the remaining tech is truly indistinguishable from magic – perhaps even with mana as a weird radiation field and True Faith as a psi ability to which the zombie plague is sensitive. *Occult Horror* (p. 144) is the least likely to work, because supernatural disasters tend to leave supernatural wastelands. For that, run *actual* fantasy.

However things look, what lets zombies confront ultra-tech and not be wiped out is the fact that there’s so little ultra-tech left. Each cartridge or power cell is a jewel beyond compare, and there are far more zombies than there are shots. And while pre-apocalypse armor might

make the heroes immune to zombies for a while, the tools and spare parts to fix it don’t exist – enforce *Breakdowns* (p. B485) mercilessly.



Zombies in Spaaaaace

Perhaps not literally – though if you give them Doesn’t Breathe and Vacuum Support, why not? There are other possibilities, however: The zombies are undead in spacesuits, and while the oxygen was replaced by CO₂ and decay products long ago, the suits remain pressurized (and possibly armored). Or they’re the occupants of an automated spacecraft, drifting derelict (good inspirations include *Transhuman Space: Orbital Decay* and the *Dead Space* video-game series). Or maybe they’re a biological weapon, loaded aboard a warship to be dropped on some unsuspecting enemy planet. That last option is often used as an “off screen” origin for a zombie plague, but there’s no reason not to game it out in space.

Most interesting, perhaps, is the *entire planet* of zombies. On this world, the zombie apocalypse came and the zombies won – or some other apocalypse (biological, nuclear, nanotech, etc.) swept the planet and zombies appeared in the aftermath. Either way, the place is overrun and there are no survivors. Well, until the PCs end up there, that is. If the heroes crash-land or are exiled, you get survival horror; if they’re explorers, it may feel more like conspiracy; and if they’re Space Marines on their 426th bug hunt, it’ll be fearless zombie-killers if things go five by five, splatter otherwise.

What Do They Eat in the Future?

A conundrum that arises in many futuristic settings – and in some fantasy and conspiratorial ones where zombies have been hidden for ages – is “How did the zombies stick around for so long?” If they are alive, wouldn’t they starve? If they aren’t, wouldn’t they decay?

The brute-force solution is to assign suitable abilities to zombies designed for such use: Unaging implies unrotting – and omit Will Become a Skeleton and Will Become a Rotting Corpse for good measure. Automation, Reprogrammable, and similar programming will guarantee that the zombies wait patiently. And Doesn’t Eat covers the eating part, with fantasy undead customarily running on mana, sanctity, or the like.

Often, though, the zombies are *supposed* to try to eat people – and if they’re hanging around decades or centuries after the apocalypse, or in an underground vault, the players *will* ask, “So why didn’t they starve?” Be ready with an answer! Here are a few:

They bite out of reflex or malice, but don’t need food. They have Doesn’t Eat, run on mana, sanctity, or weird

energy found where they lurk, and chew on faces and brains because their creator wanted to sow fear, because they still *hunger*, or because the zombie plague compels them to do that to spread it around.

They have food you don’t (want to) know about. Whoever left zombies behind considered this problem and stocked the larder with something like clones or magically regenerating meat popsicles. Yuck.

They hunt animals. They prefer people, but they’ll settle for rat, snake, bug, or whatever else is around.

They were preserved. Until the PCs showed up, the zombies were in magical or technological suspended animation. When the heroes kicked in the door, they rebooted the computer, cut the power, or triggered a curse, letting the zombies out. Alternatively, just give the zombies lots of Metabolism Control.

They starved. Or perhaps they did starve, whether from complete lack of food or because the alternative food source didn’t sustain them. But that didn’t deter them. Living zombies that used to eat people, starved to death, and became *undead* zombies that still want to eat people would offer an interesting twist.

Zombies tend to need help in settings that feature ultra-tech hardware. If the PCs are crash survivors or exiled prisoners, this is easy – they don’t *have* gear. In other cases, the GM might use brute force (zombies have high DR, are Homogenous and Unkillable, and possess attacks that blast through or bypass armor), stealth (they mostly come at night – mostly – or wait until the heroes aren’t geared up), tactics (they retain enough memory to strike at vulnerable air hoses and faceplates), or numbers (all the ammo is spent, *they* are still coming, and suddenly *Hideouts and Vehicles*, pp. 122-124, matters a lot). And there’s no good reason for rescue workers or scientists even to have military-grade equipment.

SUPERS

Supers campaigns aren’t especially zombie-friendly, because even high-end zombies are low-end menaces next to super-powered individuals. At best, the zombies are either an apocalypse for the heroes to avert or hordes of mooks fielded by the rare villain with occult powers (a situation similar to *Bad Guy of the Week*, p. 146). Such scenarios work best if the protagonists are *real* heroes who have qualms about blasting and squashing former people – especially if the super-team includes a Reed Richards-level gadgeteer who can cure the zombies. Zombies who must be destroyed rather than saved shouldn’t provide fodder or catharsis; they’re unfortunates (p. 11).

When using zombies in supers campaigns, then, the most interesting challenges come from ones that *are* curable – usually the living sort, preferably mind-control victims such as neuroids (p. 103) and Vodou slaves (p. 102).

Avoiding the supernatural *isn’t* necessary, though, and classic walking dead have their uses as fodder. As for themes, the fear of becoming a zombie is definitely present for ordinary folks, and motivates the supers’ fight. Comics are a hotbed of social criticism, too, tackling drug abuse, pollution, and totalitarian regimes (especially Nazis).

But there are a couple of special cases . . .

Supers Become Zombies

Between bulletproof skin, regeneration, and countless other defensive abilities – not to mention all-around high attributes, and quite often a gadgeteer friend who can brew cures – supers aren’t likely to become zombies. The GM might even want to give out Immunity to Zombie Plague as a standard super-ability.

Then again, perhaps supers *can* turn, but having the super-virus or super-gene means that zombie-ism affects them differently, and they don’t become totally mindless. Which isn’t the same as not being ravenous, disturbing to look at, or infectious. A super-zombie may well have a super-appetite and breed a super-contagious zombie plague. The GM who wants to go this route should read the *Marvel Zombies* series, which is where the whole idea began. Monsters-as-heroes campaigns aren’t for everyone, but the moral choices of godlike beings capable of infecting or eating entire worlds full of people are certainly a break from the usual fears and criticisms that dominate zombie fiction.

When supers become zombies, the GM should familiarize himself with *Nonhuman Zombies* (p. 106), *Scaling to Race* in particular. A super-turned-zombie won’t gain a mere +1 or +2 to ST or DR, say, but more like +10% or +20%.

Zombies Become Supers

The basic zombie story could be viewed as “low-end supers vs. normal people,” in the sense that zombies are often a bit stronger and tougher than humans, occasionally faster, and sometimes possess strange abilities such as Claws and Innate Attacks. Thus, unless zombies are utterly pathetic, there will be individuals in the game world – and gamers – who want to be zombies to gain special powers. Because the zombie plague or mutation is just a version of the super-virus or super-gene, right?

For most gaming groups, this is liable to be even less appealing than *Supers Become Zombies* (p. 148), but it could make for a memorable one-off adventure or mini-campaign. Follow the advice in *The Zombie Heroes Campaign* (below) but simply forget about being heroes, and about deep themes like fears and social criticism. The whole point is to stalk the living and eat or infect them – fans of “Versus” play in the *Left 4 Dead* video games will be familiar with the idea. This is most interesting when each PC is a different kind of boss (pp. 104-107) or variant; for inspiration, see *Many Sorts* (pp. 141-142) and *They’re Changing!* (pp. 142-143).

HEROES OR VICTIMS?

By now it should be obvious that the GM faces a big question when zombies show their ugly faces in his campaign: Are the zombies eating the PCs, and perhaps even fated to win, or do the PCs actually have a future that will occupy dozens of game sessions?

POWER LEVEL

The PCs’ point value is the main thing that will determine whether they’re screaming victims, doughty survivors, or born zombie-killers. Cunning only goes so far – ordinary folks *will* lose eventually. Conversely, no number

of zombies will slow supers or actual gods for long. Some guidelines, then:

Screaming Victims (25-50 points): The world of accountants, kids, and schoolmarm suits one-shot adventures and “campaigns” whose length is determined by when the last PC turns or dies. A long-term campaign demands *Replacements* (p. 150). A single zombie is a serious threat! This level is ideal for all horror, passable for conspiracy, marginal for fantasy and action (which count “competent heroes” among their tropes), and antithetical to supers. Appropriateness to futuristic sci-fi depends on the underlying genre.

The Zombie Heroes Campaign

In the main, zombies make poor PCs – they’re mindless, disgusting, and too often innately evil. It’s RPG tradition for zombified PCs to become NPCs. This doesn’t have to be so. “Zombies” do occasionally receive leading roles in fiction: Lucius Shepard’s novel *Green Eyes* features a free-willed Vodou-esque zombie as a protagonist; the *Marvel Zombies* comics put infected supers in speaking roles; and on film, *Corpse Bride* depicts a likeable undead girl, *Fido* portrays a classic undead zombie sympathetically, and *Les revenants* is about 70 million people whose biggest problem is not being dead when they should be.

What such tales have in common is that the zombies have the usual *physical* and often *social* status of their kind, but few of the *mental* problems. Thus, if the GM is willing to allow zombie PCs, it’s best to create zombie templates that lack severe IQ penalties and crippling mental problems (e.g., Automaton, or antisocial disadvantages with self-control numbers of “N/A”). This makes genuine zombie heroes a possibility. For more on this topic, see “Can I Play a Zombie?” (p. 38).

Zombie PCs need not lack physical problems, up to and including having to eat brains – it’s a challenge, but then gamers have managed to roleplay blood-drinking vampires since the early 1990s. Likewise, zombie PCs

can and arguably should have *odd* psychologies. In *Les revenants*, the returned seem childlike around the living but have a strange hive mind with other revenants. And Fido and pals are certainly savage – they just wear collars that act as Mitigators.

If the GM is going to do all this work, it’s probably best to declare that all the PCs will be zombies and make that the campaign theme. The heroes can then face fears from the other side, including the fear of the living, fear of *final* death (which they may have glimpsed), fear of rotting slowly, and possibly the stark realization that their half-life *is* the afterlife. When rebuilding after an apocalypse, *Fido*-style, the world might be depopulated and reliant on zombie labor, but in a *Les revenants* situation, the influx of extra bodies will be a burden on society – an opportunity for social criticism.

This definitely isn’t for everyone! Lots of gamers dislike the idea of roleplaying “monsters,” and the GM might not want to make zombies less scary by letting players befriend or become them. Moreover, purists may criticize the situation on the grounds that if the creatures aren’t mindless, they aren’t zombies. For that last one, the GM can always run a campaign where the PCs are *real* zombies; see *Zombies Become Supers* (above).

Survivors (50-100 points): Fairly realistic detectives, men-at-arms, pro athletes, and survivalists fit campaigns whose length depends on the players' ingenuity rather than the characters' abilities alone. Small hordes of zombies may be survivable with planning and tactics. This level suits all the horror subgenres, but is still too low-powered for action, much less supers. It's arguably best for conspiracy, and it's workable for fantasy in the "peasant hero" mode or sci-fi in which the PCs have access to ultra-tech gear.

Hardened Survivors (100-200 points): The heroes are full-time adventurers, idealized knights or soldiers, etc. whose survival is a function of decent stats as much as what the players do – but they must still be careful! They can defeat lone zombies with ease, small hordes without too much difficulty, and huge hordes with intelligent strategy. This level is excellent for long-term survival horror, conspiracy-tinged action, and post-apocalypse play, and a typical starting point for fantasy or sci-fi, but it's extremely low for supers. Non-survival horror starts to look strained without high-powered zombies.

Born Zombie-Killers (200-400 points): The PCs are larger-than-life figures who are supposed to upstage the zombies, which exist to make them look good. Challenges start at the level of huge hordes or the zombies' *master*, or a particularly insidious and hard-to-resist plague. Horror and conspiracy suffer terribly here, but this level is the natural stomping grounds of dungeon-crawling fantasy, all action, and sci-fi involving mutants, super-soldiers, or space marines. Low-end supers (including zombies as supers) become a possibility, and arguably a fun one, as they'll be powerful enough to prevail but not without a fight.

Zombies, What Zombies? (400+ points): This is the realm of people who impact the setting as much as any zombie plague. Feel free to pit the PCs against whole worlds of zombies – or zombie plagues, *plural*. Up here, horror is dead unless it's truly cosmic (zombies usually aren't), and conspiracy is unlikely to withstand the heroes' powers. This level is the home of supers (regular or zombified) and figures indistinguishable from them – fantasy's archmages, action's kung fu masters, and sci-fi's cyborg troopers with battlesuits and shoulder-launched nukes.

REPLACEMENTS

It's hard to run a *long-term* horror or conspiracy campaign, or a sci-fi campaign more focused on exploration than violence, if the heroes are low-powered and facing a serious zombie outbreak. If the zombies are infectious, somebody will eventually fail a Dodge roll or a HT roll and join them. Even if there's no chance of that, hordes are unrelenting dangers – just count how many characters survive *Night of the Living Dead*.

In traditional horror, that's simply how things go. You have one life to live, and once you die, you're dead at best or an NPC zombie terrorizing your former allies at worst. If the GM feels generous, he might let you roleplay the zombie – *grahr*.

Another possibility, though, is to allow the players to create and play replacement characters. There are two effective ways to do this:

- **Sequential PCs.** Each player creates one PC. If that person dies, turns, or disappears, however, the GM lets the player bring in a replacement when there's a logical opening in the story *and* a convenient break in play (e.g., the end of a game session) to permit the player to generate and the GM to check a new character. This matches the way things work in the comic-book series *The Walking Dead*, which has a constantly rotating cast of people with real personalities and backstories, and relatively few survivors left from issue #1.

- **Group Play.** The GM decides on the size of the fantasy village, investigative team, military unit, etc. and lets the players create most or all of those people. For instance, in a sci-fi campaign about a squad of 13 Space Marines visiting Planet Z, the GM might have each of his four players generate three Marines, and write up the squad leader himself. Each player still has *one* PC, with the others being NPCs for the time being. But if that PC gets bumped off, the player immediately assumes the role of another of the characters he created – or one of the *other* players' characters, if everybody agrees that would be fun. It's still possible to run out of characters, but nobody is sidelined for good by one bad roll. At the GM's option, the group can be brought back up to full strength between missions, much as in a sequential PCs situation.

Caveat ludator, though – it's hard to build fear when players know they have several tries at success, dying, or *not* dying. This makes it challenging to run a horror campaign.

To make horror work with sequential PCs, the GM must play for keeps, fudging no dice rolls and making each death memorably horrific. Zombified former friends should cause Fright Checks. If everybody dies before there's a logical place to introduce replacements, then that should be the end of the campaign.

Horror is somewhat easier with group play, as Final Defeat is still out there. Indeed, the countdown to zero, with each loss removing an ally in the battle against the zombies, can be *scarier* than a sharp, swift end. While not a zombie movie at all, *Aliens* is required viewing here, as few films better illustrate how to handle this approach.

SUSCEPTIBILITY

Conspiracy, action, and sci-fi stories with zombies often postulate that these creatures are created by construction, serum, or surgery – not contagion. Fantasy zombification is rarely infectious, either, mostly by genre convention. In a campaign where any of these things hold true, simply skip this part!

If zombies can transmit their condition, however, the GM must consider the impact on the PCs. For rules addressing how zombification propagates, see *Spreading the Fun* (pp. 124-129). There are a few basic *dramatic* models, though, each suited to a different spectrum of genres:

When, Not If: One possibility is that the PCs are all but fated to become zombies. If the GM is running a low-powered game, especially one with *Replacements* (p. 150), this is likely to be a natural consequence of lacking the competence to dodge *every* bite, make *every* HT roll.

Dramatic Bits (and Bites): Infected!

An important source of drama in zombie tales is the person who's *potentially* infected. They've been bitten, splattered, injected . . . whatever it takes. But perhaps they hide this. Or maybe it's obvious, but nobody knows what to do next. This gets complex for two reasons.

First, there's the matter of player vs. character knowledge. To handle this out of combat, require everyone to roll against the better of Vision or *Per*-based Diagnosis after each close encounter. Those who wish to hide their status may also roll against IQ or Acting, whichever is higher. Success on the first roll means noticing those who were exposed and not hiding it, along with anyone deceptive who didn't roll at least that well. To keep things uncertain, the GM should require everybody to make *both* rolls, note their margins and whether they're being sneaky, and hand over the note face-down. Then send back a note on what that person sees.

This is trickier in combat, because people pay close attention when PCs can die, and they'll *know* who was bitten (or whatever), even if this would have been hard to see in a seething horde. Thus, the GM may also wish to keep *injury* a secret until after the fight – record the HP and move on. Only mention knockdown,

unconsciousness, crippling wounds, and other effects nobody could miss, least of all the victim. When the battle is over, hand each player a note on how much injury his PC took and whether he must roll for infection. After that, roll as in a noncombat situation to see who notices splatters and bite marks.

Either way, it's unlikely that everybody will accept what he sees. Handle liars as usual – typically via a Quick Contest of Fast-Talk vs. Detect Lies. If someone is actually *changing*, eventually an uncontested Diagnosis roll or simple Vision roll will do!

The second issue concerns what to do when someone *is* exposed or changing. If the PCs aren't sure whether exposure actually causes infection, and have no skills that would help, then this is purely a matter of roleplaying. They can speculate loudly, chop off bits (see *If Thine Eye Offends Thee*, p. 128), and so on. They need to respect disadvantages such as Pacifism (Cannot Kill) and Charitable – but beyond that, it's their call. But the group's social contract always applies, as discussed under *Dramatic Bits (and Bites): Betrayal!* (p. 145). Nobody should summarily execute a fellow player's character on a whim, and the GM may use the "karma rule" to prevent this.

In a higher-powered game, this probably means some horribly insidious plague, like that of crazies (p. 101) or whippersnappers (p. 103), that doesn't lend itself well to just ducking. Such fatalism mostly suits horror or dark conspiracy – it's hard to maintain the spirit of heroic fantasy, action, or supers if the protagonists are doomed.

Tough Enough: More capable PCs, or ones facing not-so-scary plagues, may know the daily risk of turning but have a fair chance. Perhaps their HT or HT bonuses (from abilities, gear, etc.) are high enough to resist most of the time, or the infection relies on HP from bites and the heroes possess high-quality armor. Still, it's possible to foul up, and without Luck, that means becoming a zombie. This is good for survival and post-apocalyptic gaming, workable for the rare fantasy contagion, and how things normally go for well-prepared sci-fi heroes and lower-end action stars.

Sole Survivors: The GM can even set things up so that the PCs can't turn – whether by making them immune as a campaign premise (see *Heroes, Resistance, and Immunity*, p. 30), ensuring that they have access to the cure, or letting them spend character points to guarantee successful resistance (see p. B347 and **GURPS Power-Ups 5**). This *isn't* functionally identical to the zombie condition not being infectious. People around the heroes will turn, setting the tone for the campaign as the PCs struggle to help humanity – or to avoid being bled dry by desperate folks in search of a cure! This is dreadful for horror unless people *are* trying to dissect anyone who's immune, but it's a perfect fit to supers, high-powered action, and post-apocalypse sci-fi where some individuals are survivors thanks to their natural immunity.

Knowledge of Immunity

A further consideration arises if the PCs *are* immune to transmissible zombification: Do they know? In campaigns other than horror or conspiracy ones, they might. It's fair to assume that a mighty action hero or super who has waded hip-deep in zombie guts is aware of his status, while a sci-fi or fantasy type is likely to have been tested by ultra-tech or magic.

In a horror or conspiracy game, however, there's no reason to be upfront about this. Since a secret advantage (p. B33) on every character sheet is a huge clue, the GM may wish to avoid this and make it a campaign feature for him to know and the players to find out. Nobody is likely to object to learning that they have a powerful "free" advantage! And until then, they'll worry as much as the next guy.

The revelation of immunity is also a good *in-game* way to transition from a horror campaign to something else – up to and including *Fearless Zombie-Killers* (pp. 146-147) – when things need perking up. The GM can even quietly add it after the fact. If justification is needed, "acquired immunity from repeated exposure" always works.

Carriers: As suggested under *Typhoid Mary*, *Zombie Larry* (p. 30), those with full immunity may be carriers, spreading the plague as explained in *Living Carriers* (p. 127). In that case, matters are less straightforward. Giving all the PCs a secret disadvantage (p. B120) is a huge clue, too, while not doing so may irritate certain players when they discover a net disadvantage they didn't know about. However, this *is* initially a secret in most zombie fiction, so it's probably best just to bite down and make it so.

To stave off grumbling, the GM can bring the total cost to 0 points with a small benefit; e.g., Rapid Healing.

THE QUESTION OF GEAR

Last but not least is the question of the PCs' *material* preparations. In a game about action heroes, dungeon-raiding fantasy adventurers, investigators of (or working for!) the conspiracy, Space Marines, and so on, it's fairest to assume that they'll have everything they normally have when they go to work: armor, weapons, vehicles, etc. This is true even in *The Local Incident* (pp. 138-139) or *Zombie Apocalypse!* (pp. 140-141). While they might not have been expecting zombies (when in doubt, roll against an appropriate skill – be that Occultism or Intelligence Analysis – to see whether they guess), they're not the sort of people to show up with a toothbrush and a bathrobe.

However, in most horror, including survival horror *with typical people*, this isn't a good assumption. The point is that nobody was expecting zombies – if they were, it wouldn't be as scary. In that case, the GM is within his rights to say that people only have what they would have on an ordinary day, which might amount to a latté and a pocket protector. Once things get tough, they can react. In an *I, Zombie* (pp. 137-138) situation or a local incident that they can flee temporarily, they can go gear up with whatever they can find. The GM should still enforce whatever ground rules suit the setting: ordinary cops can get small arms but not rocket launchers, citizens of many countries can't keep guns and ammo at home (or perhaps at all), and so on. It simply doesn't suit horror for ordinary people to spot a zombie and magically transform into Delta Force.

Logistics

Whether to count bullets, beans, and bandages, or to ignore that in favor of action, is up to the GM. It's difficult to build tension in a survival-horror campaign – or to motivate survivors in a post-apocalyptic one – if you don't watch resources. Scarcity is as fundamental as the zombies here. Thus, in horror and apocalyptic games, it's a good idea to mark off ammo, power cells, and doses of penicillin, and to keep track of how much gas remains in the tank (chainsaw or pickup truck).

This is also true in fantasy or high-powered sci-fi games – but now because it's a genre convention. Resource management is a respected art among both adventurers who venture down dark holes miles from town and spacemen who have to bring everything with them in their tin can. It may still lead to tension and motivate the PCs, but it's mainly a matter of standard operating procedure; zombies change nothing.

However, it's mostly annoying to force action heroes, fearless zombie-killers, and supers to worry about this stuff. Supplements such as *GURPS Action* and *GURPS Monster Hunters* hand-wave the issue of supply lines because in those genres, people just *blaze away* – it's about the Rule of Cool. Supers, too, mostly just blast and whoosh and smash; unless a super specifically has a hard limit on some gadget or resource, it works. Again, these are the ground rules; zombies change nothing.

Survivalists

Survival horror *with hardened survivors* is an in-between case. It isn't anybody's day job to be a survivalist, but on the other hand, some real-life people do stockpile weapons and supplies, just in case. In that situation, it's reasonable to allow the PCs to be carrying whatever modest items such individuals would normally carry; e.g., a multi-tool, a flashlight, some way to make fire, and, if the law allows, a handgun. If they can reach their vehicle (say, in the office parking lot), the trunk can contain food, water, a first aid kit, and a few larger tools – and a shotgun or a rifle, where legal. And if they manage to fight their way to their house, compound, or bunker, they can grab all their other toys. It's most dramatic if they don't *start* in their fortress, though – make them sweat.

Post-apocalyptic futurism presents another special case. People will be living as close to the hardened-survivor lifestyle as they can manage. The catch is that there may not be much stuff around to own. The GM will have to fix a de facto setting TL, decide what items simply don't exist, and then assign all the rest a price based on its TL relative to the setting's, using *Tech Level and Equipment* (p. B27). For instance, in setting where the wastelands are TL4 on average, TL6 guns will cost four times as much and TL8 electronics, if they exist, 16 times as much. Each survivor's equipment budget will equal starting money for the setting's TL – in that TL4 future, that's the usual \$2,000 for TL4, which will make it difficult to afford marked-up TL10 ray guns. There probably won't be *actual* money . . . the GM can either handle everything by barter or introduce a de facto currency such as rifle cartridges or zombie skulls.

Zombie Countermeasures

Whether any of the stuff available can be specialized *anti-zombie* gear is a matter of forewarning and character knowledge. The usual answer is “no” unless the PCs are a fantasy party, conspiracy biohazard-containment crew, sci-fi marine squad, etc. that's specifically parachuted onto the scene (perhaps literally!) to deal with zombies. Even the most prepared survivalist rarely expects *zombies*, although the GM might allow this in return for a Delusion. Again, post-apocalyptic survivors are an exception, because they *do* expect zombies, and will be ready for them. Of course, actually knowing what works calls for special training; see *Discovering Zombie Flaws* (p. 35).

Ringin' It Up

Whatever gear is allowed, it must be obtained in the usual way. Anything carried or stashed must be paid for out of starting money, even if the world is about to go to Hell. Issue gear is *issued* – the PCs get whatever their employer or Patron feels they need, not the keys to the armory. And if they want to start stealing things once the rule of law breaks down, *game it out*, whether this means subtle Pickpocket rolls, straight-up Forced Entry, or winning battles and looting bodies.

ZOMBIOGRAPHY

There's *lots* of zombie fiction out there. Zombies are so visual that we'll begin with films, which outnumber other sources, and use a more honest title than "Bibliography."

Films

Zombie cinema tends to put the freak-out or the gross-out ahead of the story – which is fine, because zombies are meant to be startling and disgusting. But a consequence of this is that good *sources* often aren't what most people would deem good *films*. This list is offered as a guide to movies to hunt down and tear open for tasty campaign ideas, and pussy-foots around the question of whether they're fine viewing!

28 Days Later (Danny Boyle, 2002). Among the best of the "infected zombies" genre – ordinary folks survive in a biohazard apocalypse. Sequel *28 Weeks Later* (Juan Carlos Fresnadillo, 2007) shows that even an apocalypse has long-term campaign possibilities.

Braindead (Peter Jackson, 1992). Also known as *Dead Alive*, this campy film adds the disease-like transmissible curse to the mix – and the lawnmower to the armory.

Cast a Deadly Spell (Martin Campbell, 1991). Not a zombie flick, but one of the rare non-RPG sources where zombies are a background element, used as cheap labor, and not especially freaky to the setting's denizens.

Corpse Bride (Tim Burton, 2005). You can argue about whether Emily is a zombie, but the original Jewish folktale was about a dead woman reanimated by theurgy, her will bound by holy law.

Crazies, The (George A. Romero, 1973). A military plane carrying a weapon of mass zombification crashes and poisons a town's water supply, turning the locals into psycho killers and leading to a disturbing quarantine. Breck Eisner's 2010 remake is superior as a *zombie* movie, as it evokes ideas and imagery from an extra 35 years of zombie fiction, while Romero saves zombie tropes for his walking dead.

Dawn of the Dead (George A. Romero, 1978). Survival-horror classic pits survivors in a shopping mall against the undead – some the first infectious zombies in cinema, in fact – as well as a violent gang. Two SWAT-officer protagonists are classic PCs.

Dawn of the Dead (Zack Snyder, 2004). This remake's plot differs radically from the original. Portrays survival (and betrayal) among ordinary folks, illustrates why living in a gun shop won't guarantee survival, and shows how to rig anti-zombie vehicles.

Day of the Dead (George A. Romero, 1985). More Romero survival horror, this time depicting military survivalists in a fortress...

and survivor-vs.-survivor desperation. Famously introduces a "tame" zombie, Bub, who learns (or remembers). *Day of the Dead 2: Contagium* (Ana Clavell and James Glenn Dodelson, 2005) isn't a sequel, and appears here only to warn of its awfulness.

Dellamorte Dellamore (Michele Soavi, 1994). Also called *Cemetery Man*, this story treats killing undead zombies as a casual, low-key job, and illustrates the complications of living-undead relationships. The entire situation is a commentary on existence.

Diary of the Dead (George A. Romero, 2007). So-so Romero flick shows that even people who "know" about zombies – film students making a horror movie – might freak out in an outbreak. Make the students gamers for an amusing take on screaming victims.

Død Snø (Tommy Wirkola, 2009). Nazi zombies – driven by hate, vengeance, or pure evil – show that zombie survival horror doesn't need an apocalypse or contagion, just serious isolation, like the Norwegian wilderness. Often found under the title *Dead Snow*.

Doom (Andrzej Bartkowiak, 2005). Researchers unwisely restore ancient alien bio-tech, creating zombies. The point-of-view characters, definitely PC material, are tools of a sinister corporation, carrying out death sentences on the "infected." Also: chainsaw!

Evil Dead, The (Sam Raimi, 1981). This and sequels *Evil Dead II* (1987) and *Army of Darkness* (1992) are utter camp, most famous for introducing the chainsaw as a zombie-killing weapon. Still, they nicely illustrate demonic possession as a zombie origin.



Fido (Andrew Currie, 2006). Smart film puts two twists on classic undead zombies: First, the apocalypse came and humanity won. Second, the zombies aren't monsters but servants and slave labor – the work of Atomic Age science, not the occult.

Flight of the Living Dead (Scott Thomas, 2007). Despite low production values, this film is fun because it builds survival-horror tension by putting contagious zombies on a *plane*. One of countless flicks where “super-soldier program” is code for “zombies.”

Horde, La (Yannick Dahan and Benjamin Rocher, 2009). Dark, unrelenting humans-vs.-zombies violence, where survivors confined in a building want to kill each other as much as the zombies. Features gruesome hand-to-hand combat against zombies. Also known as *The Horde*.

I Am Legend (Francis Lawrence, 2007). Tale of a biological zombie apocalypse is interesting because it centers on a quest for a cure. A loose remake of *The Omega Man* (Boris Sagal, 1971), which is worth a look but which *doesn't* have mindless zombies.

Juan de los Muertos (Alejandro Brugués, 2011). When zombies strike Cuba, ordinary folks become fearless zombie-killers, not screaming victims. Mixes humor, scares, and social criticism (both communism and capitalism get stung). Also called *Juan of the Dead*.

Land of the Dead (George A. Romero, 2005). A mediocre film with lots to harvest: undead which evolve and learn, a dedicated anti-zombie vehicle (Dead Reckoning), an impressive post-apocalyptic fortress, and social decay to rival the zombie plague.

Let Sleeping Corpses Lie (Jorge Grau, 1974). This film focuses on hippies more than zombies, but includes walking dead who receive their wake-up call from an experiment with *acoustic* radiation.

Night of the Living Dead (George A. Romero, 1968). The genesis of cinematic zombies that congregate in hordes, eat flesh, are vulnerable to headshots, and have a pseudoscientific explanation (as opposed to the supernatural ones of earlier films).

Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl (Gore Verbinski, 2003). The pirate crew might not *look* like zombies, but that's an illusion. Despite their wit, they're rotting, supernatural undead bound by a curse that dictates their actions.

Plague of the Zombies, *The* (John Gilling, 1966). While there is a plague and there are zombies, the first doesn't

cause the second – that calls for Vodou. This Hammer classic is an example of pre-Romero cinema with traditional zombies, not apocalyptic ghouls.

Plan 9 from Outer Space (Edward D. Wood Jr., 1959). “Unspeakable Horrors From Outer Space Paralyze The Living And Resurrect The Dead!” The aliens' plot appears to involve conquering the world with an army of ultra-tech undead zombies.

Planet Terror (Robert Rodriguez, 2007). In this genre send-up, a bio-weapon (or is it a super-soldier experiment?) creates flesh-eating zombies (or are they mutants?), and a PC-like group of unlikely heroes must save the day with extreme violence.

Pontypool (Bruce McDonald, 2008).

Survival horror at a radio station features the first cinematic zombie plague that's *memetic* in nature. While not 100% serious, this story is clever, definitely has its creepy moments, and offers fresh fodder for gaming.

Prince of Darkness (John Carpenter, 1987). Not a zombie movie as such, but a rarity among horror flicks for featuring *several* zombie types: street people mind-controlled by satanic energies, dead bodies possessed by The Devil, and a corpse animated by an insect swarm.

[Rec] (Jaume Balagueró and Paco Plaza, 2007). Survival horror set in a quarantined building, where contagion – perhaps biohazard, maybe transmissible curse – zombifies people, including *children* (rarely seen as zombies). Followed by two sequels, and remade as *Quarantine* (John Erick Dowdle, 2008).

Resident Evil (Paul W.S. Anderson, 2002). Fans of “traditional” zombie flicks love to disagree, but *RE* and sequels *RE: Apocalypse* (Alexander Witt, 2004), *RE: Extinction* (Russell Mulcahy, 2007), *RE: Afterlife* (Anderson, 2010), and *RE: Retribution* (Anderson, 2012) cover all the bases: biotech zombies (living and undead), zombie animals, an evil corporation, fearless zombie-killers, hordes, contagion, and utter apocalypse. They offer an up-to-date genre summary for zombie gaming, especially for long-running apocalypse campaigns.

Return of the Living Dead, The (Dan O'Bannon, 1985). Campy, but also the origin of toxic-waste zombies (these ones undead) and that timeless utterance, “Brains!” Spawned at least four sequels of uneven quality.

Revenants, Les (Robin Campillo, 2004). Are they zombies? They're supposed to be dead and they seem to have a mindless side, but they're not that different from us. Watch it for ideas for “friendly” or “tame” zombies. Also known as *They Came Back*.



Shaun of the Dead (Edgar Wright, 2004). Despite being deliberately goofy, this film offers tributes to many of the genre's greats, as well as stinging social criticism. One of the rare flicks that ends with humanity beating the zombie apocalypse and "taming" the zombies.

Shock Waves (Ken Wiederhorn, 1977). Nazi zombies again, these ones super-soldiers made by weird science. Not a great film (despite having Peter Cushing), but worthy for its use of *non*-flesh-eating undead that are as scary underwater as on land.

Silent Rage (Michael Miller, 1982). Chuck Norris meets his match in an undead killer reanimated by an ill-advised experiment. Rarely identified as a zombie movie because it lacks hordes and flesh-eating, but worth a look for fans of weird-science zombies.

Undead or Alive (Glasgow Phillips, 2007). This cowboys-and-Indians-with-zombies flick is dorky, but inspirational for those interested in TL5 zombie stories or old Apache curses.

Universal Soldier (Roland Emmerich, 1992). They're black-ops science experiments rather than "classic" zombies, but the UniSols are definitely reanimated, hunting down people, and (mostly) in thrall to their masters.

Versus (Ryûhei Kitamura, 2000). The zombies here come from the cursed (or at least supernatural) Forest of Resurrection that brings back the dead . . . which just happens to be where the Yakuza have been dumping murder victims. Ridiculous violence ensues.

White Zombie (Victor Halperin, 1932). This is the first zombie movie, and draws on Vodou beliefs. There are no ghouls, hordes, or plagues here, just enslaved victims.

Zombie Diaries, The (Michael Bartlett and Kevin Gates, 2006). Poor entertainment, but a serviceable point-of-view piece showing a zombie apocalypse unfolding through the eyes of ordinary folks.

Zombie Strippers! (Jay Lee, 2008). Funnier and less lewd than it sounds, this movie offers yet another secret government super-soldier project and a unique take on zombies as characters (they aren't half as bad as most of the non-zombies).

Zombieland (Ruben Fleischer, 2009). Tongue-in-cheek look at a zombie apocalypse, best watched for the humor, the ordinary guy-turned-born-zombie-killer, and a nice set of rules for surviving against zombies.

Video Games

After movies, video games offer the strongest zombie visuals. Some would argue stronger, since you're actually *in* the scene.

Dead Island (Techland, 2011). First-person RPG set in an island resort overrun by zombies. The hardened-survivor PCs seem to be immune to the plague. Major focuses are melee combat and salvage (supplies for friendly NPCs, weapons for PCs).

Dead Space (Electronic Arts, 2008). Zombies in space – namely, bizarrely mutated "Necromorphs" twisted from corpses by an alien virus in order to propagate itself. The game and its sequels focus on finding and upgrading gear, and of course fighting.

Diablo (Blizzard, 1996). While *all* fantasy hack-and-slash games have zombies, this game has quite a few sorts, and sequels *Diablo II* (2000) and *Diablo III* (2012) just go nuts with variety. If you're short on ideas for fantasy zombies, play for a few hours.

Doom (id Software, 1993). This first-person shooter and its sequels include possessed humans, only *called* "zombies" as of *Doom 3* (2004). The futuristic veneer doesn't make these weird-science creatures, though – they're explicitly supernatural, involving demons from Hell. The similar *Quake* (id Software, 1996) also throws occult zombies into a sci-fi setting, these ones undead who toss guts.

Fallout (Interplay, 1997). In this post-apocalyptic RPG, the PC battles living people transformed into savage "ghouls" by radiation, though sequels clarify that not all ghouls are mindless. Zombies did *not* cause the apocalypse here, and the *Fallout* series is even more useful as a source of post-apocalypse inspiration than as a font of zombie ideas.

Half-Life (Valve, 1998). Not a zombie game per se, but this shooter and its sequels famously include the "head-crab": a monster that latches onto its victim's head and turns him into a mutated zombie. *Half-Life 2* (2004) makes it clear that these are bio-weapons.

Killing Floor (Tripwire, 2009). A shooter about battling bio-tech zombies (called "specimens") that have overrun London, no thanks to a sinister corporation's handiwork. Good stuff if you're looking for weird new zombies.

Left 4 Dead (Valve, 2008). This shooter and its 2009 sequel pit four survivors against endless "infected" (zombies). Some infected are mutants with special powers, while the survivors aren't merely immune, but *carriers*. In head-to-head mode ("Versus"), you can play the zombies!

Plants vs. Zombies (PopCap, 2009). An example of cute, mainstream zombies: Take on wave after wave of zombies using mutant plants as weapons. Not a useful inspiration for plots, but a surprisingly fun source of *zombie* ideas.

Resident Evil (Capcom, 1996). This survival-horror game pits the player against bio-tech nightmares that include flesh-eating zombies and zombie dogs. The sequels add yet more zombies, and two CGI movies – *RE: Degeneration* (2008) and *RE: Damnation* (2012) – are part of the same continuity. The eponymous live-action production and its sequels are only loosely related.

Return to Castle Wolfenstein (Gray Matter/Nerve/id Software, 2001). This shooter has occult undead zombies, Nazi weird-science zombies, and everything in between. It all blurs together, but it's great inspiration for TL6-7 fearless zombie-killers in WWII.

Comics

Comics are visual, too, and often explore with ease what live-action movies and video-game budgets cannot – including some fairly impressive levels of gore.

Kirkman, Robert et al. *Marvel Zombies* (Marvel 2005-present). One of the few treatments of zombies in the supers genre (or vice versa), presenting superheroes turned into zombies by a virus that can spread between universes. Though afflicted by a hunger for flesh and a drive to spread zombies, the zombie supers aren't mere mindless monsters.

Kirkman, Robert. *The Walking Dead* (Image, 2003-present). An ongoing account of ordinary people living through a zombie apocalypse and into the post-apocalypse. A go-to source for long-term apocalypse campaigns. The related TV series, initially closer to “inspired by,” is moving toward “based on.”

Books

Books on zombies make fine complementary sources to visual media – although it’s important to understand that those published since the 1990s are essentially a response to the cinematic zombie craze.

Austen, Jane and Grahame-Smith, Seth. *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (Quirk, 2009). The author can’t bring himself to read it, but it gets in on the strength of its title. It might just be of value to gamers running Regency-era (TL5) zombie campaigns.

Betancourt, John and Preiss, Byron (editors). *The Ultimate Zombie* (Dell, 1993). A collection of 23 short stories covering just about every sort of zombie. Helpful when you can’t decide what kinds of zombies you want!

Brooks, Max. *World War Z* (Crown, 2006). A faux history of the zombie apocalypse, told from the point of view of several survivors. Brooks’ zombies are undead, infected flesh-eaters in the Romero mode.

Brooks, Max. *Zombie Survival Guide, The* (Three Rivers, 2003). A how-to guide to surviving a zombie apocalypse – though one biased toward dealing with the flesh-eating undead.

Caine, Rachel. *Working Stiff* (Roc, 2011), *Two Weeks’ Notice* (2012), and *Terminated* (2013). The narrator is an ex-military funeral director who becomes a bio-tech zombie; imagine *RoboCop* by way of the Umbrella Corporation. Her daily nanite injections provide handy mechanisms for blackmail, mind control, heightened strength, and rot repair/prevention.

Davis, Wade. *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (Simon & Schuster, 1985). Controversial “true story” about Vodou zombies argues for zombification caused by potent drugs. May prove useful to GMs interested in Vodou slaves or face-eating psychos.

King, Stephen. *Pet Sematary* (Doubleday, 1983). It all starts with zombie pets, though it certainly doesn’t stop there. The GM might ask players who want such pets to read this story.

Lovecraft, H.P. “Herbert West – Reanimator” (1922). This short story may be the first attempt to reconcile zombies with mad science (a serum) instead of the occult, though it owes a debt to *Frankenstein*. Look for it in *The Call of Cthulhu and Other Weird Stories* (Penguin, 1999).

Matheson, Richard. *I Am Legend* (Fawcett, 1954). This tale of vampires, not zombies, has a legitimate claim as the origin of apocalyptic fiction involving humans transformed into both infected monsters and reanimated dead by a pandemic (borne by mosquitoes).

McDonald, Ian. *Necroville* (Bantam Spectra, 1994). The earliest story to use nanotech as a reanimating influence. These scientifically resurrected dead become de facto zombie slaves, and come to resent it. Also known as *Terminal Café*.

McGuire, Seanan (as Mira Grant). *Feed* (Orbit, 2010), *Deadline* (2011), and *Blackout* (2012). Medical cures lead to a viral apocalypse involving zombified people and animals alike. Notable for characters who are aware of zombie fiction – a rarity in zombie stories.

Ringo, John and Weber, David. *March Upcountry* (Baen, 2001) and sequels. Tutorial implants are great – they allow you to learn new things and remember everything. They can even do things for you. And they can make you a zombie if they’re hacked.

Shepard, Lucius. *Green Eyes* (Ace, 1984). Vodou meets pseudoscience in the form of a zombie point-of-view character. A must-read for those who want to allow zombie PCs.

*It is a truth universally
acknowledged that a zombie
in possession of brains must
be in want of more brains.*

– Seth Grahame-Smith,
*Pride and Prejudice
and Zombies*

Tabletop Games

Last but not least we have *other* zombie-themed hobby games.

Breitenstein, Todd. **Zombies!!!** (Journeyman Press, 2001). This tile-based strategy game simulates the classic zombie movie well – right down to shuffling zombies and betrayal among survivors. A dozen sequels add more locations, zombies, events, and items.

Jackson, Steve. **Zombie Dice** (Steve Jackson Games, 2010). A quick, fun game where you pretend to be a zombie and roll special dice to see whether you eat brains or die. The dice make a great prop or accessory for *any* zombie game!

Link, Barry. **GURPS Horror: Zombietown, U.S.A.** (Steve Jackson Games, 1988). Small-town zombie adventure. Stats in this **GURPS Classic** item would need conversion to **GURPS Fourth Edition**, but the story works as written.

Punch, Sean. **GURPS Undead** (Steve Jackson Games, 1998). The author’s earlier work is “all undead, including zombies,” as contrasted with “all zombies, including undead ones.”

Soles, Jason and Vega, Nicole. **Unhallowed Metropolis** (Eos Press, 2007). A post-zombie-apocalypse game set in a quasi-Victorian future. Of interest to those who want steampunk zombies in a world that replaces TL6+ with TL(5+n) mad science.

Sweeney, Patrick. **Transhuman Space: Orbital Decay** (Steve Jackson Games, 2002). Ultra-tech zombies in spaaaae! Written for **GURPS Third Edition**, but easily converted.

Vasilakos, George. **All Flesh Must Be Eaten** (Eden Studios, 1999). The first dedicated zombie RPG. Later supplements cover almost every kind of zombie.

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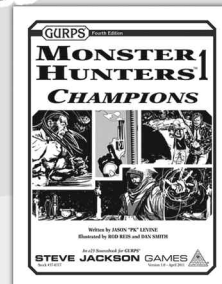
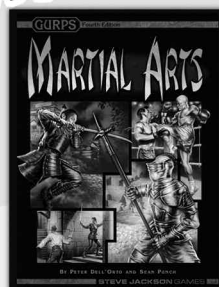
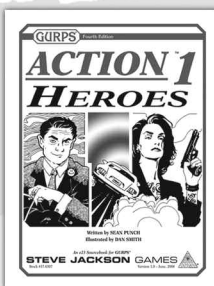
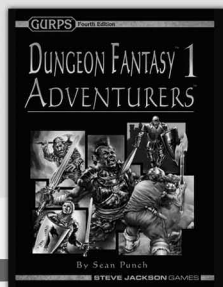
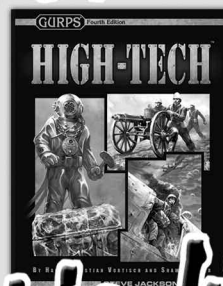
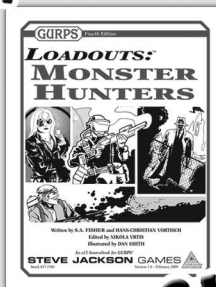
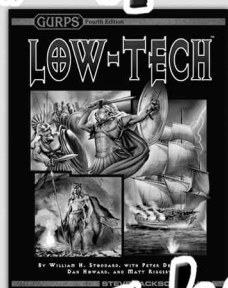
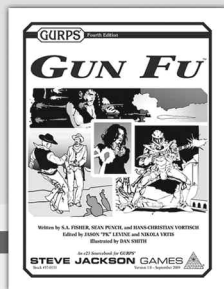
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