

THE
WALKING DEAD®
UNIVERSE



RULES

Sample file

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SPECIAL THANKS TO

The Walking Dead Universe's CCO Scott M. Gimple, TWDU producer Brian Bockrath, and all the wonderful people from AMC Networks who helped us along the way over the years: Simon Ferrari, Clayton Neuman, Kevin Dreyfuss, Kim Kelleher, Madhu Goel Southworth, Mike Zagari, Kristen Chung, and Dario Di Zanni.

PRINT

Ningbo Eastar, 2023

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INTRODUCTION

The deceitful stranger is trying to get away with a backpack full of canned dog food, stolen from the camp where the player characters Hannah and Miguel live with their group. They catch up to the thief in a walker-infested, small-town area and chase him up a fire escape onto the roof of an apartment building. For a moment, he seems to be cornered, but then...

Gamemaster: *With one gigantic leap, the stranger jumps over to the roof of the adjacent building. For a fraction of a second, you think he might not make it. Then he hits the roof on the other side, skids in the snow, and rolls around to come up on his feet. Very athletic.*

Hannah (player 1): *I just stand there and watch him, knowing that I would never be able to make that jump. Then I reach into my left coat pocket and grab the small revolver I took from the dead kid.*

Gamemaster: *He turns around with a mocking smile. "Well, well, looks like I'm eatin' good tonight." White vapor hisses from his mouth as he exhales heavily.*

Hannah: *I raise the revolver and aim between his eyes.*

Gamemaster: *The thief seems to think this is hilarious. "Sweetie, if you pull that trigger the dead will pack these streets in minutes. Are you ready to get caught up here, without any food or shelter? I don't think so."*

Hannah: *"You thought wrong." I cock the hammer.*

Miguel (player 2): *Whoa! Is there anything I can do to stop her before she shoots?*

Gamemaster: *You can always try. What do you do?*

Miguel: *I tackle her, so she falls down on the roof, before the shot goes off.*

Gamemaster: *Okay. Roll Close Combat.*

Miguel: [Rolls four six-sided dice] *I failed, no successes in there!*

Gamemaster: *Alright, Hannah, you see Miguel throwing himself at you, but at the last moment you are able to take a step backwards and he tumbles past you.*

Hannah: *I shoot.*

Welcome to the Starter Set for *The Walking Dead Universe Roleplaying Game*. In this set you will find everything you need to play the first survival mode scenario for the game, called *The Wolves' Den*.

The text to the left is an example of how the dialogue between those participating in the game may flow during an intense scene. As you probably noticed, there are both players and a Gamemaster in this game.

You and your friends will have to decide beforehand which one of you will be the **Gamemaster**, or GM. The rest of you, preferably two to five people, are the players who will each portray a **Player Character** (PC). All other people in the world, such as the thief in the example, are called **Non-Player Characters** (NPCs) and they are controlled by the GM.

NPCs who are in the same group as the PCs, or who could be recruited to join the group, are often referred to as NPC survivors. If, or when, your PC dies, you may choose one of the NPC survivors to become your new PC.

The content of this booklet can be read by both players and Gamemasters. You don't have to know the content by heart, but well enough to be able to use it as a reference when playing.

CONTENTS

This Starter Set contains two booklets. The one you are reading right now introduces a selection of game rules, focused on what you need for the survival scenario *The Wolves' Den* – which you will find in the second booklet.

Adding to that, the boxed set includes ten base dice and as many stress dice, a Theat Meter, three maps of adventure locations, and ten pre-generated player characters.

Finally, there is a huge, double-sided area map in the box, depicting a region north of Atlanta, Georgia, and an area in Virginia. The latter can be used to pinpoint where *The Wolves' Den* takes place, but other than that, these maps are mainly meant to be used with *The Walking Dead Universe RPG Core Rulebook* (see the textbox *The Core Rules* on the next page).

WHAT IS ROLEPLAYING?

If you have never played a roleplaying game before, you can think of it as a TV series but without any visual support – you simply state what things look like. Another difference is that you do not have a script, and none of you knows beforehand what will happen.

You have an assigned role, and you play your PC as you think they should be played. When they say something, you say it as if you were them – you can even change your voice a little if that helps you to better embody the character. It is your job to describe what they do, and how they do it. At times, you can even describe what they think about or hope for.

Generally speaking, your PC will try to survive in the hostile world of the dead, doing whatever it takes to achieve that goal. However, your job as a player is not to win the game by surviving as long as possible, but rather to play your PC in the “best” way you can to fit your goals and the dynamic of your gaming group. If your PC, for example, hates someone, they may at times do stupid and dangerous things in order to get revenge or hurt them in some way. This makes for a dramatic and entertaining game.

Miguel (player 2): *While the others try to catch some sleep, I make a fire and tend to it through the night.*

GM: *Well, you are up on a rooftop, in the middle of the winter, on a building surrounded by walkers on all sides, so it wouldn't be likely that there is firewood around. But okay, there are... some rags and a broken backpack someone must have left here ages ago. It burns well enough, for a while. But it is still extremely cold.*

Hannah (player 1): *While David and Imani are sleeping, I walk over to Miguel and sit down beside him. “You don't need to keep watch, they can't come up here. You'd be better off getting some shuteye.”*

Miguel: *I say nothing, I don't even look at you.*

Hannah: *“I get it, it's unnerving to hear them moving around down there. You'd think we'd all be used to it by now.”*

Miguel: *“You're a fool.”*

Hannah: *I look at you, surprised. “What?”*

Miguel: *“It isn't them. It's you, with all your self-righteous speeches about doing anything to survive. And then you let your pride put us in this situation. You didn't need to shoot the thief. But you did it anyway because you couldn't stand that he won.”*

THE GAMEMASTER

The Gamemaster is like a director for a play, or a leader of the group. They most often get the game going and call an end when it is over for the night.

The GM describes what things look like, what is happening around the PCs, and makes decisions for

THE CORE RULES

In addition to this boxed set, there is the book containing the complete core rules for *The Walking Dead Universe Roleplaying Game*, giving you all the tools needed to create and evolve PCs, and to design and run the game in campaign mode.

all other people in the world, beside the PCs. But they do not have to do it alone. This book is full of tips and instructions that will help them do their part, and if they think some things are hard, they may always ask the players for help.

It is not the GM's job to entertain the players. You all entertain each other. Help other players have fun, and they will see to it that you have a good time. Put their PCs in difficult and interesting situations, start conflicts, and have emotional make-up scenes where your PCs find trust in each other again – or whatever signifies a fun time for you and your friends.

GAME MODES

There are two ways to play the game, *Campaign Mode* or *Survival Mode*. Whichever way you play, you always meet up – physically or online – and play for a few hours. This is called a session and could be compared to an episode in the television series.

SURVIVAL MODE: Survival Mode scenarios, like *The Wolves' Den*, are often finished in one or two sessions. They give you a pre-written situation, and often pre-generated PCs and NPCs. They put you right into a dramatic and dangerous situation that needs to be handled right then and there. Also, survival mode scenarios most often contain places and people from the television franchise.

CAMPAIGN MODE: When you play a campaign, you play several sessions that together form a longer story. The story you create is not predetermined; your choices and the result of your efforts create the storyline. For rules and guidelines on how to set up and run a campaign, see *The Walking Dead Universe RPG Core Rulebook*.

“We won't get weak. That's not in us anymore. We'll make it work.”

Rick Grimes

THE PRINCIPLES OF THE GAME

This entire game is permeated by a few simple principles. They are both instructions on how to play, and sources of inspiration. Go through them with any new players before you start playing.

- 1 DO WHATEVER IT TAKES TO SURVIVE.** There is no preset path to salvation for your PC, and no way to win the game. There are no boss endings or hidden treasures. All there is, is your will to survive, and your freedom to do whatever it takes to keep going another day.
- 2 DEATH IS INESCAPABLE.** Death is everywhere, and even though you can kill individual walkers, there will always be more coming. Your only hope is to build barricades. But they will only last so long.
- 3 YOU ARE NEVER SAFE.** Everything changes; there is no permanently safe place. Those who were your allies yesterday may sneak into your camp tonight to take your supplies, or your life. The old gas station which was cleared an hour ago is now filled with walkers after a car alarm went off. Even your own mind may betray you through fear, weakness, even delusion.
- 4 YOU ARE NOT ALONE.** This is a game about a group of people, not individual heroes. Your PC may die, but you will get a new one. The same holds for the other players and the GM: Everyone is equally responsible for what happens at the table. You all bring the fun, and you should respect each other's preferences and wishes.
- 5 YOU ARE TELLING A STORY.** The game is played in scenes. Not everything that happens must be played out. Set scenes and play whatever feels interesting. Skip the rest.
- 6 FICTION COMES FIRST.** In this game, the story is more important than the rules. Never say anything about rule mechanics without first describing and talking about how it impacts the story. This game is not about attacking walkers and rolling for damage. It's about what these experiences bring out in your PCs and how it changes you and your perspective on the world. So if a dice roll does not align with the story that you want to tell or where a player wants to take a PC – talk about it first before allowing the dice to dictate where your story goes.

THE WORLD OF THE DEAD

This game takes place in *The Walking Dead Universe*, the same setting explored throughout the various television series from AMC Networks. Some time has passed since those who died started to come back as flesh-eating walkers – exactly how much time is for you to decide. Before that, your PCs all led ordinary lives. They made it through the first wave of death and destruction, bearing witness as society collapsed and the army made a futile attempt to defend the cities from the walkers.

They are now a close-knit group of allies and maybe even rivals who stick together to survive. They have a haven: a base where they are relatively safe. But they are constantly on the lookout for food, medicine, and all the other resources needed to get by. And, besides the walkers, there are other survivors out there. Some of them may want to join your group of PCs, but others will try to steal what you have or even kill you.

SAFETY TOOLS

The Walking Dead television series takes place in a dark world with many situations that raise issues relating to personal morality. This game is no different.

That said, this is still a game, and players should not be forced to deal with topics they find distressing in real life, or that make them feel unsafe at the table. To make sure everyone is having fun and feeling safe, we recommend that you use safety tools before, during, and after the game. Examples of such safety tools are pre-game discussions about lines and veils for subjects that players want to avoid or keep off-screen; safety cards to be shown during play by a player to indicate that they feel uncomfortable with what is happening in the game; and post-game debriefings.

Always respect a player's wish to raise a concern at any time during the game or even to leave the table if they want to. And don't forget to take breaks. More information about safety tools in tabletop roleplaying can be found online.

In the long run, this game could be about rebuilding society and creating something new from the ashes. But as the world of the dead is lethal, and your PCs will be forced to do things that may drive them mad or fundamentally change who they are, it could just as well turn into a story about going from bad to worse.

THE OUTBREAK

All of this started with the outbreak, the moment when the dead started to come back. Everyone remembers it. Everyone lost somebody.

Sometime before the outbreak, a virus spread around the globe. Everyone carries it, and it is this virus that makes you come back after you die. It doesn't matter how – walker bite, bullet wound, starvation, sickness, or natural causes – everyone comes back as a walker. That said, being bitten or scratched by a walker will always kill you, as the wound becomes infected. Your only hope if bitten is to amputate the limb – and quickly.

THE WALKERS

Walkers are everywhere – there are no safe places. They are like the wind or water, seeping in wherever there is a crack. You can kill individual walkers, but you can never take out so many that it makes a real difference. It is a simple matter of fact that if you mess up and attract their attention, the swarm will come.

Walkers are driven only by their compulsion to devour living flesh. When a gathering of walkers come together, they form a swarm and move as one. A huge walker swarm can destroy most anything in its path.

THE LIVING

In a world where food is scarce, there is little electricity, and no industrial production of medicine or other equipment, the struggle to survive often means taking from other people. The few remaining survivors have all done inhuman things to stay alive. The living are often a bigger threat to the PCs than the walkers. But there are all kinds. In a world with cannibals, robbers, and murderers, there are also those who want to trade, to join ranks, and to build a new society.

THE HAVEN

Most survivors have a haven where they rest and gather their supplies. It could be anything from some tents on a rooftop, to a well-functioning military base with running hot water and electricity.

In the survival mode scenario included in this boxed set, the PCs are assumed to come from the same haven. However, the haven itself is not described and it doesn't matter in the situation they are in.

WHEN & WHERE?

The Walking Dead Universe Roleplaying Game is designed to be set at any point in time after the outbreak – anywhere on the timeline, before, during, or after any season of the various television series set within AMC's fictional universe.

One-shot Survival Mode scenarios, such as *The Wolves' Den*, are typically set at a certain point in the story of the television franchise, letting you encounter characters and locations from the show.



THE PLAYER CHARACTERS

This section is about your PC. In the Core Rulebook you will find rules for creating your very own PC, but when playing *The Wolves' Den*, you will use one of the pre-generated PCs included in the boxed set.

The core of your PC is their background and personality. As the story progresses, you will find out more about yourself and your relationships to the other PCs.

ISSUE

Everyone who is alive in the world of the dead has an Issue – something that is problematic or challenging about their person. An Issue could be almost anything: being an alcoholic, trusting people too easily, being lonely and longing for company, and so on.

Issues have two functions. The most important is to help you understand and roleplay your PC. The other is to give the GM inspiration for creating Challenges in the story. If you, for example, are protective of children and cannot stand to see them get hurt, there will probably come a time when you will hear babies crying inside a building that is surrounded by

walkers. It is up to you to decide how your PC handles it. You might risk it all to save those babies – or you find out that children are not that important to your PC after all.

It is possible to change your Issue at any time, but it works best to do it between sessions. You always have at least one Issue.

DRIVE

Your Drive is the thing that makes you grit your teeth and push through the fear and pain. Your Drive could be that you are looking for your daughter, or that you are afraid of dying. It is whatever keeps you going.

Once every session you may use your Drive to get a +2 modifier on a skill roll (page 11). Describe how it motivates you and makes you able to push on, then roll two extra base dice for the skill roll. You must declare that you use your Drive before the roll.

You may change your Drive at any time, or, as a consequence of not being able to handle your fear, you might lose your Drive. This process is described on page 9.

CHARACTERISTICS

Attributes, talents, and skills indicate what your character is good at. Together, they are referred to as characteristics. Attribute values can range from 1 to 5, and skill values from 0 to 5.

ATTRIBUTES

You have four attributes, which indicate your core strengths and weaknesses. They are Strength, Agility, Wits, and Empathy.

STRENGTH is a measure of how tough you are. It is the ability to take and deliver a beating. It determines things like how long you can go without food or rest, and how easily you pry open a blocked door.

AGILITY is a measure of your coordination and motor skills. It is used, for example, when you sneak away from something dangerous, when you try to balance on an icy rooftop, and when you shoot a gun.

WITS is your intellectual capacity, which you use to solve problems. It also reflects your prior education, and your general level of world-weariness.

EMPATHY represents your ability to understand other people, and to persuade, charm, or trick them.

SKILLS

Skills represent acquired knowledge, training, and experience. There are twelve skills, three connected to each base attribute. The skills are described in detail on page 16.

TALENTS

Talents are tricks, traits, and abilities that can benefit you in various situations. They affect your dice rolls, or they let you do things you would not otherwise be able to do. The talents available in this starter set are described on the pre-generated PCs.