

GURPS®

Fourth Edition

ZOMBIES DAY ONE™



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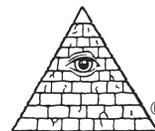
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*The T-Virus is protean,
changing from liquid to airborne
to blood transmission, depending
on its environment.*

*– Red Queen,
in Resident Evil*

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

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

– *Fido*

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INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

RECOMMENDED BOOKS

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

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

PUBLICATION HISTORY

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

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

ABOUT GURPS

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

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

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

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

Rules to Avoid

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

MOOD AND PACING

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

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

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

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

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

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

TOUGH CALLS

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

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

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

ZOMBIE-FIGHTERS

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

CHARACTER CREATION

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

EVERYTHING ELSE

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

Cannibals

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

Changed Animals

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

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

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

Mutants

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

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

THE GORY DETAILS

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

The Meat

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

The Motivation

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

Turning Points

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

BY THE NUMBERS

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



Infected

-60 points

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

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

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

Perks: Penetrating Voice [1].

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

Quirks: Glimpses of Clarity [-1].

Features: Affected as Living; Infectious; Sterile.

CHAPTER EIGHT

DEPRAVITY WELL

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

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

And lots of caveats.

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

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

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

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

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

– Dr. Spires, in Silent Rage

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

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

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

AT A GLANCE: DEPRAVITY WELL

Genre: Science-Fiction Horror.

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

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

Supernatural Powers: None.

Scope: Global Apocalypse.

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

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

DAY ONE

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

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

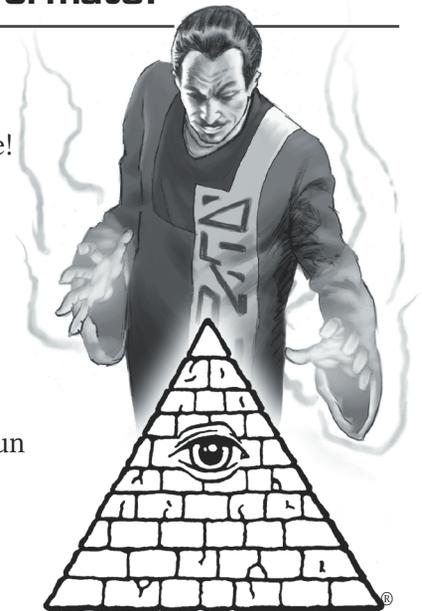
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