The End of the World

A Role Playing Game

by

Nick Wedig

Created Thursday, September 22, 2005

For some unknown reason, the dead have begun to rise from their graves. Perhaps an advanced scientific experiment or chemical weapon is responsible. Or possibly the dead have returned because of black magics or other occult knowledge long hidden from society at large. Perhaps it is the end of the world, as the televangelist channel proclaimed for a while before it turned to static.

You don't know why, but you know that shambling, formerly human creatures have invaded your peaceful little suburb. As far as you can tell, everyone else in the city is dead, except for a terrified few other that you have found. You have all congregated together for mutual protection, but as the stress increases, the internal tensions of your compatriots may be more dangerous to you than the undead outside the window.

Thematically, the game is about the breakdown of social taboos and mores. Once these outside limitations are removed, the hatred that usually bubbles beneath the surface comes forth. Zombies are only in the game peripherally as a way of addressing these themes, really. Perhaps other apocalypses could be substituted. Anything where the normal rules of society have broken down. The nice suburb that the PCs lived in has been disrupted, for some reason, and now they have to band together and deal with that. More frightening, though, is that they need to deal with each other as their own sense of morality breaks down.

The game really requires four or more player characters, plus a GM, as with fewer players the hatred relationships are easily figured out.

Character Creation:

       You are a normal resident of the suburbs. You have a decent middle class income and a reasonably nice home. Or did, until the zombies attacked. Now, you're scrambling for your life and have banded together with a bunch of misfits. Perhaps you knew some of these people before Armageddon came, or perhaps they're just the only other living people you could find. Either way, necessity has forced you together, and you need to use what limited resources you have left to survive as society crumbles around you.

       Each player will decide upon and declare their character's basic premise and occupation. These should be kept general, as each player gets the opportunity to modify each other player's character to some degree.

       Example: The GM, Anne, has assembled Jim, Mary, Adam and yourself for to play a game. You decide to play a woman who has had to work very hard to make it to the suburbs. She was born to a poor family, but has fought hard, using every resource available to her, to make a nice life for herself. You think that watching this life crumble around her would make for compelling drama, and the other players also seem interested in this idea. At this point, she's just a rough sketch, with no profession and only a basic background and personality. These will get fleshed out as the game goes on. You decide to call your character Margaret.

Once every player has a character concept, each player should write their name (or their character's if they have that by now, or both) on an index card, and give them to the GM to redistribute. The GM decides how to redistribute these cards, though no player should get their own card back. They can be randomly passed out or the GM can distribute them in whatever way she thinks would be most interesting for the game. After the cards are distributed, the players look at the cards, but can choose to keep this card secret or reveal it at any time they wish. The name on this card is the character that your character hates. One of your goals is to see that they do not survive the oncoming zombie apocalypse. Try to determine why you hate them from what has been described about their character thus far. If you have no reason, you can use your input into their character to try to establish a reason or relationship with their character, giving you a reason to hate them. It may just be a personality clash or bigotry or any number of other causes. Perhaps you've just decided that, since the world has ended, you want to watch people die, and that character's your primary target.

Example: When the GM hands you back an index card, it has Jim's name on it. Earlier, he described his character as a rich young kid who has never had to work really hard in his life. Jim is interested in seeing if his spoiled rich boy can deal with an actual challenge and get by without the help of his family. This gives you a natural reason to hate him: you have always been jealous of his wealth and luxury, and hate him for never having to really work at anything. If you had had to create a reason to hate Mary's charity worker PC, you may have hit a mental block, but in this case the answer was easy.

Now you will go around the table, and each player gets to suggest a fact about each other player's character. These facts can be anything, from personal background to additional abilities or faults. When another player suggests something about your character, you can choose to accept what they suggest, in which case you should note it on your character sheet and you receive a Trust Point to add to your pool. These are the basic currency of the game, and having more may be good for you. If you refuse to accept their suggestion, nothing changes about your character. Another player could later agree with an earlier vetoed suggestion, in which case you'll receive both trust points from both players. Or you could veto it again if you still like it. Any number of players could use their suggestions to reinforce an earlier suggestion, making some propositions very tempting.

Example: You suggest to Jim that his character's occupation be "Jock" which he accepts, gaining one additional point. You suggest to Mary that her character be enraged by people hoarding their resources, which is a sneaky way of turning her against Jim's rich boy character. She also agrees, since it seems to fit with her character idea. You suggest to Adam that his character has a bad knee, which he declines.

Jim suggests that Margaret climbed out of the ghetto through criminal activity and that her occupation be "criminal". This would be useful when breaking into buildings, stealing things and stabbing Jim in the back, but it doesn't jive with how you'd imagined your character. You decline, and Mary suggests your character that your

character received charity from her character years before. You think that this is Mary

angling for a reason to hate your character, but decide that it can't hurt too much to have

a relationship with the other characters, and accept the extra point. Adam suggests that

Margaret is an artist. You think for a moment about how to turn that to your advantage

and can't immediately think of anything, but decide being an artist isn't a bad thing, so

accept his suggestion. At this point, you have two extra trust points beyond the baseline

twelve, which you can distribute as you wish.

After every player has suggested a fact about every other character, you should

have a little more information about your character. Now you should clarify and fill out

the rest of your character sheet. You need to answer a few questions about your

character, such as "what pisses you off?", "what are you afraid of?" and "what monstrous

act has your character always wanted to perform, but been afraid of society's backlash for

doing so?" You also need to discuss with the GM and other player examples of what is

and is not covered by your occupation.

Example: As per Adam's suggestion, Margaret is an artist. You suggest to the

GM that she is a postmodern artist who specializes in welding together large mechanical

monstrosities but is currently working as an ice sculptor to make ends meet. The GM

agrees to the welding art pieces, but says that the machine don't really work.

Recognizing that the ice sculpting is just an excuse to be proficient with a chainsaw, the

GM vetoes the ice sculpting.

Each character has something that makes them irrationally angry, for whatever reason, and something that makes them so terrified that they can't think rationally. These should, ideally, be things that are likely to come up in the game, both because that makes for interesting character interactions and because you'll receive a mechanical bonus when they do come up. These are also a slight limitation, as you can't increase your trust in another character when he or she does something that frightens or terrifies you, but you can't really choose your companions in an apocalypse.

Example: You decide that waste makes your artist character incredibly pissed off. This ties in with the being poor as a child, and using recycled machinery in your art. It also gives you potential excuses to bully and badger Jim's character, so the other players might not realize that he's the one you're trying to eliminate. You also decide that relying on others terrifies Margaret, as being self reliant was important to her when struggling out of the ghetto.

In addition, every character has some horrible, monstrous urge that they have never fulfilled because of society's restrictions. Think of despicable and destructive things that people are likely to do when there's no police or morality to stop them. Perhaps this is incestuous or pedophiliac relations, or drug related benders or murder in cold blood or anything else you can think of. To some extent, the tone of these acts needs to be modulated by the relative comfort level of the players in the game, but you should try to think of something that the other players are going to think is horrible. What you want, ultimately, is for the other players to drop their level of trust they have invested in

you as much as possible, so you need to push the buttons of the players and/or their characters. At the end of a scene when they drop their trust in you because you've done this despicable thing, then you reveal that it was your secret urge and gain a number of Trust points equal to the trust you lost. These go in your pool to be invested as you wish.

Example: Many of Margaret's works involve destructive or frightening looking machines. Big claws, blades, jaws and saws. She has always harbored a desire to see someone thrown inside a big machine or engine of some kind and be ripped to shreds.

Trust:

      You will start the game with three trust points for each character in the game (including yourself), plus one for every fact about your character that you accepted as true. At the beginning of the game, you can distribute these between various other characters and yourself. It may help if you can get different colored pools of tokens, such as poker chips or colored stones for each player, so that you can pass them around and easily keep track of whose trust you're using and abusing. So when you start, you'll have a list of character and a number of dice next to them, like so:

Jim's character, Eric: 3 points

Mary's character, Arianna: 5 points

Adam's character, Clark: 2 points

Myself, Margaret: 4 points

      Hand each player an appropriate number of tokens equal to the number you've allotted to them. You can only change these token distributions between scenes.

Conflicts

Whenever your character is in conflict, the GM will discuss with you what's at risk and set a difficulty. The difficulty of each action will start at 1 and increase by at least 1 every scene (see *Zombie Slaying* below). You will total all the collective trust that other players/characters have invested in your character, plus the number of points you have invested in yourself if the task falls within the area of your occupation, or you are in a situation where your character is enraged or terrified (as determined in character creation). This total is your Effectiveness Pool, which is then distributed among different aspects of the task at hand. The GM will then subtract the difficulty from the various totals.

Example: Jim has, unwisely, devoted 4 points worth of trust to your character. Mary's character has granted you 3 points and Adam has granted to 1 point, arguing that your character and his have never met before. Therefore, the players can distribute 6 points between aspects of your success, or 10 points if being an artist would help or if you are in a situation that is particularly emotionally affecting to your character. When you are trying to bar the door to keep hideous undead monstrosities from getting inside, you'll have 6 points of Effectiveness. If you decide to weld the door shut, however, you have a total Effectiveness of 10.

The various aspects of a conflict are: *Personal Safety, Companions Safety, Success,* and *Zombie Slaying*.

Personal Safety is whether or not the active character (i.e., the character performing the act central to the current conflict, who trust total is used to determine effectiveness) becomes injured. If the total amount of Effectiveness put in Personal Safety is zero, then your character has died. At the end of the conflict, you need to explain what part of the conflict killed your character, which may include random bad luck that is not zombie related (particularly good for conflicts where there is little or no apparent danger). Dead characters can return later as zombies for additional dramatic impact. The player of the dead character keeps the trust points other characters had invested in them, and use those to oppose living PCs when they return. The GM should wait at least a scene before reintroducing the zombie PC, unless the game is already at or very near a climax to the game (depends on the number of players left, and the current difficulty level). When a character dies, the character that hated them gains a number of points in their pool equal to the number of players.

If the total Effectiveness put in Personal Safety is 1 or 2, then you, the active character, have become injured. At the end of the conflict, it is up to the player of the active character to explain how you became injured. Having failed to even protect yourself, any points you have invested in yourself are removed from the game. You can redistribute point of trust in yourself at at the next scene change, but have lost all the points you had invested in yourself.

If the Effectiveness put in Personal Safety is 3 or more, then the active character has survived without any injury. Congratulations, you get to live to see more of the horrors of the apocalypse.

Companions Safety follows similar lines, but is a little more widespread. The number of points put in Companions safety is the number of non-active Player Characters who are not injured in some way during the conflict. Assume all non-active characters who contributed trust to the active character will be injured, and that each point of Effectiveness put here protects one non-active PC. Unlike the active character, non-active characters can't die because of a conflict, but they can be injured in a variety of gruesome ways. The player controlling the active character decides which characters are injured and which are not.

Non-active characters who are injured lose their belief in the effectiveness of the active character. Take half the trust they had invested in the active character and remove these trust points from the game (round down). In future scenes, these PCs can put more trust in the character who failed them, but this trust is lost.

Success is a simple indicator of how much of your goal you achieve. A zero put in Success indicates total failure, almost certainly a reversal of the situation. You are now further from that goal than you were before you tried anything. One point of Effectiveness put in Success indicates a minor failure, one which failed but hasn't hurt future chances. Two is a mixed bag, perhaps a success with a noticeable drawback, or

partial success, or perhaps a failure that will make you future attempts easier. Three or higher is a total achievement of your goal. At the end of the conflict, the GM declares and narrates how your level of success works and what each level would represent.

Zombie Slaying does not necessairly have to involve Zombies. Really, this aspect of the conflict is a representation of preventing the situation from decaying and getting worse. The difficulty of each scene with steadily get worse, but this allows you to somewhat slow the inevitable progession. In each conflict, the difficulty for future conflicts can increase by a minimum of one and by a maximum equal to the number of players. If no points are put in Zombie Slaying, then the difficulty will increase by the maximum. For every point of Effectiveness put in Zombie Slaying, the increase in difficulty is decreased by 1 point, down to the minimum increase of one point.

Distributing Effectiveness

Once the Effectiveness pool for a conflict has been distributed, you go around the table describing the conflict blow by blow. Start with the active character, if any of the Effectiveness was due to the active character's trust in themselves. Go around the table the way that maximizes the time before the GM goes, skipping characters who did not contribute trust to the Effectiveness Pool or who have already allocated the trust they did contribute. As you go around the table, each player takes one of the trust points they supplied to the Effectiveness Pool and declares which aspect of the conflict they want to put the Effectiveness point in, or give it to the player of the active character for them to

distribute. Characters who supplied no points of trust to the Effectiveness Pool (like someone who betrayed the active PC) don't get any input into the conflict. They describe, briefly, how their character acts to help the active character achieve that aspect of the conflict: fulfilling the goal, or yelling "Look out behind you!" as a zombie aproaches them or hiding or whatever inches the group toward that goal of the conflict.

Each time the turn passes around to the GM, she gets to spend Difficulty points to hurt the character's effectiveness. On any round, when the GM gets her turn then she may spend up to half the Difficulty points from the conflict's Difficulty pool (or as few as zero Difficulty points). Each point of Difficulty allocated to a given category reduces the total in that aspect by one level (minimum zero). The GM described how environmental hazards or encroaching hordes of undead make it harder to achieve that particular goal in the conflict. (Note that repeated turns around the table give the GM slightly more control over the conflict, so it might be strategically better to have everyone trust you a little than to have one person trust you a lot, all other things being equal.)

Keep going around the table until all the points of Effectiveness have been allocated. The GM then allocates leftover Difficulty points. Then compare each aspect of the conflict with its descriptions (above) and the appropriate person, typically the active player or the GM, narrates the final results.

PC versus PC Conflict

If two or more PCs come into direct conflict, whether it be deciding a course of action or both scrabbling to stab the other with a butcher's knife, then the normal aspects of a conflict don't apply. Instead, there are only two aspects to distribute points into: *Personal Safety* and *Defeating the Other Guy*. Each character totals the trust they have invested in themselves (even if their occupation, fear or rage don't apply), plus the trust others have invested in them for their Effectiveness Pool and compare with their opponent's Pool. The higher value wins the conflict. Keep in mind that you cannot change trust distribution in the middle of a scene, thereby putting all your trust in yourself.

Because you're openly opposing your fellow PC, you can't betray him and thereby gain the benefit for the trust he had invested in you (see *Trust*, below). This also goes for people supporting one side or the other.

Aditionally, in a PC versus PC conflict, any characters on the sideline must choose to support only one of the PCs in the conflict. Thus, it's only a good idea to challenge another PC to a duel to the death when you are pretty sure that the other PCs would back you in the conflict, even if they do not participate.

Example: You have gotten in an argument with Adam's PC Clark. You want to head for the airstrip on the edge of town, hoping for some sort of plane or helicopter, or

at least a truck to escape the suburbs. Clark thinks that the entire country has been overrun with zombies, and so escaping would be impossible. He suggests raiding a grocery store or mall and then heading into the wilderness, where zombies will be less common. You argue with him for a while until the GM suggests that one or the other back down or that you establish a conflict. The stakes are established as whose plan is followed. You have 4 points worth of trust in yourself, whereas Clark only trusts himself with 3 points. The deciding factor will be which of the other PCs side with you and which side with Clark. Mary's Arianna agrees with Clark's plan, knowing that Clark has a cabin in the woods and knows how to hunt. Mary has invested three points in Clark, giving him an effective total of 6 for the conflict thus far.   Eric, Jim's PC, decides that escaping by air would still be a good idea even if the entire country is swarmed with walking corpses. He adds the 4 points of trust he has already invested in you to your total, giving you a total of 8.

Once you've totalled your Effectiveness Pools, you go around the table describing how you act in the conflict and allocate points to one of the aspects, as in normal conflicts. Nonactive character gets to allocate trust that they supplied to the player's totals, just like in normal conflicts. Personal Safety works as in normal conflicts, whereas to succeed at achieving your stakes, you need to have a higher total in the Defeating the Other Guy aspect. Unlike normal conflicts, you can use your points of Effectiveness to subtract points from your opponent's aspects (as with a GM subtracting via difficulty, the minimum in an aspect is zero). Thus, you could severely injure your friends and compatriots.

Example: After a few turns of the conflict, you both have spent enough points in Personal Safety to ensure you won't be hurt unless the other guy decides to attack. You go back and forth putting point in Defeating the Other Guy, but it is clear fromt he start that Clark will lose the conflict unless he resorts to violence. He decides to keep his cool for now, and the party will head to the airport.

Zombie PCs

If a character dies and returns as one of the undead legion, then they can oppose the surviving PCs. If the GM and player of the zombie both agree to it, he can have his zombie retain some level of sentience and blame the other PCs for his death. Like every other aspect of the zombies themselves, this is entirely optional. Make the undead PCs, and all the other undead, act in whatever way most frightens you nd the other character.

In a conflict with a PC, that PC totals their effectiveness, as against a live PC (see above). The undead PC then adds all the trust that had been invested in it when he or she died, and uses that total as their effectiveness in the conflict. Thereafter, allocate Effectiveness points as in a PC vs. PC conflict.

Example: A few scenes after Clark died, his animated corpse is seen following the party. The stakes for the conflict are set as whether or not you get infected with the zombie creation virus. After a few rounds, you have repeatedly spent Effectiveness on

Personal Safety, but Clark keeps using his Effectiveness to cancel yours, as Adam,

Clark's player, no longer cares in his Zombified PC survives the conflict. Your only hope

is the fact that he has fewer dice than you, and really wants you to get infected. You

know that at the end of the conflict, you'll have three more dice than him, but that means

deciding whether you'll be injured or be infected.

Using Trust Points:

Between scenes, you can increase the trust you invest in a given character by one point, or reduce it by any value. You can raise your trust in yourself by any amount, or similarly lower it by any amount. This reflects your character's changing opinions of your companions and yourself, for better or worse.

You cannot add trust to a character who acts in a way that falls in your fear or rage categories, though of course you can remove as many as you wish.

Betrayal

Whenever another character goes to total their Effectiveness Pool for a conflict, you can decide to betray the trust they have granted you. Narrate how you choose that stressful moment to turn on them, thereby endangering their chances of succeeding at their task. You take back the trust points you have invested in them, if any, and take the trust points they invested in you and convert them into your own points. You also can't be injured during the oncoming conflict.

Example: You have invested 3 points in Jim's character, Eric and he has invested 4 points in your character Margaret. Jim doesn't know that your character hates his, though. So when Eric tries to climb over a fence to flee a pack of zombies, you declare that, when he reaches up to Margaret for a helping hand, she looks him dead in

the eye, and then leaps down on the other side of the fence. You then collect back your 3 points, and replace the 4 points Jim invested in Margaret with 4 tokens of your color that you can invest in various other characters. Eric is, at this point, less likely to survive the encounter, but if he does he'll be pissed, and it's possible that the other characters will trust you less after open betrayal.

.

Establishing facts

When the GM begins to frame the new scene, you can offer a point to establish one new fact about the upcoming scene, such as where it happens, who is present, what sort of conflict is about to happen, or the condition of the characters. Each player gets to do this, and if two or more disagree on some aspect of the new scene, they can bid trust points, with the higher bid deciding who decides the new fact. Trust points bid like this, or paid to the GM to establish a new fact, are removed from the game. Everyone's effectiveness is reduced, but you may have improved your overall situation (or hurt the one you hate. Either way).

You can also spend point of trust to establish facts about the character who gave you those points. Once play has begun, players cannot declare any new information about their characters, but other players can spend their trust points granted to them to introduce new information about the granting character.

Example: The player characters have made it to an abandoned airstrip, and amazingly enough found a semi functional Cessna. The GM asks if character can pilot an airplane, a question that had not been addressed in character creation. You decide to declare that that Mary's character Arianna is the daughter of a pilot, and thus flew a Cessna a few times before. You take one of the 4 chips Mary invested in you and remove it from the game, but now the party can escape in the airplane.

If there are two or more players wanting to establish facts about a given character, particularly contradicting facts, then whoever sacrifices the most trust points (of those granted by the contested character) gets to declare their information. You can only establish one new fact about any given character per scene.

Pacing and GM Advice

The game is broken down into scenes. A large part of the GM's job is to establish what the scenes are and create interesting scenes. Each scene needs to have some sort of conflict, though the exact nature of the conflict can be left uncertain until things begin happening. It's important to change the sort of conflict every few scenes, to keep the game from being just reacting to wave after wave of zombies. Every scene, you need to change the kind of conflict or change the environment to something new and interesting or introduce some new sort of opposition (perhaps non-human zombies, or a *Resident Evil* style boss monster or a human foe of some kind).

More than one conflict can occur in a scene, but usually one is sufficient. At that point, you move on, which allows the players to adjust their trust levels in reaction to the conflict and to give some input on what's going to happen.

Try to escalate the conflicts and tension each scene. The difficulty steadily rises, and so the threats dealt with at the beginning of the game session need to be bad but not as bad as what is going to come later.

The game ends when all living characters have gotten the bonus from watching their hated character die. This might mean a last man standing scenario, or two or more PCs might survive and be able to work together peaceably. At most, half the original party of PCs can survive.

Character sheet

Name:

Occupation:

One thing that pisses you off:

One thing that terrifies you:

Trust level for each other character:

Aspects of a Conflict:

Personal Safety   (0 = dead. 1 or 2 = injured. 3+ = safe)

Companions Safety (Each point equals on safe companion)

Success   (0 = total failure. 1 is failure. 2 is a mixed bag. 3+ is total success)

Zombie Slaying   (number of players minus Zombie Slaying equals increase in

difficulty. Minimum increase of 1.)

Secret information:

(Fold sheet over here to hide this info, if you want)

One character you hate:

One monstrous thing you have always wanted to do but have been afraid to do: