

The Zombie Plan

A game of life and death

Overview

In this game we play people very similar to ourselves who have to deal with zombies attacking. We'll all take turns describing what happens. Once everyone's had their first turn, the group will have found shelter from the zombies – and one of us will be dead.

Death means you keep playing – only now that you're a zombie your goal is to turn everyone else into zombies by reducing their Life to 0. If no-one has any Life left, zombies win.

The survivors win if they can reduce the zombies' Death total to 0.

Set up the game

We need an odd number of players (3,5,7, etc). We'll also need something small (something that's not a coin) to pass between the players. Let's call that the "Ball".

Everyone shares their favourite zombie movie and why. If you don't have one, you probably shouldn't be playing this game.

"The Rules": If you die (in any way), you'll turn into a zombie. If you're bitten, you'll turn into one. If you're bitten and die, you'll turn into one that much faster. Your characters don't know any of this at the start of the game.

All you need to decide is whether the zombies are fast or slow.

Make your character

Your character has the same first name as you. Your character's occupation is something that you have done at some point in your life. Aside from that, your character doesn't need to have any similarities to you at all. You don't need to tell any of the other players this information until it comes up in the game.

Pull out all the coins you've got in your wallet and pockets. Lay them out in front of you. That's how much Life your character has. Life represents your character's plot immunity to getting bitten (or dying). It can be their ability to fight off zombies, the shelter they're in, luckiness, or ammo. If your Life drops to 0, then your character turns into a zombie, and when you describe stuff, you'll be trying to help the zombies win.

Example, if you have 5 coins, you have 5 Life. It doesn't matter what size the coins are.

Describing what happens

The game's set wherever we're playing the game - and whatever you can see around you right now is allowed to be described as being in the game.

Choose the player to start describing things. Women go before men, characters with more Life goes before ones with less. If there's a tie, the younger person goes first.

Starting player, take hold of that "Ball". You explain why your character is here, describe the arrival of the first zombie(s) and describes how you react to that. Then flip all of your Life coins, and pass the Ball (and the turn) to the person on your left.

NB: For this first phase, every time the Ball passes hands, the person who was just speaking flips all their Life coins.

Next player, describe how your character reacts to the situation and then pass their turn to the person on your left - unless ...

... Other players, at any time you can point your finger at the talking player, and take the Ball (and the right to speak) from them. Just remember that everyone has to have a turn in this first phase before you can have a second go.

Once everyone's flipped all their coins, look at who has Heads on the coin with the highest value. **They become the first zombie.** If there's a tie, only the tying players keep narrating (and flipping their coins at the end of their narration) until one player is left.

NB: All that coin flipping was just for this set-up phase. You won't need to do that again as you keep on describing stuff.

"Let it ride": The key to this is that everyone's got to abide by the stuff people have previously described. If the place you're sheltering in has been completely cleared of zombies, for instance, then no-one should narrate a zombie 'just happening' to pop up to bite someone inside the shelter. What's done is done.

How tough are the zombies?

Well that's measured by the Death total, which equals the starting Life of the player who's just turned into a zombie. Death represents the hordes of zombies attacking you: their strength, numbers, tenacity, and variety of ways of attacking.

What happens now?

Players continue taking turns describing what happened. At any point, when a zombie or survivor player interrupts, they can call for a conflict. A conflict is about life and death stuff – a zombie attack, having to go out (for some reason) amongst the zombies, or just anything where there's a risk of dying.

If a survivor initiates a conflict where their character goes into danger alone, they will gain a Life point if they succeed (see below).

Conflicts

On the count of three, everyone holds out either one or two fingers.

The survivors succeed if the total number of fingers is even. They get to remove one of the Death coins from the game.

The zombies succeed if the total number of fingers is odd. They take a Life coin from any character affected by the conflict, and add it to the Death total..

If everyone held out two fingers, the Zombies succeed (as above).

“Let it ride”: Once a conflict’s done, the results of it are permanent.

The most important rule of the game: There can be NO DISCUSSION between any of the players about how many fingers they’re going to hold out. No collaboration, planning, or secret signals. That’s cheating.

F.U.B.A.R.

If, during a conflict, you put out a closed fist, you can collect 1 Life from everyone, and remove that amount of coins from the Death total. Grab the Ball and describe what happens.

However, if two (or more) people put out a closed fist, every survivor loses a Life and transfers it over to the Death total.

Character vs. Character

I’m not sure if this situation will ever come up, but if two (or more) characters are in conflict (about something that’s not life and death), then everyone should point to the character they want to see win. The person with the most fingers pointing at them gets to describe what happens (which doesn’t necessarily need to have their character coming out on top).

Designer Notes

I wanted to write a 1-2 page game that people could play with what they had on them, and play a complete game over lunch. The ‘hand’ mechanic came first, then I wrapped all the zombie stuff around it because that’s where my head was at.

Zombie movies seem to be about the fragility of civilisation. Can it be maintained? Can people’s trust of each other over-ride their self-interest and ego. I’m not sure if these rules reflect that yet, but – hey – it’s a first draft.

Narration is a simplified version of Universalis. “Let it ride” is from Burning Empires.

If you’re ever confused about who’s turn it is to describe stuff, check the ‘Starting Player’ rules (Woman, Most Life, Youngest).

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