

PS3BOX

ZOMPOCALYPSE



MISSION: VIDIDIOTS

The video game market is a 78 billion dollar industry and the competition to design the next monster franchise is cutthroat beyond most human comprehension. One of the most important elements of the gaming craze is the vast numbers of individuals these games can reach out and touch. These fascinating business facts are nonetheless usually far outside the area of concern for the average CROSS agent, but for once, this Halloween, it seems that the gaming industry's business and the Vatican's business are one and the same.

OUT OF THE ORDINARY

When the agents report to the Manger one fall morning their briefing for the day is succinct in both length and content. They must look into a series of violent attacks in the small university town of Willimantic, Connecticut, home of Walden University. An Investigation roll will easily uncover nine attacks since the middle of October. Checking into the backgrounds of both the assailants and the victims finds no commonality of any kind. The attackers vary wildly by income, race, and standing with the victims appearing to be completely random. It takes an Investigation roll when looking through the arrest reports to discover that several of the attackers used the similar expression of "I don't know what came over me." A Raise on an Investigation roll will allow the agent to deduce that the only things even remotely in common between the attackers, aside from all being male, is their

ages fall in the 17 to 25 range and they are all enrolled at Walden University.

Questioning the suspects in jail or those able to post bail will require police connections or powers of arrest. Barring those options, a Persuasion roll at -2 (due to the mental state of most of the suspects) will bluff the individual into speaking with the agent(s). The interviews are surprisingly similar. Each suspect seems remorseful and doesn't understand why they attacked their victim; most didn't even know the person they assaulted. All they can remember from before the attack was a blinding rage they can barely describe, but why they were so angry, they cannot explain.

WHAT LIES BENEATH

Frustrated by their lack of progress, the agents must interview friends and family of the suspects to make a breakthrough. A successful Persuasion roll when talking to Gabrielle Prescott, the mother of Antuan Prescott, will learn that Antuan is not violent or prone to fits of anger. In fact, their only quasi-violent habit is a preference for video games "Especially that new one." When pressed about this game, the person shows obvious disgust and states "Wait right here. I want you to take it and get that thing out of my house. Never did like him taking up those games and that one's the worst of the lot."

As the agents wait, there is a piercing shriek from the back of the house as Gabrielle Prescott screams for help. If the team races toward the screams, they

will find the once docile Antuan in a towering rage, and they will have to fight him to save not only the game disc but Gabrielle as well. Blinded by fury, Antuan must be beaten unconscious to subdue as lethal force shouldn't be an option.

The game in question is Zompocalypse and is different from most such games in that the players take on the role of the monsters rather than the humans. A successful Investigation roll will reveal that every one of the suspects has had access to Zompocalypse through a special video game beta testing course at the university and the game is not available to the general public. Further questioning of the suspects learns they are all beta testers of the game had more than a dozen hours of play time under their belts.

IN PLAIN SIGHT

It takes a Raise on a Knowledge (Computers) roll to crack the security on the game disc to learn there are extensive subliminal images hidden in the graphics of the disc. A Healing roll or an Investigation roll at -2 will deduce these images have the specific purpose of triggering the areas of the brain controlling anger while suppressing self-control areas. In plain terms, after 60 hours of playing the game, the player essentially becomes one of the zombie characters and will attack whoever happens to be available. Further analysis of the disc reveals the game, which was distributed to the beta testing class as part of a Halloween special release three days ago, has a "hidden reward for the first thousand players to reach level 25," which takes on average 60 hours to reach. In addition, the disc includes a one-time access code to an exclusive online multi-player online site where they will be exposed to even more violent subliminal images.

Given the hidden cues on the disc, it requires a Raise on a Spirit roll to resist the compulsion to keep playing. Assuming things go as the agents fear, by midnight on Halloween, which is now just six hours away, a wave of zombified gamers will surge into Willimantic with only one goal, to kill as many humans as possible.

FOREWARNED IS FOREARMED

The problem for the agents is now that they know the cause of the assaults is preventing this Halloween from becoming an actual bloodbath. Clearly, the makers of the game have an agenda, the ques-

tion is, is there a means to control the zombie army created by the game?

The next obvious step for the agents is to speak to or infiltrate Carnivore Species Entertainment, the makers of Zompocalypse. An open approach will only alert Darrin Flynn, the president of the company of the team's existence and will not learn anything useful. Regardless of the agents' credentials, between the receptionist and company security they run into a wall of polite refusals and excuses until they will either have to leave or face trespassing charges.

Also, when the agents return to the parking garage, they find a number of men equal to the number of agents shambling around their car. When the heroes speak to the men, they launch an unprovoked and relentless attack. The men are unarmed but fight without mercy just like Antuan Prescott. The only way to defeat them short of lethal force, which again is not an option, is to beat each one unconscious.

Infiltration will allow the agents the rush of eluding very high tech security and barriers to get inside the building. Successfully penetrating the layered defenses will require no less than two Stealth, two Lockpicking, and two Knowledge (Computers) rolls. If any of these rolls fails, the team trips an alarm. Each person can attempt a Stealth roll to escape the building and the grounds. Failing this final roll results in that agent running into a pair of zombie gamers, and then building security and local police. With so many innocent targets this will likely be a fight they cannot and should not win and should end with capture. Their superiors will post bail, but they will face the consequences later for needing this assistance.

A successful infiltration will gain access to Carnivore Species Entertainment's central computer server, and a Knowledge (Computers) or a Smarts roll at -2 will determine the sequence of images necessary to neutralize the game's subliminal programming. However, knowing the cure does not include how to transmit those images to anyone under the game's influence.

A CHALLENGE IS JUST ANOTHER OPPORTUNITY

As the difficulty of infiltrating the building's security is so high, the agents face the very real possi-

bility of not gaining the above information. As an alternative, the defeated agents can roll a Knowledge (Computers) or a Smarts roll at -2 to devise an alternative plan. Having one of the gaming discs gives the team access to the source code of the game and the access code for the online game set to start in only two hours. It stands to reason that if they can gain access to the game remotely, they might be able to override the game's programming.

Racing to the nearest CROSS safe house, surveillance van, or anywhere with a decent Internet-connected computer, the agents have to roll a Raise on a Knowledge (Computers) to hack into the online server. Once they have access, a Success on a second Knowledge (Computers) roll will allow the agent to introduce enough conflicting images into the game stream that will induce a temporary form of epilepsy that essentially "reboots" the player's brain and breaks the game's mind-washing.

Similarly, the agents may take a more direct approach to get the neutralizing images uploaded to the game servers. They may kidnap Darrin Flynn, the owner of Carnivore and force him to make the changes necessary to reboot the beta-testers' brains. If he is put in that situation, on a successful Stealth roll, he will attempt to expose himself to subliminal images on his smartphone to turn himself into a zombie. On a Raise, he will also expose nearby security guards to the images giving him reinforcements. If Flynn is subdued through non-lethal means, he will be defeated and will neutralize the subliminal programming.

LOOSE ENDS

Once the crisis passes, connections within CROSS will produce the necessary warrants to seize all the games, shut down the website, arrest the employees of Carnivore Species Entertainment, and search their computer servers. Eventually, under questioning, Darrin Flynn reveals it was his rejection by Walden University that set the stage for his elaborate revenge scheme. He deliberately built his game company in Walden and eventually hatched his plan to punish the school and its enrolled students with his plot.

The consequence for capture during a failed infiltration of the Carnivore Species Entertainment building now comes into play. Each player will have one Experience Point deducted from their re-

ward for the mission due to having their superiors bail them out of jail.

ANTUAN PRESCOTT

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d10, Vigor d10
Skills: Fighting d6, Intimidation d6, Notice d6
Charisma: -4; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 9
Hindrances: Bloodthirsty, Delusional (Major, Believes self to be a zombie), Vengeful (Major)
Edges: Improved Frenzy, First Strike
Gear: Louisville Slugger (Str+d6)

Special Abilities

- **Claws:** Str.
- **Bring 'em On:** Antuan is immune to Gang Up Bonuses
- **Fearless:** Antuan is immune to Fear and Intimidation.
- **Feels No Pain:** +2 Toughness; +2 to recover from being Shaken

Tags: Earthly

DARRIN FLYNN

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d12, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6
Skills: Driving d4, Fighting d6, Investigation d12, Knowledge (Computers) d12, Knowledge (Psychology) d8, Notice d6, Persuasion d6, Stealth d6, Streetwise d6

Charisma: +2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 5
Hindrances: Greedy (Minor), Vengeful (Minor, Punish Walden University), Overconfident
Edges: Charismatic, Hacker
Tags: Earthly

ZOMBIE GAMERS

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6
Skills: Fighting d6, Intimidation d6, Notice d6
Charisma: -; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 5
Hindrances: Bloodthirsty, Delusional (Major, Believes self to be a zombie), Vengeful (Major)
Edges: Improved Frenzy, Bring 'em On, First Strike
Tags: Earthly

ATTRIBUTIONS

"Vampire Zombie Horror Scary Dark" (<https://pixabay.com/photos/vampire-zombie-horror-scary-dark-3615207/>) by Lavir_Hamil (https://pixabay.com/users/lavir_hamil-6281005/). This work is licensed under Pixabay License <https://pixabay.com/service/license/>.