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# the Infected

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# INTRODUCTION

Welcome to my second edition of *the Infected*. Thanks for checking it out.

What you've got in your hands here is a simple but powerful little role playing game. It plays out from start to finish in perhaps four or five hours. During that time you'll find yourself deep in a struggle between the things your characters desperately need to turn their lives around and the people they are willing to sacrifice to get there.

In these stories our protagonists are at a crucial juncture in their lives. They're just now preparing to turn their lives around for the better. Problem is, there's a deadly infection going around, turning everyone they know and love into monsters. Will your character fix their life? What kind of monster will they become while they're trying to make that fix?

I expect that the game will play well with three to seven players. Playtests to date have had exactly four players in them.

My first inspiration for this design was zombie movies. But, as the game grew and transformed, I realized that it's a great system for playing out all sorts of monster movies. From *The Lost Boys* to *The Thing*, any movie where the people eventually become one of the monsters can inspire play.

The rules are pretty simple and you'll need only a few items to play. The system uses six sided dice exclusively. Half of the dice need to be visually distinct from the rest. Call these the 'infected dice'. You'll need a copy of each of the Motivation Cards (a 'deck'). You'll need two copies of the NPC Card and five tokens for every player except the GM. The GM will need a single copy of the GM's Record Sheet. And finally, everyone will need a pen or pencil.



## BEFORE THE SHOW

Once you've gathered up your players, all the tools you'll need to play, and the obligatory munchies are on the table, you'll want to distribute and discuss a few things.

### Distribute

- ☞ Randomly distribute one Motivation Card to each non-GM player. Players should take a peek at their card and talk about what the cards are for without revealing what card they've received yet.
- ☞ Each player stacks five tokens on or near their Motivation Card.
- ☞ GM places four infected dice in their pool for the first act.
- ☞ Each non-GM player places two blank NPC Cards in front of them.

### Discuss

- ☞ Establish the setting and film style. Collaborate with the players to determine where and when the story is going to take place. Will it be a modern day story set in the hills of West Virginia? Or perhaps a sweeping tale of plague infesting dozens of cities across Europe during the Renaissance. Primarily for flavor, settle on a film style. Will it be a black and white '50s noir flick? Perhaps a smart cult classic? Or maybe

something that you imagine might come from the imagination of Romero and Tarentino's love child.

- ☞ Finally, establish what kind of origin the infection has. Choose one of three categories; Industrial, Natural, or Supernatural. An industrial origin for the infection implies that either the works of mankind or their side effects have created the infection. A natural origin might be something like a mutant strain of tape worm or a madness-inducing bite from a rabid dog. Supernatural origins might include a vengeful god casting his punishment on mankind or maybe the results of an ancient curse.

### The nature of the infection

You'll have plenty of leeway for narrating how the infection manifests in your game, to include the symptoms and what the monsters look and act like. However, there are some guidelines that you'll need to follow.

While the infection often originates somewhere else, it can always be transferred from one person to another and from a monster to a healthy person.

The symptoms of the infection are always drastic and frightening, never subtle. As the infection sinks deeper and deeper into it's victims slowly transform into monsters.

## MOTIVATION CARDS

For this playtest document, motivation cards each have a description of a scene on them. Eventually I'd hope to have some killer artist draw or paint out those scenes for me, maybe adding some cryptic and inspirational images to my ideas, but for now, we deal with the little snippets of text.

Your card represents what's fucked up and wrong with your character's life. Feel free to interpret the card wildly. Then, consider what your character is going to do to fix what's wrong with their lives. Don't tell anyone what either is yet. You'll have plenty of opportunity to show them during the show.

### Change is good

The reason why you're not going to tell anyone what your character's goal is until it happens is that it's ok for that goal to morph and change over the course of the story.

On the other hand, you'll probably be doing a lot of foreshadowing of your goal along the way.

### Those tokens

You're probably wondering just why you stacked up those five tokens next to your card. They represent all the shit that's standing between your character and fixing their life. You'll be trying to get rid of all of them before

the story ends. Check out the chapter on Resolving Conflicts for more details.



## SCENES

A movie is composed of many scenes, right? Well, that's what our story is composed of too.

Players take turns framing scenes. Framing a scene is just like setting a stage in a play. Be sure to tell everyone where the scene will take place, what time of day it is, and who's there. As a rule, your character should almost always be in the scene when it's your turn to frame.

### More show, less tell

Whenever possible, give us narration that shows us what's going on. Don't just tell us. If your character is going through a deep emotional struggle between her faith and her lust for her son then we want to see how that struggle shows up on film.

Worst comes to worst, you can always narrate a voice-over for your character, having her explain exactly what's going on in her head, but I suggest using this technique as a last resort. Painting a picture in our imaginations will have a much stronger effect on play.

## RESOLVING CONFLICTS

At some point your character is going to object to something that someone else is doing or someone else is going to object to what your character is doing. And someone's going to try to do something about it. That's when we've got ourselves a conflict.

Conflicts are resolved with a roll of the dice. The more dice you have to roll, the more likely you are to get the conflict to come out how you want it.

You start with one only one die, representing your character's ability to get things done, but you have two different ways to gain more dice. By narrating important NPCs into the scene helping your character. Or by becoming infected and invoking the monster within you.

Everyone rolls their dice at once. Each side of the conflict adds up their best two dice, and the side with the highest total wins the conflict. In the case of a tie, the GM wins the conflict even if he wasn't previously involved.

### Infected dice cheat

Whenever you roll a 1 on an infected die, treat that 1 like a 6. In fact, just go right ahead and move that die so that the 6 side is up instead of the 1 if you like.

## Narration

The winner of the conflict gets the buck-stop for narrating how everything comes out. This doesn't mean that only one person is permitted to speak while narrating how the conflict comes out, it means that the responsibility for the narration and the rights to the last word pass to that one particular person.

In the case where more than one player is on the same side of a winning conflict those players should collaborate on how things turn out.

## What not to do

Don't try to metagame the stakes of the conflict. Just keep narrating what your character is doing, and maybe what the NPCs are up to, until another player objects to what's going on. Let the conflicts come out 'organically' that way.

If no one reacts to something you'd hoped would turn out to be a conflict then you've got two options. The first is to try to turn up the heat a little bit. If none of the players are concerned that your character is trying to steal auto parts maybe they'll care when you reveal that you're stealing the parts from another PC's girlfriend's car.

Failing that, narrate an important NPC as being in conflict with your character and then hand that NPC Card over to the GM.

## THE GM'S DICE

The GM also gets a single die to start out each conflict. Instead of reflecting the ability of a PC to get things done, the GM's die reflects the outside forces that are preventing the PCs from accomplishing what they want to get done.

The GM can get NPC dice pretty much just like any other player, but he gets his infected dice in a somewhat different manner.

At the beginning of each act (check the chapter on acts) the GM gets a certain number of infected dice in a pool. When the GM draws infected dice from that pool for a conflict he uses those dice up. They're removed from play, which helps move the story forward.

The GM's infected dice, and the number he rolls, reflects the situation the PCs are in compared to the infected and monstrous NPCs they are in conflict with.

When escape from the infected or monsters is plain and simple roll 1 infected die. When escape is apparent, but probably difficult roll 2 infected dice. But when there is no obvious escape and it's unlikely that the PCs have much chance to survive roll 3 infected dice.

# IMPORTANT NPCs

You know those two blank NPC cards sitting in front of you? Well, at any time you can write the name of an NPC into that blank space there, effectively declaring that this particular NPC is important to the story.

Now, if you've narrated any NPC who's been written down on one of those cards as helping you in the conflict at hand, then you can put that NPC back in front of you and they'll (usually) give you an extra die or two for the conflict.

Let's look at just how many dice an NPC will give you. Take a peek at that column of numbers on the card. There's a number on the left and a number on the right. The numbers on the left get bigger as you go down the column and the numbers on the right get smaller.

|          |         |
|----------|---------|
| INFECTED | MONSTER |
| +0 / +3  |         |
| +1 / +2  |         |
| +1 / +2  |         |
| +2 / +1  |         |
| +2 / +1  |         |
| +3 / +0  |         |

The number on the left is the number of dice that a non-GM player gets if this NPC is helping them in a conflict. The number on the right is

the number of dice that the GM gets if the NPC is under their control.

After resolving a conflict, cross out the line of dice that got used in this conflict. Work your way down the columns. Don't ever cross out the +3/+0 block, no matter how many times the character is used in a conflict.

## Ownership

Once you've put a name on one of your blank NPC cards, they no longer belong to you. NPC cards that aren't currently involved in a conflict should be placed in the middle of the table, within everyone's reach.

If there's ever a conflict over who gets to use a particular NPC in a conflict, such as a time when the NPC appears to be helping more than one PC, use the following three steps to determine who should have the NPC placed in front of them for their use.

- ☞ If the NPC is Infected or Monster, then the GM wins. The infected just can't be trusted.
- ☞ If neither player is the GM then the NPC goes to the player who would otherwise have fewer NPCs.
- ☞ If both players have the same number of NPCs, then the contested NPC should go to the player who first narrated the NPC into the conflict.

## Pushing a conflict

If your PC is in the scene and you have at least one NPC helping you, then you can push a conflict. If you don't currently have any NPCs helping you then you may narrate how one enters the scene to help you out in order to get the push. Each conflict may only be pushed twice, yielding a maximum of three rounds of conflict.

To push a conflict into a second or third round, first declare the push. Then narrate how events in the conflict are changing and give everyone a chance to do the same. This narration should reflect the die results of the current round. Then everyone picks up their dice again for another roll. Anyone who wants to use their infected dice in this new roll must include more narration about the monster within them, even if they already did so for the previous round or rounds.

Your success and failure in the second and third rounds of a conflict have an effect on the NPCs that are helping you. If you are on the losing side of the roll in either the second or third rounds of the conflict, then all of your helping NPCs are hurt. If you are on the winning side of either of those rounds, then all BUT ONE of your NPCs are hurt.

The first time an NPC is hurt, circle Infected on their card. Due to the events of this conflict, they are now hosting the infection and will eventually show the symptoms.

The second time an NPC is hurt, even if it's in the same conflict as the first time, circle Monster on their card. They are no longer human. May not even be alive anymore. They can't help you anymore. When a monster NPC appears in a conflict their card is always placed in front of the GM.

NPCs in front of the GM are *never* hurt.



## BECOMING INFECTED

Your character begins the story free of the infection. Almost inevitably he or she will contract it. It gives you power. The power to become a monster. The power to take what you want and need through inhuman means.

Whenever you lose a conflict where any one of the opposing players rolled more infected dice than you had available to you, you'll gain a single infected die. If you ever have three or more infected dice then your character has become a monster and can no longer address or resolve their Goal.

You may roll your infected dice when your narration includes your character embracing their transformation into the monster. This transformation may be mental, physical, or emotional, but it'll be apparent to everyone that your character is loosing what makes them human.

If you roll your infected dice, you must roll all of them. You either imprison or release the monster inside you. You do not keep it on a leash.

## ADDRESSING AND RESOLVING YOUR GOAL

At the beginning of any conflict you can declare that this conflict could bring your character closer to achieving their goal. This is called addressing your goal. Signify the address by taking a single token off of your card and putting it up with your dice. If you win the conflict then the token is removed from play. If you lose the conflict the token is placed back on your card.

Alternately, you can declare that the current conflict will resolve your goal. You only get to do this once per story, so don't make this decision lightly.

If you have any tokens left on your card when you make this declaration then the GM has to get involved in the conflict, even if he wasn't so before hand. The GM gains one extra die to roll for each token you still have remaining on your card. Too many tokens will effectively guarantee that you'll lose your most important conflict.



# ACTS

There are three acts in this game. The acts are here to provide us with a bit of help in pacing out our story well. To do this, we tie the GM's infected pool to the acts and we have a bridge between the acts.

## The Bridge

Between the first and second and the second and third acts the GM should provide a little bridge of narration. Something to change the tempo a little bit. Sort of cleanse the palate, if you will.

I'd like to try having the GM narrate a few sentences worth of events and scenery in which our PCs are absent. Something where the horrors are not present. Imply a new relationship or introduce a new NPC.

As you can see, this bit is pretty flimsy right now. Making it awesome is high on my design to-do list.

## Regulation of the GM's pool by Act.

At the beginning of each act the GM places a particular number of infected dice into his pool. For the first act it's four dice, and we've already accomplished this in our pre-story prep. For the second act it's seven dice and four the third act it's eleven dice.

Also, the number of dice the GM may draw from his pool for any conflict is capped by the Act. One die in the first act, two in the second, and three in the third. Remembering that PCs can only die when they receive their third infected die, we see that PCs can only die in the third act.

## Regulation of the Act by GM's pool.

After any conflict that uses up the last of the GM's pool, the conflict is over. Assuming that each player has had at least one opportunity to address their Goal. If the GM uses up his pool and one or more of the players have not yet addressed their Goal, then the next scene should either address those Goals, or those players should pass and the next act should begin.

## Final credits

After the last scene of the third act, the GM should ask the players to collaboratively discuss what scenes, if any, run across the screen during the final credits.

## Pacing Caveat!

The GM's pool of infected dice should be placed where everyone can see it. Keep an eye on that pool. You don't want to be surprised by the end of the act, or by the end of the story, if you have a great idea for a scene just waiting to come out.



# APPENDIX I: MOTIVATION CARDS

## Misunderstood Maestro

An unseen painting is observed by several figures. All but the artist are reacting in horror or revulsion. The artist beams with pride at his work.

## A man in chains

Wrapped in thick chains and tied to an anchor, the subject seems to almost be whistling as he sinks to unknown depths. Bright fishes watch on with disdain.

## Missing Pieces

Image shows a man standing next to a child at the beach. Only the image is cut like a jigsaw puzzle and there's a piece missing where the child's face and the man's heart should be. Another missing piece conceals the identity of the location. A third shadow hints that another person may have been cut out of the picture.

## Mouse and Raven

The two figures sit across from a game of backgammon. The raven blathers on, chatting about who knows what. The mouse quietly sips at his lemonade, obviously interested in something else. The raven is preparing to cheat at the game, switching the dice.

## Cast Out

In the foreground we have a young woman crying, her face buried in her hands. Growing naturally from her back is a set of colorful butterfly wings. In the background are three mean-looking goths. Each looks defiant and each makes a different dismissive gesture to the foreground girl.

## Martyr

A woman sits in a throne. She looks sad and off-camera. Her flesh is pierced in many places by spears, held by off-scene attackers. The spears pierce her heart, her womb, and her head. Her hand loosely holds the spear in her heart.

## Triumph and Impatience

Father holds up newborn over his head, looking up at it with awe. Child had radiant glow around him. Mother sleeps with a smile nearby. The specter of death studies a clock reading 11:55.

## Keeper of the Monkey

A screaming baboon perches atop our subject's head. The monkey hurls cigarettes and needles at a nearby crowd of preteens. The subject holds the beast's leash. One of the preteens holds up her hand to block the barrage.