

# THE SHOTGUN DIARIES

## A Zombie Survival Roleplaying Game

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Written for Nick Watts  
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Dear Diary,

Went to the grocery store today for supplies. We got canned soup, canned vegetables and canned fruit. We lost Marie.

After we all agreed to stay together, after we all agreed going out alone was too dangerous, after all of that, she decided to search the backroom. And none of us noticed. None of us noticed until she started screaming.

Our buddy system completely failed. Jay ran for the front door and never looked back. Ron and I dropped our bags and shouldered our rifles. When we got there, it was too late. We blockaded the door and grabbed what bags we could. Then, we tried to catch up with Jay.

He was already in the shop, the iron gate shut. If Ron didn't have his own key, Jay would have left us out there. I was almost out of ammunition when the gate went up. We had to cut off their hands to get it closed.

It's never easy to confront someone when everyone has guns. Jay wouldn't back down. He was right to run, he said. He was right to get the hell out of there. Ron tried to tell him that Marie was his buddy and it was Jay's fault it happened at all. Jay wouldn't listen and at the end, he decided he would be better off on his own. We agreed he could take whatever he could carry and let him go. He went out the roof exit and ran across the rooftops toward the edge of the city.

That leaves us with seven. Only three of us can make the grocery run. Walter and Virginia are too old, Tommy is too young and Elizabeth should be giving birth any day now. None of us know what to do. We can't even get to the library to get a book.

My day trudges forward. I eat canned peaches and look out the window. The iron gate keeps them out of reach of the glass. Fortunately, the gun store has bullet proof glass, so even if they get through the gate, the glass will buy us time to reach the roof. I finish my peaches and look out at the faces. They aren't even human anymore. I don't know why I'm so compelled to watch them. Maybe I'm looking for mom and dad. Maybe I'm looking for Debbie. I haven't seen them yet. Ninety-two days gone and I haven't seen anyone I know. How weird is that? I haven't seen anyone I know.

Day is done. I'll try to sleep. The place where I do see the people I know. And I watch them die again and again and again. Good night, diary. One more day under my belt. At least there's that.

# Introduction

*The Shotgun Diaries is a roleplaying game about zombie survival horror. Specifically, this is Nick's roleplaying game about zombie horror. I designed it for his birthday, so if it seems I'm talking to a specific person, I am. This game belongs to Nick and he gave me permission to show it to you. So, if you like it, the next time you see him, make sure to thank him.*

*(And happy birthday, Nick!)*

*In the game, you play the roles of survivors of the zombie apocalypse. Why the zombies are here really doesn't matter, does it? We know what happens to those who try to find a cure. We know what happens to those who study the zombies. The only choice here is to survive.*

*You will need three to six players (less and more than that diminishes gameplay) and a Zombie Master who acts as the referee. You also need six-sided dice and different tokens for the Zombie Clock and Fear.*

*So, let's find out who your alter ego is in this world of fear and teeth.*

## MAKING A SURVIVOR

*All zombie survival movies have particular kinds of characters. You may even call them archetypes. What is your archetype?*

### The Clever Survivor

*The Clever Survivor knows how to make tools out of the strangest things. He also knows how to make complicated machines work. He always rolls at least four dice for any risk involving tools, devices or machines.*

## **The Dangerous Survivor**

*The Dangerous Survivor has been trained with weapons. He's a cop or a soldier or just a gun nut. The Dangerous Survivor always rolls at least four dice for any risk involving weapons.*

## **The Fast Survivor**

*The Fast Survivor isn't very big, isn't very smart, but she can run like hell. The Fast Survivor always rolls at least four dice for any risk involving speed.*

## **The Sneaky Survivor**

*The Sneaky Survivor knows how to get around without being seen. He always rolls at least four dice for any risk involving sneaking around and not being seen.*

## **The Strong Survivor**

*The Strong Survivor may not be very smart, but when you need to block the door, he's the guy to get. The Strong Survivor always rolls at least four dice for any risk involving any physical actions.*

## **The Helpless Survivor**

*The Helpless Survivor is in a wheelchair or is pregnant or is a little child who can't protect himself. The Helpless Survivor never rolls any dice, but if anyone takes a risk to help or protect him, they roll two additional dice.*

*(Note: the Helpless Survivor is best played as an NPC. Most players will find the Helpless Survivor difficult to play because he doesn't have any dice. However, if players are willing to take a chance on a particularly challenging role, the Helpless Survivor is the way to go.)*

# TAKING RISKS

*Whenever your character wants to take a risk, roll dice. Roll a number of six-sided dice equal to your Survivor type. If any of your dice rolls a 6, you get to say what happens to your Survivor. If none of your dice rolls a 6, the Narrator says what happens to your Survivor.*

*That's the basic mechanic. But, there are some complications.*

## No Zombie? No Roll!

*First, an important rule: if no zombies are present, the Survivors don't need to roll for any risks.*

*If the Survivors are locked up in a shopping mall and they've cleared all the zombies out, they don't need to roll for anything.*

## No Dice? No Dice!

*If you can't roll dice, the Zombie Master says what happens. That doesn't always mean you get eaten by zombies, but it probably does. Time to make a new Survivor. This means if you are the Fast Survivor and you need to lift a heavy gate to get away from the zombies... you get no dice to roll.*

## Killing Zombies

*On the other hand, if you are rolling dice, zombies are present. However, no Survivor should ever "roll to kill zombies." In this game, I assume that if you are rolling dice, you are always killing zombies. Climbing a ladder? You're killing zombies. Trying to get through the window? You're killing zombies. Grocery shopping? You're killing zombies. Saving another Survivor from a zombie attack? You're killing zombies.*

*Every risk involves shooting zombies. Don't waste rolls trying to shoot specific zombies. You are always shooting zombies.*

## **Don't Split the Party**

*Whenever you take a risk, roll your basic dice from your Survivor Type. However, if you are with other people, you can roll a number of bonus dice equal to the number of people with you.*

*For example, if you are out getting groceries at the local food shop, trying to sneak by the zombies, you roll a number of dice appropriate to your Survivor Type plus a number of dice equal to the number of people with you. If you have five people with you, roll five bonus dice. If any of those dice rolls a six, you get to say what happens to your Survivor.*

## **Tools & Weapons**

*Whenever you are using tools or weapons, you increase your chance of success. Tools and weapons give you a specific bonus listed as "+1" or "+2." Most tools give you a +1 bonus and most weapons give you the same bonus.*

*A +1 bonus lowers the difficulty of a risk from 6 to 5, essentially adding one point to any die you roll, turning a 5 to a 6 (with a +1). So, if you have the right tool for the right job, any 5 or 6 allows you to say what happens to your Survivor. A tool or weapon that gives you a +2 turns a 4, 5 into a 6, giving you a success.*

*Tools only have a +1 bonus.*

*Hand weapons (such as lug wrenches, baseball bats, katanas, and chain saws) also give a +1 bonus.*

*Firearms have a +2 bonus.*

# SUPPLIES

*At the beginning of play, every Survivor rolls four dice. Any die that rolls a 6 gets thrown into a common pool. This is your Supply Pool. It represents food, ammunition, bandages and other things necessary for survival. The more dice in the pool, the more supplies you have.*

*At any time during the game, a player can draw dice from the Supplies Pool. These count as bonus dice he may roll to succeed in a risk. However, once the dice are gone, the Survivors no longer have the supplies they need to survive. The ammunition is gone, they have no more clean bandages, the propane tanks are empty, a tire blows out on the car, etc.*

*This doesn't mean you can't fight zombies, but it does mean you have no bonus dice to do it. Supplies provide the kind of bonuses Survivors need to continue surviving. To replenish their Supply Pool, Survivors must find sanctuary.*

# SANCTUARY

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*For a break in the horror, Survivors can try to find Sanctuary. A safe place to rest, recoup and replenish supplies.*

*Finding Sanctuary requires a risk. Every Survivor takes a risk based on their unique abilities. The Fast Survivor rolls four dice, the Smart Survivor rolls four dice, etc. If the Survivors roll a number of sixes greater than their current number (four Survivors rolling five or more sixes; three Survivors rolling four or more sixes), they find Sanctuary. Gather up all your sixes. The number of sixes you roll equals the safety of your current Sanctuary. A gun shop. An abandoned grammar school. A grocery store.*



Throw all the dice that rolled a six into a common pool, which becomes the Supplies Pool. If the Survivors already have supplies remaining when they find a new Sanctuary, the new roll adds to the current Supply Pool.

The number of sixes rolled also represents the relative security of the found Sanctuary. But if a Survivor exits the Sanctuary (to get food, find more Survivors or for any other reason), the Survivor is not safe and must deal with the zombies.

## THE ZOMBIE CLOCK

The Zombie Clock represents the imminent and inevitable arrival of zombies. At the beginning of the game, the Zombie Clock starts at 1 (one zombie). You can represent the Zombie Clock any way you like. Dice, figurines, skulls, teeth, etc.

Every ten minutes of real time that goes by:

- roughly, a day passes, and
- the Zombie Clock inches up one more rank, and
- the Supply Pool goes down by one.

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Again: Zombie Clock goes up one, Supply Pool goes down one. This represents the passage of time. Zombies gather and Supplies dwindle.

At any time, the Zombie Master can unleash zombies in the Survivors' direction. The number of zombies equals the rank of the Zombie Clock.

If the Zombie Clock's rank is lower than the security rank of the Sanctuary, the zombies cannot find a way in. The Survivors are safe. No zombie can enter the Sanctuary.

This gives the players time to prepare for the inevitable. Sooner or later, the zombies will find out what's going on inside the Sanctuary and find a

way to get through the Survivor's defenses. As soon as the Zombie Clock reaches a rank greater than the Sanctuary's security rank, the zombies have found a weak spot and start creeping into the Sanctuary.

After any attack of zombies, the Zombie Clock resets itself back to zero.

## **Complications**

The Zombie Master may also use the Zombie Clock to create complications in the game. By discarding one rank of the Zombie Clock (turning it down from four to three, for example), he can cause a particular complication for the Survivors.

- The car's engine overheats or runs out of gas.
- The power goes out in the Sanctuary and can only be fixed outside.
- A small fire mysteriously breaks out in the kitchen.
- The faucets go dry.
- A lone zombie finds an unprotected Survivor.

Complications deduct one rank from the Zombie Clock, providing the Zombie Master an opportunity to throw problems into the Survivor's faces.

Complications override all other rules. Even if the Survivors are safe in the Sanctuary, a single zombie can stumble his way through their defenses and find the Survivors. The Sanctuary cannot be fully compromised, but one small thing can go wrong. Perhaps the dogs and cats in the pet store are infected and attack one of the Survivors? Or perhaps they missed a zombie in the Sporting Goods Section, just behind the golf clubs...

# FEAR

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*Fear eats at your confidence and makes you act in stupid, selfish ways. Every character can earn Fear based on his experiences in the zombie apocalypse. Your character starts with one Fear Rank.*

*Whenever you make a risk, you must use a number of Fear Dice equal to your Fear Rank. Pick a d6 that doesn't look like the others. That is your Fear Die.*

*So, if you have a 1 Fear Rank and you are rolling 4 dice, you roll 3 normal dice and one Fear Die. If your Fear is 3 and you are rolling four dice, you must roll three Fear Dice and one normal die.*

*If you ever choose your Fear Die as a success, you must use your action to hide, run away or otherwise save yourself. Your friends on the other side of that door? Lock it. There's zombies, too! And they can't get in here!*

## Fear Checks

*Certain events can cause your Survivor to gain Fear Ranks. We call this a Fear Check. Whenever your Survivor sees one of the following events, roll one die. If the result is higher than your current Fear rank, your Fear rank increases by one. For example, Nick is wandering around the Sanctuary when he opens a door and finds a zombie chewing on a corpse's brain. This is a valid cause for a Fear Check. Nick's current Fear Rank is 2. He rolls a die. The result is 4. Because Nick rolled higher than his current Fear Rank, his Fear Rank increases by one rank.*

*Just seeing zombies is not enough of a reason for a Fear Check. Zombies are everywhere and you see them all the time. Specific circumstances must be met to cause a Fear Check.*

*Some examples of what could cause a Fear Check:*

- *he sees another Survivor eaten by zombies*
- *he sees a zombie he recognizes*
- *finding a zombie in a Sanctuary*
- *he loses something key to his survival (a gun, food, a hiding place)*
- *another Survivor ditches him out of self-survival*
- *any other scene of horror and hopelessness (as per Narrator's judgment)*

## **THE DIARY**



*Your Survivor has a diary, recording his daily existence in the zombie apocalypse. Every day is one page. Every day is an affirmation that you are still alive and every day you are still alive is another chance that something will change. Someone will come. A break in the horror will allow us to escape. Every day is another day.*

### **Benefits**

*Every game session is an opportunity to write an entry in your diary. It must be a full page. If you write an entry in your diary, you get two small benefits.*

*Every entry lowers your Fear Rank by one. But your Fear Rank is always at least one; it never goes to zero. Not ever. You may have hope, but the zombies are always within reach.*

*Waiting for you to make a mistake.*

*Every day, you can say something is true. Make sure to underline this or highlight it in some way. The thing you write down that's true gives you one*

bonus die for a specific circumstance. For example, you write down that Survivor Jill is a nurse. She gets a bonus die for any risk that's appropriate. You write down that Survivor James is great at finding food. James gets a bonus die for finding food. Remember: your bonus die only counts for one specific circumstance.

You can even write down things that are true about zombies. They're slow or fast. They eat brains or they don't eat brains. You have to shoot them in the head or you don't have to shoot them in the head.

Don't go writing down "I'm awesome!" and expect a bonus die for all actions. Only a wanker would do that. And you're not a wanker, right?

## RESCUE

If you wish, set a time for rescue. A real time. Say... five game sessions. Each game session is one day. Anyone who makes it to the end of the time period gets rescued by the helicopter or by the army or by rednecks with shotguns in pickup trucks. Congrats. You made it. Until next time.

## ZOMBIES

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So, let's talk about zombies.

First off, zombies don't get any dice. Zombies win a die roll when the Survivors fail one. Otherwise, they don't get any dice.

Also, the Zombie Master can use Complications to allow zombies to stumble upon solutions they would normally not be able to solve themselves. For example, we've got a bunch of zombies in the elevator. Complication Point: one of them elbows the seventh floor button. Or, the zombies can't get up the escalator. Complication Point: one of them stumbles up the right way.

## Infection

*Instead of dying from zombie attack, a Survivor can become infected by the zombies. This happens when the Survivor fails to roll a six. The Zombie Master shows mercy on the poor Survivor and allows him to live just a little bit longer.*

*The Survivor remains infected until the Zombie Master spends a Complication Point to turn the Survivor into a zombie. He should do this at the most opportune (or inopportune) time.*

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## Survivor Zombies

*If a Survivor dies, he becomes a zombie. If the player wishes, he can continue playing his character as a Zombie. Note the difference between zombies and Zombies. Make sure to use the proper inflection to note the difference.*

*("Is it a zombie or a Zombie?")*

*A Zombie has four dice to be a zombie to do the things zombies do: rip, tear, break, bite, chew, gut and destroy. But deep in his dim and dead mind, he still has foggy memories of what he used to be. So, each zombie type gets one special ability. All of these turn back the Zombie Clock by one rank if a Zombie chooses to use them. If the Zombie Clock is at zero, the Zombie cannot use his special ability.*

*If the Total Fear of the Survivors is greater than the number of Survivors, Zombies can use their special abilities at will.*

- The Strong Zombie gets four bonus dice for physical risks (that's a total of 8!).*
- The Sneaky Zombie can sneak into a Sanctuary without being seen.*

- *The Clever Zombie can sabotage the Supply Pool by 1d6.*
- *The Dangerous Zombie cancels the benefit of weapons.*
- *The Helpless Zombie can overwhelm a victim with complete hopeless pity, stealing two dice from his roll.*

## **Survivor vs Zombie**

The only time Survivors roll against zombies is if they encounter a Zombie. Both the Survivor and Zombie roll appropriate dice. Whoever rolls the most sixes says what happens. This doesn't mean the Zombie kills the Survivor if he rolls the most sixes, but it generally does. Ties go to the Survivor, but the Survivor becomes infected.

## **Zombie Master Notes**

*Finally, a few notes for you, the Zombie Master, on how to make the game fun, intense and interesting.*

## **Watch Zombie Movies**

*No kidding, huh?*

*But you'd be surprised by how many ideas you get from sitting down with your favorite zombie movie and a notebook. Watch critically. Think to yourself, "How would I use this in the game?" A little preparation this way will give you a whole tablet full of ideas for your next game.*

## **Know Your Players**

*This is a game about being afraid. That means, you have to know how to scare your players. And that means you have to be a little mean. Find out what scares your players and use it. Just make sure, before the game begins,*

*that your players are okay with a little fright now and then. If they aren't, maybe you should play a game where they get to feel powerful instead.*

*There's more in the world to be afraid of than zombies. Use them. If Jessie is afraid of spiders and Joannie is afraid of drowning and Jacob is afraid of clowns, make sure to use those things in your game.*

*Also know when not to do things to your players. Fun is fun and scared is scared, but sometimes scared isn't fun. Know the difference.*

*And get a helmet.*

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## **Atmosphere & Mood**

*There's a thin line between humor and horror. Know it. And don't let your players cross it too often. Although, you may want to run a horror/humor game (in the tradition of Army of Darkness, for example). Just make sure there's the right blend of laughs and screams. And, of course, dim the lights, put on some scary music and encourage your players to maintain the mood. And if they joke around too much, bump up the Zombie Clock. That gets them worried right quick.*

## **Speed, Speed, Speed**

*This isn't a philosophical game. It isn't a game about the existential dilemma. This is a game about zombies eating your brains. And they're right outside the door. And they're banging on that door and they're going to get through any second now. So run, run, run! Run you bastard, run!*

*The only stat on the players' sheets is Survivor Type. You give them Fear Points, so they don't need to write those down. And when a Survivor dies or gets infected, it's just that easy to make a new one. So run! Run! Run! Run! You can rest when you find sanctuary. But not for long.*



# Last Words

*If you, player or Zombie Master, don't know what to do, roll dice. A six means the player says what happens and anything else says the Zombie Master says what happens. That's really all the rules you need. Everything else is just clever dice tricks.*

*This game isn't about building a character that can protect himself or a character who has the best traits or feats or skills or anything like that. All you've really got is your one trick, a shotgun with a few rounds and the will to survive.*

*And that's all you need.*

*Keep running. I'll see you at the sanctuary.*

*JW*

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