

Year of the Zombie

A SURVIVORS GUIDE TO RISEN AMERICA

ISSUE 4

LEAVING LUBBOCK

TIM WILLARD & JOHN PICOT

INCLUDES WINTERS TALE
VOLUME 2



YEAR OF THE ZOMBIE

A SURVIVOR'S GUIDE TO RISEN AMERICA

VOLUME FOUR: LEAVING LUBBOCK

I tied Pancho to the bumper of a truck, and spent the night in the cab. Them dead people hammered on the outside for awhile, then eventually got bored and left me alone. I dreamed of when I was a young man, growing up in West Texas, and I dreamt of the Indian Reservation too. Finally, the sun rose enough to wake me, and my brain had sorted out what it needed to do for the plan to be semi-solid.

I climbed out, and the dead that were pushing at the truck moaned in disappointment and turned away. Stretching sounded like a bowl of them Rice Crispies, with popping and snapping as my old joints settled into their sockets. I wandered over to where Pancho was tied up, and took off his feed bag and dumped the oats

into the bag of feed that was slung onto the saddle, and then mounted up.

I was going to need a few things in order to get the people out of those buildings. I knew right where about half of them were.

I found the school buses right where I figured I would, and it took me a couple of minutes of work to get the first one started. Pancho was a bit leery of climbing up the stairs and into the bus, but I didn't want to walk back to where these buses were stored. The engine sputtered and backfired a lot, but I managed to get the bus to the street where both buildings were. I parked it crossways and left it there, then went back and kept repeating the process until both ends of the street and the alleys were completely blocked off. That's when I climbed into the Army truck and fired it up.

I used the Army truck to drive over the zombies in the street, running them over and crushing their lives out. It didn't bother me none, that ain't no way for someone to live no how. Once none of them were standing, I got out, and went to work. Any of the heads that were intact, I stomped on until the skull cracked.

It only took about 10 minutes for them Texas Samurai to get the idea, and they came out wielding sledgehammers and ball peen hammers. I could hear shouts and arguments from inside



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the building Winter went into, but I didn't pay them no mind. If'n they wanted to stay in their own little fortress, I wouldn't begrudge 'em.

I turned to the confident looking man and we looked each other over. He had a calm about him, as well as the reassuring feeling of a true leader. I don't reckon I know what he saw in me, but whatever it was, he nodded slightly in approval.

"Well, Mr. Lefferts are you suggesting we take the military vehicle, or take the buses?" he asked me. "As you can see, we number eleven in our group."

"Neither, sir. I suggest you move into the storm drains and follow them outside the city. A good pair of bolt cutters and a sledgehammer should get you through any grates you run into." I smiled. The other man nodded. "Once you get clear, move fast, and find a vehicle you can use. There aren't any big groups to turn over or stop a vehicle once you get outside of town."

"Thank you, Mr. Lefferts. Your assistance is greatly appreciated." The man told me, shaking my hand. I watched as he gave orders to his followers, then went over and hammered on the door to Winter's shelter.

"What?" The question was said harshly.

"Tell Winter the way is clear for her to lead you out." I told the voice.

"We're not leaving." The voice told me, the tone still nasty.

"I would like to speak to Winter." I replied politely. It took a few minutes, and then Winter asked me what I wanted.

"If you don't want to spend the rest of your life in that office building, I suggest you follow the Texas Samurai. They're on their way out." I told her.

"Thank you, Marion." She replied. I went over to the Army vehicle, fired it up, and drove next to one of the school buses. Once there, I climbed out, got on top of the vehicle, and slithered into the school bus through the window. Pancho snorted at me, and I grinned.

"Ready, old boy?" I asked him. I looked out the window to see the last of the Samurai vanish into the storm drain. Winter was motioning to a group of about five people, and while

I watched, one of them followed. I'd done my bit.

I led Pancho out, and headed south. Lubbock was a dead place, so I made a beeline out of the city and headed South on the old boy. There was still sporadic gunfire as I left the city, but none of it was aimed at me. I knew I could not save everyone, and not even all of those I had met were willing to let themselves be saved.

Wandering through the suburbs was an exercise in depression. Many of the homes had open doors, there were many doors and windows spattered with dried brown stains. There were bicycles normally ridden by tots lying on the lawns, and cars strewn about like a giant child had fallen asleep in the middle of playing.

I could feel eyes on me as I rode through the suburbs, but nobody hailed me or shot at me, so I left them to themselves. It wouldn't have been proper to push my way into their homes or their lives.

Once I hit the highway, I felt a bit better. Sure, there was a mighty large amount of them cars scattered around, many of them filled with zombies that banged on the glass as I passed. I stayed in the southbound lane, more outta habit than anything else, I reckon. Pancho didn't like the tarmac on his hooves none, but something about the tall, tall grass; I wasn't so sure I trusted. Just looking at it gave me shivers up my spine.

Toward nightfall, I began looking for a place to hole up where the zombies wouldn't annoy me none. I took one of the off ramps and headed down to a gas station with an add-on garage. There were a few vehicles around the pumps, and several corpses, but I paid them no mind as I hitched Pancho up to one of the pumps and slid off of him.

I checked behind the place, in the dumpster, on the sides, one hand on my Army pig iron, checking for anything I might need to be wary of. Besides Mr. Rattler sunning himself on a pile of tires, there wasn't nuttin' to worry about.

The front door was unlocked, and I let myself in. No chime, so the power was definitely out. I grabbed a candy bar and peeled it open. I be-

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gan munching on it as I wandered behind the counter and into the vehicle bay. There was a shiny foreign car on the rack, tools scattered around, and the heavy bay door. I could see there was going to be a bit of a problem, the power being off and all.

I checked out the door, and found where the heavy duty chain was attached to a sprocket, and figured that was pretty much the only thing holding the door down. Still, I was in a garage, and garages have tools. It took me only a few moments to locate the tools I needed, and I ended up cursing a bit when I barked my knuckles removing the chain from the sprocket.

Once that was done, I pulled the door up as far as I could manage, and jammed a screwdriver into the tracks to hold it up. Pancho didn't like being led into the garage one bit, but a quick slap on his flank got him moving. He made his displeasure pretty plain when he made water all over the tools.

Still, it was amusing, and lifted my spirits after passing hundreds of cars full a' dead folk. I lifted the door, yanked out the screw driver, and let it all crash to the ground. Pancho tossed his head in annoyance, and I pulled up a chair and curried him down.

Once I was done, I hauled my sleeping gear into the store section of the gas station, put Pancho's feed bag on that unruly and villainous face of his, and relaxed. Once I was done with my ritualistic coughing fit, I lit a Coleman lantern and set about cleaning my weapons. They'd taught me when I was drafted that taking care of your weapons meant they'd take care of you, and that was doubly true in this dead world.

That night I dreamed of my youth, before Ol' Scratch set his talons into my lungs, playing football with the other boys at the orphanage. My dream was interrupted by a loud banging on the glass, and I woke up with my shooting iron

in my hand.

Outside there were several of them dead people banging on the glass, and I looked around, curious to what had attracted them. I could see Pancho swaying slightly on his hooves, asleep and dreaming equine dreams. The Coleman lantern was out, and the gas station was completely dark.

Yet they'd found me. They knew I was inside the store, how I didn't know. Two small kids were pressed against the door, growling and shoving at it. I took the time to examine the six of them outside the glass, three adult men, one adult woman, and two little girls. One of the men had part of his jaw torn away, a butcher knife's handle sticking outta his gut, and gunshot wounds. The middle one had a broken neck, a missing arm, and bullet holes in his expensive suit. The last still had rubber around his arm from where he'd been doing horse, several gunshot wounds, and part of his jaw blown away. The woman was fully clothed, with bite marks on her forearms and one on her throat. Both children had been bitten on the face, and one was missing several fingers.

Nothing about their appearance gave any



indication on how they had figured out I was inside of the gas station. The place was completely dark and silent, and I doubted they could hear me through the glass walls and door.

I stood up in my long-johns and moved closer to the glass, the Army pig-iron tight in my fist, and leaned forward to look the man in the business suit in the eyes. They were white, covered with what looked like cataracts. I could see him open his mouth and try to chew on the glass.

Yup, he knew I was there.

I looked around quickly, made sure the store was empty, and then moved quietly to get dressed. Once I was properly covered, I opened the back door to the place and ghosted outside. Mr. Rattler had long since moved on, and my boots made no sound as I moved quietly to the front of the building. They were still hammering on the glass, the two little ones pounding as quickly as they could, trying to force the door open.

I said they Lord's Prayer quickly, and began firing; the red dot lighting on the sides of their heads, and the pistol wheezing softer than mah lungs. The only ones who noticed something was going on were the two kids, both of who charged me. Two head shots and the tykes went down.

I holstered the pistol, returned to my little lair, and stripped back down to mah long johns. Outside still looked clear and peaceful, but just in case I jammed a few screwdrivers between the doors and the doorjambs; just in case.

Were they getting more aggressive because they were getting hungry, or were it typical? The question followed me into sleep.

--In God's Grace;

M. Samuel Lefferts

Sensei Walt Bushey (Epic Hero)

(Fast Hero 3/Strong Hero 2/Martial Artist 5/Komei-Jyuku 10): CR 20; Medium-size humanoid; HD 3d8-3 plus 2d8-2 plus 5d8-5 plus 10d8-10; HP 66; Mas 9; Init +2; Spd 30 ft; Defense 28, touch 28, flatfooted 26 (+0 size, +2 Dex, +9 class); BAB +19; Grap +21; Atk +27 melee (2d6+2, Katana); FS 5 ft by 5 ft; Reach 5 ft; SQ ; AL none; SV Fort +7, Ref +14, Will +4; AP 15; Rep +4; Str 14, Dex 15, Con 9, Int 12, Wis 9, Cha 10.

Occupation: Athlete (Balance, Jump, Tumble)

Skills: Balance +19, Climb +10, Escape Artist +10, Hide +11, Jump +20, Knowledge (Current Events) +12, Knowledge (Streetwise) +7, Knowledge (Theology and Philosophy) +10, Move Silently +10, Tumble +15

Feats: Acrobatic, Brawl, Combat Martial Arts, Combat Reflexes, Defensive Martial Arts, Exotic Melee Weapon Proficiency (Katana), Improved Two-Weapon Fighting, Simple Weapons Proficiency, Two-Weapon Fighting, Weapon Focus (Katana)

Talents (Fast Hero): Evasion, Uncanny Dodge 1

Talents (Strong Hero): Ignore Hardness

Talents (Martial Artist): Living Weapon 1d6, Flying Kick, Living Weapon 1d8, Iron Fist (one attack)

Talents (Komei-Jyuku): Mae No Koto, Zanshin (+5), Tora No Koto, Saiya-Biki, Inazuma No Koto, Kaishaku No Koto

Possessions: Katana

Very dangerous with bare hands, improvised weapons, and literally any kind of Japanese Martial weapon he gets his hands on. Mr. Bushey has a slightly reduced CON (He has bleeding ulcers that forced him out of the USAF Para-rescue). Despite his age (43 as of this writing), Sensei Bushey is still in very solid shape, practicing martial arts everyday, and continuing a regimen of physical fitness. The man has very high energy levels and despite a slightly reduced CON from his ulcers, he can still match blows with younger, stronger men.

He is the President of the Texas Komei Jyuku, which is a Shibuchō (branch) of the

Musojikiden Eishin-Ryu Iaijutsu. Katsujin Budokai is the only Shibuchō (branch) dojo for the Komei Jyuku / Muso Jikiden Eishin Ryu Iaijutsu and Ryoen Ryu Naginatajutsu in the state of Texas. Walt Bushey sensei is a direct student of Sekiguchi Komei sensei (Iaijutsu) and Nobuko Shimizu sensei (Naginatajutsu) and a member of the Nippon Kobudo Kyokan. Bushey sensei is responsible for teaching and spreading the “Itto-shin” or “one-heart” of dento kobudo through the entire state of Texas and surrounding area’s.

Today, the most widely practiced style of iaido in central Japan is “Muso Jikiden Eishin-Ryu,” meaning “Peerless, Direct Transmission, True-Faith Style.” Eishin-Ryu claims an unbroken history of about 450 years; making it the second oldest extant martial art form in Japan (the only budo form with a longer history is “Tenshin Shoden Katori Shinto-Ryu,” an eclectic system of fighting arts that includes some “Iaijutsu,” the art of drawing the sword and reacting to surprise attacks).

The founder of Eishin-Ryu was Hayashizaki Jinsuke Minamoto Shigenobu, who lived between 1546 and 1621 in present day Kanagawa prefecture, Japan. Most iaido historians agree that the inspiration for the name Eishin-Ryu came from the name of the 7th generation headmaster, Hasegawa Chikaranosuke Eishin. Certainly the characters used in his name are the same as those employed in the name of the style. After the 11th generation, iaido branched off into Muso Shinden-Ryu by Nakayama Hakudo. The original branch becomes known as Muso Jikiden Eishin-Ryu after Oe Masamichi. Currently these two are the most widely practiced Iaijutsu/iaido styles in Japan. There are also a number of other, less-widely practiced, forms of iaido that grew out of Hayashizaki’s art.

Tim’s Note: Sensei Bushey is best used as either a wandering friendly encounter, or perhaps the PC’s may have heard of his training people in anti-zombie swordcraft and want to search him out; to learn from him.

Musojikiden Eishin-Ryu

Komei-Jyuku Advanced Class

John’s Note: This is a ridiculous oversimplification of all of the encompassing arts and techniques within Musojikiden Eishin-Ryu. But as the game does not allow for the more complex nuances to be brought out, I have to reduce it to a mere 10 levels of game mechanics.

There are over 59 individual kata within Eishin-Ryu, and that does not include the saiyabiki, or the variations taught within that style. However, creating a 60+ level class seemed too unwieldy for most, so this is as approximate a translation as I could bring to bear.

Keep in mind also, that all of the techniques were used to counter specific situations that occurred in daily Japanese life. For example, there is a kata for killing someone with your sword while sitting at a table and drinking tea! A lot of those simply won’t apply to most situations players will encounter in a typical YotZ game, and so I had to prune and pick the techniques and methods that I believed could accommodate a broad system like D20 Modern.

I hope my Sensei (Walt Bushey) will not be too upset at this oversimplification of him and his art.

Requirements

To qualify to become a Komei-Jyuku, a character must fulfill the following criteria.

Base Attack Bonus: +6.

Skill: Jump 6 ranks.

Feats: Combat Martial Arts, Defensive Martial Arts, Exotic Melee Weapon Proficiency (Katana), Weapon Focus (Katana).

Class Information

Hit Die: 1d8

Action Points: 6 + one-half character level,

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rounded down, every time the Komei-Jyuku attains a new level in this class.

Class Skills

The Komei-Jyuku 's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are:

Balance (Dex), Climb (Str), Escape Artist (Dex), Hide (Dex), Intimidate (Cha), Jump (Str), Knowledge (current events, popular culture, theology and philosophy) (Int), Move Silently (Dex), Perform (dance) (Cha), Profession (Wis), Read/Write Language (none), Speak Language (none), Spot (Wis), Tumble (Dex).

Skill Points at Each Level: 3 + Int modifier.

Table 1: Komei-Jyuku

Class Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Class Features	Defensive Bonus	Reputation Bonus
1st	+1	+0	+1	+0	Mae No Koto (fast draw katana)	+1	+0
2nd	+2	+1	+2	+1	Zanshin (+1 to attack and damage with katana)	+2	+0
3rd	+3	+1	+2	+1	Tora No Koto (draw and attack with katana while moving full speed)	+2	+0
4th	+4	+1	+3	+1	Zanshin (+1 to attack and damage with katana)	+3	+0
5th	+5	+2	+3	+2	Saiya-Biki (use sword and saiya to attack targets at 10' blunt attack)	+4	+1
6th	+6	+2	+4	+2	Zanshin (+1 to attack and damage with katana)	+4	+1
7th	+7	+2	+4	+2	Inazuma No Koto(draw and full attacks with katana while doing full move)	+5	+1
8th	+8	+3	+5	+3	Zanshin (+1 to attack and damage with katana)	+6	+1
9th	+9	+3	+5	+3	Zanshin (+1 to attack and damage with katana)	+6	+2
10th	+10	+3	+6	+3	Kaishaku No Koto (decapitation stroke. +10 for called shots, typically head)	+7	+2

Mae No Koto: Students of Iaijutsu are taught how to draw their katana and attack with it either simultaneously as a function of the draw and to step in and attack while still maintaining a parry. This is the first kata all students learn, but it is the basis for all other techniques.

Zanshin: Iaijutsu requires intense focus and concentration to master. Often novices will

handle live blades and if they lose concentration they may be cut by some of the more complex maneuvers. This concentration allows for a surer, focused strike and is represented by the +1 to hit and +1 to damage.

Tora No Koto: The Charging Tiger. A student who masters this kata learns how to draw, take his full move and attack at the end of it. It encompasses the charge ability and grants a +2 to hit, but the charge can take the form of a staggered charge, or a 90 degree turn.

Saiya-Biki: More of a trick, than an actual technique. The Eishin-Ryu school uses a long cord attached to the saiya (sheath) of

the sword. Using this cord and a sheathed katana, a practitioner of this can use the length of the blade, and the cord to slide the saiya out and smash an opponent in the face. Since Saiya are made of hardwood, that has been lacquered, they can cause a significant amount of damage. Treat the attack as a 10' reach weapon that deals 1d6 blunt damage.

Inazuma No Koto: The Lightning Strike. This technique allows a swordsman to fast draw his katana, make his full move, and still gain all of his full katana attacks in a single round.

Kaishaku No Koto: Eishin-Ryu teaches the technique of how to properly decapitate a person who intends to commit seppuku (ritual suicide). This may sound amusing but it is a very reverent and serious technique that is performed in complete silence without a great amount of motion or attention. Thus it is fitting to include it here. Using this technique, a Komei-Jyuku member can as a full round action, gain a +10 on his to-hit roll for the purposes of targeting a specific location on an opponent.

John's Note: With the bonuses for Zanshin added in, one can easily see how this attack might be a game breaker. As long as a natural one isn't rolled, a person using this attack is virtually guaranteed a successful location hit of his choosing. But remember it is a full-round action, and also can only be performed with a katana. If you're getting mobbed by zombies, or facing opponents at long and short range who are using missile fire on you, you'll find that it's less of a game breaker then you might first have believed. As in real life, the gun is the great equalizer.

Unarmed Combat in Year of the Zombie

Simply put: Don't do it. Unless you're trained in hand to hand combat, going toe to toe with a zombie means you are going to get grappled, you are going to get pulled down, and you are going to get eaten.

However, some groups may want to give character's the chance to do damage to the zombies when fighting bare handed. While it is possible to do brain damage with bare hands, it's goddamn tough to do.

The following hand to hand maneuvers are available, to take on zombies, with bare hands:

Swing & Toss: The swing and toss is simply grabbing a foe, swinging around once or twice, and throwing the foe. It requires a successful grapple check, followed by a contested strength check. If it succeeds, the foe is tossed 5'+1' for every point of strength bonus.

Trip Attack: As per melee combat rules, but this also covers standard foot sweeps, kicking out the ankles, etc.

Bull Rush: The character can do the standard bull rush rules, but stop early, throwing the foe back 5 feet plus one foot per point of strength bonus.

Skull Stomp: When an enemy is down, the character can stomp on their head for 1d4+Str in lethal damage. This requires an immediate massive damage check (DC: 10+damage) or the person will go unconscious. Unconscious characters stomped must make the MDC or die. Zombies must make a fortitude check (DC: 10+damage) or be destroyed.

Knee Kick: The knees are very easy to damage, and a kick directly to the joint can shatter it quite easily. This kick will do 1d3+Str damage to the joint, and unless the victim succeeds in a Fortitude Check (DC: 10+Damage) the knee will be damaged, reducing the victim's speed by 5'. If the check roll, results in a natural 1, the

Deadly Hands [General]

You know how to deal lethal damage with your unarmed attacks.

Benefit: Your unarmed strikes can deal lethal or nonlethal damage, at your option. You can inflict damage on a specific location, with only a -2 penalty to attack rolls. Characters with Deadly Hands are not considered armed and still incur attacks of opportunity when making an unarmed attack against an armed opponent.

knee is shattered and cannot be used to carry weight, as well as halving the victim's speed.

The Deadly Hands feat is useful for those characters that have grown up using their fists for certain brutality, including street fighting, mob work, pit fighting, or maybe just brawling in taverns.

As far as the zombies go for attack actions, as it states: A zombie may move or attack, but not both in a single round. A generous GM may rule that a 5' step, normally a free action, counts as the zombie's move action, allowing a PC to hit the zombie with a 2x4 and take a step back, then whomp it again the next round.

The biggest problem with this is that another zombie may come up behind the PC, and bite them before the PC knows what is going on.

However, when a zombie does get a chance to make a single attack, it may either (1-4 on a d6) attempt to grapple, or just bite (5-6) their opponent.

Still, the rule stands: Just don't do it.

On Zombie Infection

It states, in the rules, that anybody who is bitten by the walking dead survives no longer than 72 hours. That, however, needs expanding on. That seventy-two hour mark counts only if the character is receiving antibiotics, painkillers, and other medical attention. While the zombie infection is apparently not a viral or bacterial infection, the secondary infections caused by tissue necrosis are only slowed down by the antibiotics, and the painkillers merely keep the infected person from lapsing into a coma due to the pain.

Crash program researchers, assigned by the CDC, the WHO, and many other organizations, inspected the infected, attempting to isolate some kind of viral or bacterial infection that perhaps could be fought. No organisms were found in the mouth of the Risen, that are not present (usually to a lesser degree) in the living

human mouth. However, all human researchers agree that a human bite stands a high chance of becoming infected unless treated.

One thing they discovered is that the tissue surrounding the injury seems to be affected by some kind of necrotic agent, the muscle itself rotting and releasing more toxins that continued to affect the muscles and organs.

While getting the blood of a Riser in an open wound, the mouth, or the eyes does not transmit the infection, it appears that it is the blood that carries the infection that will eventually kill a bitten victim.

Mechanics of Infection

Normally, it is just assumed that nobody makes it past 72 hours, however a more intensive way of tracking the infection can be used to heighten the drama of being bitten.

- Every 15 minutes after being bitten, the victim must make a Fortitude Check: DC 10+damage. If they fail, they lapse unconscious and take 1d4 points of Constitution damage. Should they succeed, they take no damage and suffer no other effects.
- Every 4 hours, the victim should make another Fortitude check: DC 15+ number of hours they've been bitten. Should they fail, they immediately lose consciousness and take 1d6 points of Constitution damage. Should they succeed, they will take 1 point of Constitution damage.
- After the completion of strenuous activity (usually combat) the person must make another Fortitude check (DC: 15+number of rounds) or go unconscious. If they make it, they still lose a point of constitution.

The application of painkillers and antibiotics will prevent the 15 minute checks, but not the 4 hour checks.

- Those who lapse unconscious are considered to be losing 1 point of Constitution every hour until awoken.

As you can see, they will die. There is no stopping it. And once they die, they will Rise, and seek to kill all they can.

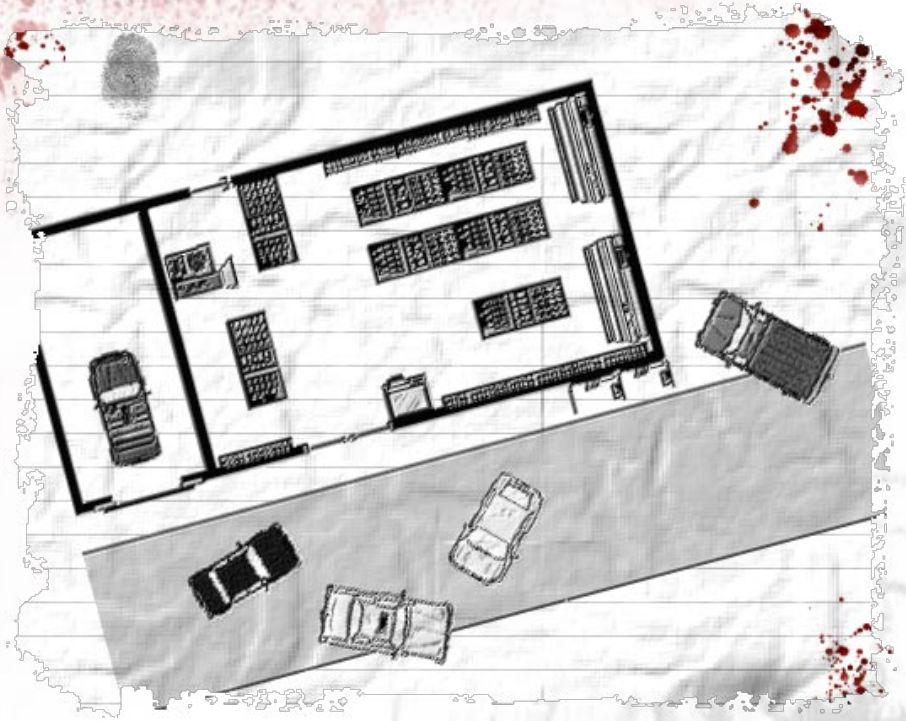
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On average, a bitten person will go into unconsciousness within the hour, passing out from a combination of pain and weakness as the tissues around the blood vessels become necrotic. It is most obvious in the face and on the surface of the skin, as the facial features of the infected soon appear sunken and waxy. The skin becomes grayish within a few hours, as the dead tissue begins to rot.

The infection will start to affect the brain within 12 hours. Reflexes will begin to slow (-1 to Reflex checks and Initiative at 12 hours, and every 4 hours beyond) and the person will be distracted by lights and sounds quite easily.

During the last 10 hours, the patient is always comatose, and shows signs of rapidly dying. Large bruises form beneath the skin, the face takes on a waxy look as the fat beneath rots, and the eyes sink deeply into their sockets. The skin around the eyes becomes bruised, the lips become colorless.

During the last 14 hours, the patient's temperature drops by 1 degree per hour. At death, the average body temperature is 82 degrees Fahrenheit.



zombie can actually have a lowered defense due to damage to the bone structure, in addition to not being very coordinated. It is not recommended that a zombie take more than a -4 penalty to Defense.

Attacks: Reducing a zombie to only being able to grapple works. Once the zombie grapples a foe, it will attempt to either do slam damage (1 on a d6) or a bite attack (2-6) on the grappled foe. This will make zombie's attack rates slower and increase the chances of the living surviving an encounter.

Damage: The zombie's slam attack does 1d6 points of damage; and the bite does 1d4 points of damage; as well as Zombie Infection, which has no save.

Altered Classic Zombies

The following are ways that the classic zombie can be modified, to make it either tougher or easier for the PC's to fight.

Hit Die: Reduce to 1d12, or perhaps 1d8. This can represent massive damage to the zombie, or perhaps a zombie weakened by exposure.
Speed: Reduce to any multiple of 5, minimum of 5.

Defense: Rather than add a +2 bonus, the

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SURVIVOR'S TALES OF RISEN AMERICA

VOLUME TWO: WINTER'S STORY

Publisher's Note: Writings from the point in time known to laymen, as "The Rising" are scarce at best. There are the well-known Diaries of Becka, which most students are required to read in secondary school, but little attention is paid to secondary writings. Of those, the Survivor's Guide is an invaluable resource in seeing how this nation fared after the cataclysm, and the little known "Survivor's Tales" is another. Encouraged by would-be historians, Survivor's Tales makes for an interesting look at post cataclysm life. Of course, the constant insistence that the dead returned to life, as some kind of cannibal monster is ridiculous, but the various "historical" records are an insight into mass hysteria on a global level.

I had made it from my apartment to a refugee center, where my willingness to help had ended up getting me drafted by the soldiers manning it. They'd dressed me up in soldier clothing, given me a weapon and ammunition, and I'd chosen to man the sandbags in the street rather than being inside the building with all the injured people.

There were about three dozen people who were not wounded, and several of them kept haranguing the soldiers about getting either flown out, or driving them out. Apparently they thought that they deserved to be somewhere nicer.

I was just glad to be somewhere where people were willing to shoot the fuck out of anyone who screwed around. The lanky guy, who I was told was the "platoon sergeant", would give two warnings through the bullhorn to show signs of normalcy, and if the approaching people wouldn't reply, those of us manning the guns would shoot them.

The night was fast approaching, the streetlights already flickering on, when two women and a man rounded the corner, staggering with exhaustion. One of the women stumbled, going down to one knee, and the other darted between two of the cars, waving and hollering at us. The man hauled her to his

feet, throwing one arm over his shoulder, as he kept pushing forward. The soldiers were waving their arms and yelling encouragement, and that was when we saw them for the first time.

They came around the corner at a run, sprinting after the three people with their arms in front of them. We could hear a loud screech from them, and one jumped clear over the hood of one of the cars. The Sergeant called out "Take 'em down, protect those civilians!" and several of the soldiers began banging away.

I looked through the tiny sight, trying to sight in on the one man's bobbing head. I kept pulling the trigger; riding the recoil and pulling it back down. One shoulder went back, but he snarled and kept coming, ignoring the wound. Suddenly a bang on my rifle lifted it up, one of the soldiers pushing my rifle up with his.

He sighted, took a single shot, and turned around.

"Hey, asshole!" I snarled, as the man and woman scrambled over the sandbags. The soldier turned around with a shocked look on his face.

"What, bitch?" he replied, idly swinging his weapon around. It wasn't pointed exactly at me, but it wasn't pointed away from me either.

I looked at the weapon, then back up at his face, making sure my weapon was pointed both away from everyone, and away from the building itself.

"What the hell was that? Do you need me manning a gun, or not?" I asked. The Sergeant had turned around and the three other soldiers were watching too.

"You suck, that's all." He said, and started to turn around.

"So I'll get better with all the practice you're giving me? I've been a soldier about two hours; you've been one for years." I answered. "Hell yeah, I suck, but at least I'm trying, and none of those people inside have even tried. If you don't fucking want me, then to hell with you, I'll go inside and cry."

"Go the fuck..." the guy started to say over his shoulder, but Sergeant held up his hand.

"Apologize, Hanson. You were out of line." Sergeant ordered. "That was uncalled for."

Hanson stopped, his neck turning red, and then he turned back to me, a vein throbbing on his forehead.

"Sorry you suck so bad." He grated, deliberately shifting so that his weapon was kind of pointed at me.

Fuck this. I decided. If this was how it was going to be played, I could play it. Not much different than being in a gang, I guess. I stepped forward, kicking his weapon hard enough that it flew out of his hand and stepped past him, putting one foot behind his ankle and pushing on his chest. He flew backwards and I jumped on him, straddling his chest, and pushed my rifle against his neck.

"Don't you ever point your goddamned weapon at me again?" I snarled, pushing my face into his. He was trying to push the rifle off his neck, and turning purple. "You may be hot shit at that rifle, soldier boy, but if you ever fuck with me, I'll be using your balls as earrings."

A hand on my equipment carrying straps pulled me up, off of him, and one of the soldiers grabbed my arms. I let my rifle fall to point at the ground, while Sergeant pulled Hanson up from the ground. Hanson looked like he was going to go after me, but Sergeant grabbed his arm and pulled him back.

"I warned you not to treat people like that. If you don't like it, tough shit, Private Hanson, you can either soldier on, or cross that wire without weapons or gear." Sergeant ordered. Hanson looked petulant for a moment, then nodded.

"Yes, Sergeant." Hanson mumbled, picking up his rifle and heading into the building. I saw the glare he shot both me and Sergeant, but Sergeant didn't.

"You can't go around manhandling people, Private Winter. You got a problem with one of your fellow soldiers, you come to me." His tone brooked no argument, and I stiffened at the tone.

"Yes, Sergeant." I replied.

"Fine, Private Winter, I'm glad you understand." Sergeant replied, and then turned to one of the other soldiers. "Private Nemmel, show her how to use NVG's, I want her effective tonight."

The private showed me how to attach the night vision goggles to my helmet and use them, and it was surprisingly easy, for an eight thousand dollar piece of equipment. I was put on the sandbag line, crouched down behind the makeshift wall, peering over at the street which was now lit in green.

"Private Winter." The voice was from one of the other troops, Lewis.

"What?" I asked, not taking my eyes from the street. I'd seen a couple of those staggering infected guys cross the intersection, and once one of those running ones. It may have been dark, but that didn't mean we could take it easy.

"Watch out for Hanson, he's a vengeful little prick, and you took him down a peg in front of everyone." Lewis told me, his tone serious. "He won't let that ride; he'll be looking for a way to take you down to his level."

"Tougher guys than him have tried." I warned him, shrugging my shoulders. Two of those staggering guys had stopped, and were turning in our direction. I could see that one was missing part of his arm, and the other had a torn up face.

"These guys are just supposed to be plague victims, right?" I asked, watching them stagger closer.

"Yeah, that's what the Ell-Tee says, anyway."

Lewis replied.

"Check out the two guys coming toward us. No fucking way this is some kind of disease. I ain't never heard of no disease that can make someone like that keep moving." I nodded toward the pair, and heard Lewis make a hissing noise.

"No shit. That's impossible, they're, they're..."

"Dead." I finished.

"But how could they, I mean, what could be..." he stammered.

"Don't you watch movies? Those are fucking zombies." His head jerked at my words. I lifted my rifle, and took careful aim through the sight.

"Exhale, hold it, and stroke the trigger, don't yank it." Lewis told me, looking at me. I followed his directions, lined up the barrel post in the middle of the circle, put it on the man's forehead, and stroked the trigger.

The bullet was low, it crashed through the guy's jaw, blowing it nearly clean off, and exiting out the back of his head, the blood black in the NVG's.

"Let me see your weapon." He told me. I handed it to him, and he made some kind of adjustment to the front sight and the rear. He handed it back, and I sighted in on the other zombie. Exhale, hold, stroke. This one hit right where I was aiming, above the right eye. The man dropped out of sight.

"Nice. Ever fired a weapon before?" Lewis asked.

"I plead the Fifth." I answered, dead serious.

"Article Thirty-One." He corrected.

"What?"

"You gave up your Constitutional Rights when you signed up. The Uniform Code of Military Justice covers it all. The right to remain silent is your Article Thirty-One right." He told me. I nodded, and he patted my shoulder as he got up.

"I'll be back in a half hour to relieve you." He told me.

I watched through the NVG's as people stumbled by, obviously mangled. I could faintly hear radio traffic from inside the building, along with crying and muttered voices. The

NVG's made me nauseous when I moved my head too fast, so I learned to compensate for it quickly. By the time Lewis returned, I'd counted over a hundred of those infected stagger by. In the distance I could hear the heavy rumble of rap from The Spot down the street, a hip-hop nightclub.

"Go ahead and grab something to eat and some sleep." Lewis said, crouching down next to me. "Keep your weapon close." I nodded, and followed the example of the other guy coming off of wall duty, moving into the inside of the office building doing the duck walk like I'd learned to do in gym class.

Inside, people were crying and muttering to one another. The Ell-Tee was sitting against a wall, his helmet pulled low and his weapon across his hips, held there by his bent legs. The other guy that had been near him was awake, a miniature telephone receiver clipped on his helmet strap.

Inside, people were clustered together. Most of them had bite marks on their hands and arms. A few children were huddled under green blankets, some of them shivering, some moaning, and some laying too still for my comfort.

"Private Winter." It was Parks, who had given me my gear. He was speaking softly, and it took me a minute to remember I was still using the night vision gear. He was holding out a clear plastic bag full of other bags. When I came up to him, he handed me the bag.

"It's food. Follow me; some of us are bunking down by the back door. Sergeant Gliss sent me to get you." I nodded, tearing open the bag and rummaging through it. By the time we reached the rear of the building, I'd torn open a corner of the foil package and had squeezed the contents into my mouth and wolfed it down.

"How's your first day in the military, Private Winter?" Sergeant asked me. He and about five others were gathered around a small Coleman lantern, food packets in front of each man, and their rifles nearby.

"Not bad, now that we've got the pecking order established." I smiled. Harker smiled back, and shook a handful of M&M's into his mouth.

YEAR OF THE ZOMBIE

"I heard you knocked Hanson on his ass." Harker said, and I nodded as an answer. "Good, fucker deserves it. For someone that managed to weasel out of our last two Iraq deployments, he talks a lot of shit and acts like an asshole." The others nodded in agreement as I sat down.

We talked for awhile; then I curled up on some discarded cardboard boxes and went to sleep. Most of the others drifted off before me, and the small hallway was filled with the sound of snoring and men passing gas. Luckily, the smell didn't keep me from dozing off.

--Autobiography of Winter Discontent
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YEAR OF THE ZOMBIE

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