

# disintegration

A Scenario of Zombie Survival Horror for **Dread**

by Aaron M. Sturgill

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A Scenario of Zombie Survival Horror for **Dread**

## introduction

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*disintegration* is a scenario of zombie survival horror for the *Dread* horror roleplaying game. I have drawn heavily from *The Walking Dead* graphic novels and television series to present a nearly-present-day post-apocalyptic world where true-to-life characters struggle to survive and rediscover society without many trappings of convenience and order.

*disintegration* is meant to be played in one to three sessions, but can be expanded to campaign play if desired. In particular, my goal is to present a full story arc within the constraints of a typical 4-hour convention time slot.

*Dread* is a story game of horror and suspense from Epidiah Ravachol and The Impossible Dream. It uses a block tower such as Jenga® to create pacing, tension, and resolution. Visit them at [tiltingatwindmills.net](http://tiltingatwindmills.net).

The cover image was taken from [wallpapervortex.com](http://wallpapervortex.com).

## overview

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## setting

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One year from today. One year after the dead rose and began to consume the living.

The dead are densely concentrated in metropolitan centers, so living survivors within city limits are going to have a rough time, unless they've been able to cordon off and secure a somewhat stable area or installation. In rural areas there is a much more balanced ratio of living-to-dead, but herds of roaming dead can overrun a farm or nomadic encampment with terrifying speed.

Food, fuel, and armaments are not in terribly short supply... yet... which means there are plenty of people still vying over the scraps.

*disintegration* can work equally well in an urban or rural setting. For instance, a search for fuel could apply to the vehicles the characters are using to travel, or to the generator(s) they use to provide heat to their community.

## archetypes and questionnaires

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There are questionnaires provided for five distinct character archetypes. (See *The Walking Dead* and *Lost* for inspiration.) These roles are not meant to be restrictive, but inspirational: e.g., the Caretaker need not be a goody-goody mother figure; she could be a drug addict who just wants to be left alone, but just happens to have the largest store of canned goods, and finds herself obliged to keep everyone alive (in exchange for...?).

- ▶ The Born Leader (lives by order)
- ▶ The Sage (lives by faith)
- ▶ The Caretaker (lives by love)
- ▶ The Loose Cannon (lives by self-interest)
- ▶ The Kid (lives in wonder and innocence)

More than five are certainly possible, but I prefer not to run dramatic RPGs for more than four or five players.

If you (the host) or the players wish to deviate from these archetypes but still use the *disintegration* plot, you'll simply have to adjust the questionnaires or develop your own to yours tastes.

## guidelines for player characters

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The group of survivors is made up of at least a dozen people. 3-5 will be the player characters (PCs), the rest will be NPCs.

In addition to creating their primary PC, each player should also come up with some ideas for a secondary survivor NPC. (See the back of the PC questionnaires.) Note that we call these secondary characters NPCs, but they aren't really non-player characters; the players will portray these supporting characters, and they can be used to replace PCs that meet an early or untimely demise.

Additionally, the host (GM) will assume direct control of any NPC that becomes directly adversarial to the party. So, if your NPC wants to start killing you or your friends, hand him over to the host.

## flashbacks

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As per the *Dread* rules, players should fill out their questionnaires together, at the table, just prior to the beginning of the story. Once questionnaires are complete, the host will look them over to ensure that the requisite information is present.

As an introduction both to the player characters and the setting, each player in turn will describe a flashback for their character – a memory of the world before the dead rose. This can be anything from a pleasant recollection from childhood, a defining moment in the pursuit of their former career, to a traumatizing or catalyzing event that shaped who they are.

For inspiration, choose an important question on your sheet – one that speaks to your vision for the character. Create an event around that question – an event within the context of our everyday world – and relate that to the group.

## guidelines for the host

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The host is primarily responsible for portraying

- ▶ the ever-present zombie threat

and other adversaries, including but not limited to...

- ▶ supply shortages
- ▶ harsh conditions
- ▶ hostile human survivors, both from within the group and without.

Other miscellaneous advice:

- ▶ Say yes to the players' ideas, or call for a pull, or make their lives harder because of their choices. (In other words, try not to restrict their fun by saying no.)
- ▶ Drive play towards conflict, and don't pull any punches. This is a game of visceral horror and death, not a hero's journey about overcoming insurmountable odds. If they feel they've won, that's fine – just don't make it cheap.

## guidelines for the plot

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Just prior to play, the group should discuss the background of their small group of survivors. Here's a series of questions to get everyone thinking. Make notes as necessary.

- ▶ How did they come to be together?
- ▶ Is there currently a de facto leader, and how did that come about?
- ▶ **(Or)** How are consensus decisions usually reached?
- ▶ Where are they? Start with, Are we...
  - Somewhat settled, or on the move?
  - In an urban environment (lots of undead), or in the country (fewer zombies, but they roam in herds)?
- ▶ What kind(s) of transportation do they possess?
- ▶ Food, water, weapons, and other supplies?

*disintegration's* horror will come both from the plague of undead that has (largely?) overrun the earth, and from other living survivors that will oppose the PCs' immediate and/or long-term goals. Conflict will also likely spring up within the PCs' own group of survivors.

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## introduction

There will be three Acts. Each Act will have several suggested Scenes that can play out in any order the host and players see fit.

Notable NPCs will be detailed (within grey sidebars) with core motivations, personality, appearance, and abilities. Locations or set pieces will be listed with pertinent data, all of which can fit on a typical 3" x 5" note card. I highly recommend that you utilize these story elements not as a strict progression of linear events, but as a toolkit or 'sandbox' within which the players can play. I.e., don't feel tied to introducing an NPC at the exact point I recommend – bring him up when it makes sense in your story.

### Act One

- ▶ Contact
- ▶ Gas Station
- ▶ First Attack
- ▶ Dissension

### Act Two

- ▶ Group Goals
- ▶ Personal Goals
- ▶ The Others Attack

### Act Three

- ▶ Resolution of Act Two (by any means necessary, possibly involving cannibalism and a marauding horde of undead)

If you prefer to think of the story in terms of themes rather than plotted events, here are some ideas:

- ▶ Holding the group together, despite constant conflicts and stress.
- ▶ How to trust a stranger.
- ▶ What is family? What is society?
- ▶ How to live with constant peril (the zombie presence).
- ▶ Humans will always be capable of greater horrors than monsters.

# 2 story

## act one

It's morning. Ask each player, in turn, what they usually do when they wake. In addition, there are two kickers to get things started:

- ▶ They need fuel for their [vehicle/generator/etc.], which is nearly empty.
- ▶ Sarah, a 17-year-old NPC, has gone missing in the night. As far as anyone knows, she went to bed with everyone else (she sleeps alone in a small tent). Now she's nowhere to be found.

The players may split up to pursue whatever is most important to them. That's okay. Tracking Sarah is a good call for a pull or two, as is finding the gas station (see following Scenes). They will not locate Sarah in Act One.

### Scene 1: Contact

Select one of the PC groups if they are split. They are approached by an (apparently) unarmed man – late twenties, well-kept (for the circumstances), showing both hands in a gesture of friendliness. He admits to having followed them for several days, is very hungry, and wishes to join them. He gives them no outright cause for alarm.

*Possible pulls:* reading the situation (success = an unsettling suspicion).

### **Ian, the Stranger**

Appearance: Late twenties, blonde hair, fairly clean. Unarmed.

Motivation: Spying for a nearby group of survivors (the Others) that wants this group's guns, and perhaps more.

Skills: Persuasion, evasion.

## Scene 2: Gas Station

Some of the PCs come upon a gas station. It's unlikely that any fuel can be unearthed, but it's currently their only lead. Unbeknownst to them, there's a group of four desperate humans, armed with a shotgun and some knives, that will viciously attack anyone who comes close to the convenience store building.

*Possible pulls:* noticing the hoarders before they attack; getting the drop on them; dodging their attacks; disarming, incapacitating, or killing them; finding gasoline or other supplies; double pull for finding weapons or a car or something else extremely useful.

## Scene 3: First Attack

Two to four zombies will now attack either the group that made contact with Ian, or whichever PCs need something to do. This can be back at the camp, out on the road, or wherever you need it to be.

*Possible pulls:* noticing the zombies before they're biting and ripping; maintaining composure as they tear into you and your friends; getting a clear shot/kick/etc.; getting a head shot and not just making them angry; running away; first aid on attack victims.

### **Gas Station Hoarders**

Appearance: Well-fed, but filthy.

Motivation: Hell-bent on keeping their little shelter, despite its attractiveness to pretty much anyone passing by.

Skills: Shootin', knifin', yellin'. The shotgun has only three rounds left.

### **Gas Station**

A typical BP station, with a huge canopy over the pumps, and a boarded-up, mostly-looted convenience store. Gas canisters are all empty, but industrious PCs can try to access the tanks beneath the pumps, which are miraculously about half-full.

If you like, you can also allow the PCs to find an abandoned car or truck (low on fuel), and some canned goods or other food.

### **Zombie**

Somewhat fast when hungry, a single zombie poses little threat to a clear-headed person. In groups, they're always devastating.

## Scene 4: Dissension

Following the attack, an NPC named Lorenzo will step up to question the decisions and/or actions of the group's leadership (whomever that might be). Draw upon *Lost* or *The Walking Dead* for a picture of how this often happens in a desperate survival situation, even when it seems uncalled-for. In fact, Lorenzo just wants to be in charge, and the quality of the current leadership matters little to him.

## act two

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### Scene 1: Group Goals

Ask the PCs (especially those in a leadership position) what they think the group, as a whole, should be trying to accomplish. It could be...

- ▶ Fortifying and otherwise securing their position or holdout, if they feel they are in a somewhat stable location.
- ▶ Getting out on the road to progress to their destination. This could be...
  - a short-term goal like finding a store or mall that they can loot;
  - a mid-term goal like finding a regional military or CDC installation, or
  - a long-term goal like finding a permanent place to establish a stable community.

These are just a starting point. Encourage the players to direct the action as much as possible, as you arrange the pieces for the next violent conflict.

*Possible pulls:* these can vary quite a bit, but they will likely be rather mundane. Gathering/erecting fortifications; training PCs or NPCs to shoot or fight; game hunting; repairing vehicles or generators; clearing obstacles on a road; taking out the occasional zombie (nothing too life-threatening).

### **Lorenzo, the Dissenter**

Appearance: Attractive; black hair, chiseled features, intense eyes.

Motivation: Would like to usurp the group leadership.

Skills: Persuasion; sneaking around; fisticuffs.

## Scene 2: Personal Goals

Perhaps one or more of the PCs will have something specific that their character wants to pursue or accomplish that doesn't necessarily involve the rest of the group. This could be...

- ▶ Improving or embellishing a weapon or other possession.
- ▶ Reading or learning a new skill (likely taking more than a single day, but perhaps worth mentioning).
- ▶ Forming/continuing/severing a relationship with another PC or NPC.
- ▶ Observing something specific, such as their environment or the behavior of another character.

*Possible pulls:* again, these can vary quite a bit. Learning a new skill to the point of proficiency (perhaps a double-pull); convincing someone that they're wrong; installing a sight on your rifle; putting your spouse at ease through loving actions.

## Scene 3: The Others Attack

**Deception:** Ian (the stranger they met in Act One) has been spying for a larger group of survivors bent on taking the PCs' group hostage. In addition to learning their habits, abilities, and defenses, Ian has found a friend in Lorenzo, who found an eager ear to bend in regards to usurping the PCs' authority. (An astute PC can learn of this conspiracy during the previous Scene, **Personal Goals**, by observing Lorenzo or Ian).

### **The Others – Overview**

Complement: Around 20 people; mostly able-bodied fighters, with only one child.

Vehicles & Arms: A large pickup truck, a Jeep with no top, two motorcycles, and a cargo van (left at their base). Enough guns to go around, but nothing automatic (unless the PCs are sufficiently armed to call for such).

Motivation: Pretty much a death squad – mobile or stationary, as the story requires. Either way, they always keep a cage (or cargo van) of hostage victims that they use slowly for cannibalism (as seen in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*). Of course, they believe they're simply ensuring their continued survival.

**Precursor:** Ian and Lorenzo pave the way for the Others' attack by attempting to take out any sentries that are guarding the PCs' group (likely waiting for nightfall, when most of them will be asleep). Regardless of their success, Ian will fire off a flare, signaling the Others to approach. Everyone will then be woken by the rumble of the Others' vehicles surrounding their encampment. They will intimidate the PCs by using blinding lights and a full array of guns bristling from each vehicle.

**Goals:** The Others' only goals are to take the survivors' belongings and imprison them, keeping them alive to feed from when necessary. They will not respond to any entreaties or attempts to bargain, and they will almost certainly have the upper hand. There are only two general outcomes: the group of survivors is taken hostage, or they repel the Others for a time.

**Defense:** If the PCs are sufficiently prepared, armed, and/or lucky, it's possible that the Others will retreat for a time. In this case, their leader, Joseph, will announce just before leaving that they have the survivors' friend, Sarah, as a hostage. He says they will kill her in 24 hours if the survivors do not turn over at least a token amount of food to them. This can be communicated via a note thrown in a bottle, if verbal communication is impossible.

**Capture:** If the survivors are captured, they will all be corralled into the Others' cargo van (back at The 66 Motel). Here they will find Sarah, who is thus far unharmed. However, she says she has heard terrible sounds coming from the motel...

### **Joseph, the Leader**

Appearance: Lanky, but healthy; long, brown hair; calm and reasonable.

Motivation: To preserve his authority and the loyalty of those in his 'care', while visiting unspeakable horrors upon his victims, which is his privilege.

Skills: Endearing nature; leadership; cruelty; firearms.



**Important:** only describe what the characters see. Do not tell them what it means. Let them come to their own conclusions. Do not refute, correct, or influence their opinions, unless they ask Sarah questions. Even then, she's mostly just sobbing.

**Lastly:** it's entirely possible that one of the PCs can escape while the rest are captured, or vice versa.

## act three

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The Scenes in Act Three are not strictly defined. Act Three is where the story is resolved, and this resolution flows directly from the events of Act Two.

As previously stated, the PCs' group will find itself in one of two general positions:

- ▶ imprisoned by the Others, or
- ▶ successfully defended, but awaiting a presumed further attack.

In addition, one or more survivors may have escaped capture, in which case they can aid the hostages through guerilla tactics. The Others may believe erroneously that all of the survivors are in their custody.

### The 66 Motel

Here's one option for a base held by the Others. It will work in either an urban or rural setting. If urban, it's near the airport or off the outer-belt; if rural, it's off the nearest interstate exit. It's a pretty standard fleabag from the '70s... two stories, twenty-four rooms, and an office at the front, with a dilapidated canopy overhead.

The Others keep their newly-arrived prisoners in a cargo van parked in the middle of the parking lot. Their cannibalized victims are in room 023, on the second story. As for security, there's a spotter/sniper on the roof and two sentries patrolling the perimeter of the property at all times.

### Scene: Hostages (if PCs were taken captive in Act Two)

The Others have two holding areas for their prisoners: (a) a cargo van parked in the motel parking lot for new arrivals, and (b) a second-story motel room where they keep those they've already cannibalized.

The van has a grate of bars (no glass) where each window used to be (windshield, driver's & passenger's side, and one in each rear door), and a grate wall separating the two front seats from the two parallel benches in back (against each side wall). Sarah is locked inside, so far physically unharmed.

Room 023 in the motel is boarded up from the outside, with no sources of light inside. Sarah has heard gut-wrenching screams from the motel, and may have some suppositions about what's going on.

The hostages in the van will be unable to escape – however, their salvation will be twofold:

- ▶ A herd of zombies overruns the motel.
- ▶ A malcontent Other named Alicia will free the hostage(s) from the van.

These events can certainly coincide with a PC who previously escaped coming to the aid of the prisoners. Of course, escaping from the van into a dense herd of marauding undead is a complication at best, but Alicia knows where Joseph and the Others are, and will help the PCs escape and/or take out their captors (as long as they agree to protect her and her son, Adam).

### **Alicia, the Turncoat**

Appearance: Rail-thin; head closely-shaved; sunken eyes; dour glare.

Motivation: To protect her son, Adam; to free the prisoners; to get away from Joseph; to make him pay for his crimes.

Skills: Sneak; observation.



### Scene: Defenders (if the Others were driven off in Act Two)

If the survivors successfully drove off the Others' first attack, they will be in the tense position of not knowing if or when the Others will attempt another strike. The PCs may wish to launch a preemptive strike, assuming they can locate the Others, which will require some recon (the better part of a day, at the very least).

If they want to entrench and prepare for a further assault, remind them that the Others have Sarah. If they opt to throw her to the wolves and stay put anyway, have the zombie horde (see previous Scene) rip into them, pressing them towards The 66 Motel.

Either way, they will find Sarah in the van and the Others' victims in room 023, as in the previous Scene. Of course, the sentries and sniper will be watching for them – but, if the zombie horde is hot on the PCs' heels, that will be just the diversion that will help them free Sarah, Alicia, et al.

### resolution

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The following Scenes assume that the PCs have achieved some semblance of victory over (a) the environmental zombie threat, and (b) the overt adversity represented by the Others (even if it's just holding them in a stalemate).

### Scene: The Victims

The PCs may discover the cannibalized victims at any time, but eventually, they will probably have to decide what to do with them. There are two to four victims, each with one or more missing appendages (anything from a hand to an entire main limb). They have been locked in darkness and seclusion for several weeks at least, seeing daylight only to be fed and watered. If they are still able to speak coherently, it will be a miracle. Abject insanity and inability to function is far more likely, but utilize whatever portrayal is most effective, given your play group. You can go for blood-curdling horror and tragedy, or you can find a glimmer of hope as the victims realize they may actually have a life ahead of them, thanks to the actions of the PCs.

### Scene: The Others

Then, there's what to do with the Others. If things go well for the PCs, they may end up with a row of hostile (but defeated) prisoners bound, gagged, and kneeling at their feet, awaiting judgment (righteous or otherwise). If the PCs' rescue attempts are thwarted, they may find themselves on the run from the Others, having learned the hard way that you can't always bring evil men to justice.

Either way, the moral of the tale is in the telling. As D.V. Baker said, "Play to see what happens."

### afterword

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*disintegration* can present very divergent tones, depending on the actions and luck of the player characters. The ending can be thought-provoking and **hopeful** if most of them survive and manage to exact some kind of justice for Alicia, the victims, and the Others. On the other hand, if the Others or the zombies are able to take out protagonist after protagonist, the tone can quickly shift to desperate and nigh-**hopeless** struggle for survival.

I don't have a prescription for which is better. Both are present in nearly every survival horror story, so don't be afraid to explore either or both extreme(s) at the table.

This can easily turn into a campaign. If you do that, let me know how it goes.

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What was your career before the apocalypse, and how did this prepare you to lead the survivors?

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For what other skill or talent were/are you particularly known?

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What addiction or dependency gets you through the day, and into the night?

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What hope or belief allows you to live for tomorrow?

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How do you come off to other people? What do you look like?

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Who have you lost (or are most afraid to lose)?

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[FRONT]

# the born leader

How has the apocalypse changed your worldview, faith, or other beliefs?

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What do you fear the most?

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What do you do when faced with crippling fear?

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What do you carry with you at all times that makes you feel secure?

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Why have you lied to everyone in the group?

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Describe your possessions and mode of transportation, if any.

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What is your name?

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# disintegration

A Scenario of Zombie Survival Horror for **Dread**

How did you survive the apocalypse, despite your handicap?

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How do you fit into the group of survivors? What is your particular skill?

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What have you learned from the strange visions that come in your dreams each night?

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With which of the survivors are you hopelessly in love?

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How do the others see you, as a whole?

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How did your immediate family die?

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[FRONT]

# the sage

How has the apocalypse changed your worldview, faith, or other beliefs?

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What is your greatest fear?

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What do you do when faced with crippling fear?

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What do you carry with you at all times that makes you feel secure?

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Why do you care more for the lives of the other survivors than for your own?

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Describe your possessions and mode of transportation, if any.

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What is your name?

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# disintegration

A Scenario of Zombie Survival Horror for **Dread**

What life experience(s) prior to the apocalypse prepared you for the care and nurturing of others in this harsh environment?

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What other skill(s) of note do you bring to the group?

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Who in the group do you trust the most? Who do you distrust?

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Describe your outlook on life in general. Do you (still) believe in God?

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How do you spend the bulk of your time?

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[FRONT]

# the caretaker

How do you respond to life-threatening situations?

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How far would you go to save the life of an innocent youth? What about a peer? What about a rival or antagonist?

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Why do the others see you as depressed or removed (even considering the dire circumstances), and does this accurately reflect your state of mind?

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Describe your possessions and mode of transportation, if any.

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What is your name?

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# disintegration

A Scenario of Zombie Survival Horror for **Dread**

What is it, exactly, that sets you apart from everyone else in the group?

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How does it feel that the others often view you with distrust or outright animosity?

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What have you done to deserve or combat this reputation?

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How are you nevertheless indispensable to the survival or well-being of the group?

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Who have you lost, and how are you likely to respond to further tragedy?

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[FRONT]

# the loose cannon

How do you spend the bulk of your time?

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What did you do prior to the apocalypse, and how does that affect you now?

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Whose opinion do you actually care about? Do they know this?

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Describe your possessions and mode of transportation, if any.

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What is your name?

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A Scenario of Zombie Survival Horror for **Dread**

How do you feel about being one of the youngest in the group? How does this affect how you relate to the others, and how they relate to you?

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What were you doing when you encountered your first zombie?

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You've certainly learned a lot this past year. Describe your newfound skills and/or knowledge.

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Who in the group feels directly responsible for you? Do you resent them, appreciate them, or have some mixture of feelings?

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What terrible secret do you know that no one else does?

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[FRONT]

# the kid

Describe a violent incident in which you had to protect yourself or someone you love. (Or, describe an incident in which you were saved by another character.)

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What's your favorite part about this brutal new world?

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What strange thing happened to you that you can't explain (aside from the undead)?

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What do you hate more than anything?

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Describe your possessions and mode of transportation, if any.

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What is your name?

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## CONSEQUENCES

Physical	Mental/Emotional	Other

## POSSESSIONS, DEVELOPMENTS & MISC. NOTES

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[BACK]

## SURVIVOR NPC

Here's where you make notes about the secondary character you create (completely separate from your primary PC).

Please note that if this NPC ever becomes a direct adversary to you or another PC, the host will assume narrative control over him/her.

This character can also make for a good replacement if your primary PC leaves the game. You can play him/her from this sheet alone, or your host can generate a new questionnaire with this information in mind.

**Name**

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**Former Occupation**

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**Reputation**

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**Skills & Abilities**

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**Possessions of Note**

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