

# **Don't Die: Disaster Action RPG**

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Second Playtest Document

# In Case of Emergency: Introduction

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*Don't Die* is a tabletop role-playing game about fighting to stay alive when everything around you is trying to kill you. A major disaster has hit, and you gotta survive it. This game is meant to be picked up and played in 2-5 hours, primarily as a one-shot. There won't be a big focus on long-term play, unless you plan on making a "sequel" session. Session breaks will in all likelihood kill the pacing dead, and since the goal is not to die, we don't want any of that.

**Don't stop running, don't look back, and most importantly: Don't Die!**

## Social Contract

### Player Roles

This is a GM-less game. All the players work together to tell the story. During the course of the game, each player will wear multiple hats, sometimes at the same time. Here're the responsibilities of each such hat:

#### The Player:

- In new scenes, add When, Why, and Who Else
- Play the intentions and actions of your character
- Narrate details into the setting as the other players explore.
- Offer Hero Pool dice to other players deemed in severe need.
- Fulfill responsibilities of Character, Scene Framer, and Challenger

#### The Character:

- Explore the setting
- Interact with the other characters
- Develop more Assets
- Overcome Challenges
- Resolve Core Dangers
- Complete goals
- Try to escape
- Stay alive, whatever it takes

#### The Scene Framer:

- Establish new scenes, stating Who, Where, and What
- Exercise final say on new additions to the scene

#### The Challenger:

- Introduce new Challenges for other characters

- Introduce new temporary Situational Dangers to modify new Challenges
- Add new possible tools options for other characters

## **Concluding the Game**

The game ends when either:

- The Tension level exceeds the number of players at the table,
- The players successfully fulfill a Survival Option with at least one final living survivor,
- Or everyone dies.

## **The Checklist: Things You Need**

Game basics and materials, this should be presented in a one-page “panic bag” checklist style

### **Repeat After Me:**

Don't ever forget these Five Crucial Themes:

- Gotta keep moving!
- Just barely made it!
- On no, not again!
- It's coming right for us!
- We'll never make it in time!

When the ideas fail you, remember these!

### **Your Bug-Out Bag:**

- Dice: D4s, D6s, D8s, D10s, and a single D12
- Player sheets
- A central scenario sheet
- Mapping Paper

# Strength In Numbers: Scenario Creation

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So you're in the middle of nowhere and everything's gone to shit. Don't panic! First, identify the dangers, and then find help. (Game and Character Creation.)

## Game Setup

Get everyone around the table and go through the following procedure:

1. Set Tension and Clock
2. Establish the Setting
3. Establish the Characters
4. Run Intro Scenes

### Set Initial Tension and the Disaster Clock

The initial Tension of every new game is set at 1. Write this down on the central game sheet. The Initial Clock starts at 12. Use a D12 to represent this on the sheet.

### Establish the Setting

Toss around some ideas about when and where this story will take place. Consider the following three things (with examples):

- **Setting:** Modern, Fantasy, Sci-Fi, Period Historical, Genre Foreign, etc
- **Where:** The Big City, a space station, an oil rig, an underwater research station, the caves of the dark ones
- **When:** Present day, thirteen days in the future, the ancient times, long ago and far away

### Establishing the Disaster

Each player defines one **Core Danger**, like "Raging Blizzard" or such. Keep it simple and to the point, without any background exposition (that will come later+). Examples:

- A crazy axe murderer
- Uncontrollable wildfires
- A sinking ship
- Catastrophic earthquakes
- Military enemies
- An intense blizzard
- The mole people
- A raging hurricane

- An oppressive darkness

Remember, at the beginning of the game, at least one Core Danger must be present in every challenge, in addition to whatever situational dangers are thrown in on the spot. As the Tension increases, more will be added, and likewise more will be necessary in each challenge.

Your group needs to pick one of the core dangers as the central motivating disaster, and write a major scenario goal based on it. This goal should be focused on either Escaping the Danger, Defeating the Danger, or Subverting the Danger. This will be eventually attempted through the Survival Options that are revealed later during play. Make sure this Goal is placed front and center, so all players know the intended goal of the game.

## Establish the Characters

Each player will control a single character of their very own, and try to guide that character to survival during play. At the beginning of play, each player defines the single core **Quality** or **Knack** that most describes them, and writes it on their sheet with a D10 next to it. This is what you do best, and no other character can come close to its mastery. Each player then establishes one important personal **Goal** for their character (other than survival and escaping, which doesn't count since everyone already shares that as a game objective), and writes it down with a d8. The rest of the blanks are left open, to be filled out as the game progresses.

### *The Starting Hero Pool Dice*

The **Hero Pool** begins with a number of d6s equal to the number of players.

## Run the Intro Scenes

Each character should get a quick intro scene, created by the other players. Give them a few minutes to explore the "starting location" and add some facts. Give them a challenge to overcome, using one core danger and one brand new situational danger. When done with the first intro scene, flash-frame to another character and repeat. The goal should be to end up with each character in the same area, able to interact with each other.

## Character Basics

Your character mechanically consists of a list of **Assets**, which are broken down into five types: Qualities, Knacks, Tools, Goals, and Failures. **Qualities** are one-word adjectives like Strong, Fast, Sharp. **Knacks** are abilities and talents like Strong Grip, Crack Shot, and Good with Kids. **Tools** are things you carry around that you can use, such as Nightvision Goggles, Life Preserver Jacket, and Double-barreled Shotgun. **Goals** are driving motivations that push you forward, like "Find my little brother" and "Destroy the experiment data." **Failures** are running records of all the obstacles you failed to overcome.

On the sheet you have room for any number of Qualities, Knacks, Goals, Tools, and Failures. These are all assigned die sizes of D6, D8, or D10 (and very occasionally D4). When you

start the game, you will only have one Quality or Knack that is especially awesome, which is set at a D10. Every player determines a basic archetype based on their character's initial chosen D10 Quality or Knack. For example, if their D10 Knack is "Medicine" then they could be "The Doctor." The Archetype is evoked when exploding dice.

All other Assets must be defined as the game is played, introducing them by burning minutes off the Disaster Clock. All Assets will be rated at D6 (worth mentioning), D8 (pretty good), and D10 (the best). Assets can also be lowered to D4 during play, but no new Asset can ever begin play with that value.

## The Hero Pool

In the middle of the table is set a number of six-sided dice. This Pool begins play containing a number of dice equal to the number of players at the table. During the game, a player can offer one of these dice to another player in order to do one of the following:

- The player rolls the die and adds that many immediate scores to their test.
- The player transforms a Death outcome into a Heroic Sacrifice. The character still dies, but the Need is also achieved for the other players, if applicable, along with a single Boon. The die is removed from the pool in this case, but not rolled.

Hero Pool dice *must* be offered by non-testing players, and can *never* be requested. Asking for a Hero Pool die immediately negates its availability for the action at hand.

The *only* way to add dice to the Hero Pool is by rolling "triples" in a challenge. If three or more dice of any sizes roll the same pip result (say, you get a roll of 3 on a D6, a D6, and a D8), then you add a die to the Hero Pool of the smallest die size in that tripled set (in that example, it would be a D6). This happens regardless of Challenge outcome.

## Failures on the Sheet

You keep record of your character's failures on your sheet. Each time you fail to completely overcome a challenge, pick one of the undefeated Dangers from that Challenge and write it on your sheet under the Failures section. If it is already on the list, instead write a D6 next to it, and it is now a usable Asset in challenges specifically involving that Danger. This represents your character's growing close-and-personal familiarity with that Danger. If there's already a die size next to it, mark a tally. And if that tally makes three, erase the tallies and evolve the Asset. **(Playtest Note: the same as Charges, really)**

Every time you evolve a failure, however, you must then pick another existing Asset used in the Challenge to be devolved, permanently lowering its die size. If this lowers it below 46, the Asset is gone forever. Yes, you can sacrifice Tools this way, too.

- First time: Write down the Failure without a die rank. You can't use it just yet.
- Second Time: Mark a D6 next to it. It can now be used as an Asset against that Danger
- Third and Fourth times: Mark a Tally
- Fifth time: Erase tallies, Evolve to D8, devolve another Asset.
- Seven and more: continue tallying and evolving, to a max of D10.

## Charges: Gaining and Evolving Assets

To get more Assets, or increase existing ones, you have to either tick minutes off the clock, or evolve existing Assets. Using the first option, you can take a new *Quality*, *Knack*, or *Goal* at a D6 by ticking off *three* minutes from the Disaster Clock. If absolutely necessary, you can take this new Asset at a D8 by ticking off *seven* minutes. While the choice is ultimately yours (and yours *alone*), please consider the pacing of the game and such when you do so.

The second option involves the Charge Dots next to each Asset. You gain these dots by blitzing Challenges (i.e. beating all the Dangers).

Using the second option, whenever you fill in three Charge circles next to an existing Asset, erase them and then choose one of the following:

- Either give yourself a new Asset, somehow related to the existing one (write the new one down with a D6), or...
- **Evol**ve the existing Asset, raising its die size one rank (from D6 to D8 and from D8 to a max of d10).

One caveat: no two characters can have the same Quality, Knack, or Goal at a D10. If two characters have “Good swimmer” as a Knack, and one of them already has a D10, the other can’t raise it to a D10. If you are already The Best at something, no one else can also be The Best at the same thing.

Gaining new *Tools* is just a matter of having another player narrate them into the scene. You can’t create a tool for yourself, but you can create them for others. When you think a new item is important enough to keep, write it down with a D6 next to it. Acquiring Tools does not lower the Disaster Clock.

Gaining new *Failures* happens automatically by failing to overcome one or more Dangers during a Challenge (see p.XX).

## Devolving Assets

Sometimes you may be required to **devolve** an Asset. When this happens, the Asset in question is lowered by one die size, leaving any current Charges in place and untouched. So a D10 would be lowered to D8, a D8 would go down to D6, and a D6 would go to D4 (which can only ever be attained through devolving). Any Asset devolved below a D4 is crossed off the character sheet, lost forever.

## Charges and Rerolls

Charge Dots have a secondary function in the game. After the dice are rolled in a challenge, a player who has failed to gain enough scores to defeat all the Dangers can burn Charges on any of the involved Assets to earn rerolls. Each Charge dot burnt (erased) allows the reroll of that Asset die, and you can choose to do this one at a time if you like.

# Situational Awareness: The Meta-Game

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Dangers identified: Check!

Allies acquired: Check!

So now if you want to stay alive, you need to formulate a plan.

(Basic Game Flow Management.)

## Meta-Game Management

In *Don't Die*, there is no central Games Master calling the shots. Instead, each player contributes to the scene with equal power by adding threats, challenging each other, and describing more of the world around the characters.

### Game Flow And Pacing

#### Scene Setup

*Don't Die* plays out in a series of interconnected **Scenes**. Scenes are meant to be complete units, but that doesn't mean everything should be separated by "ye olde horizontal slide transition." Just make sure each scene is clearly its own thing.

At the beginning of a scene, one player should say "I have an idea" and start it off, giving us Who, Where, and What is going on. This player is the **Scene Framer** for that scene. Then the others can also throw in When, Why, and maybe even Who Else. The framing player has first option for those initial three items, and can ask for suggestions if she needs them.

Beyond the initial moment of scene setup, the Scene Framer doesn't have any more authority in the scene than any other player, and should participate in challenges and exploration as normal. However, if another player introduces some new scene element that just doesn't *at all* mesh with the initial setup, the Framer should alter it enough so that it can be worked in without too much mood contrast.

#### Scene Flow

During the scene, the players explore the setting and try to achieve their goals. Optimally, focus should be about one-half roleplaying and narration and the other half Challenges. Players should work together to describe the setting, the smell, the feel, the sounds that keep the characters on their toes, and so on. If a player asks if there are any fire extinguishers available, another player should answer. If a player gets onto a particularly interesting and exciting bit of exposition, let them have fun with it.

During the scene, any player can introduce **Challenges** that one or more of the other characters has to overcome (including involving their *own* character as one of the presented Dangers, if desired). Challenges bring the mechanics into play, and involve a bit of exciting dice-rolling. Challenges are a lot of fun, but you should try and not force the

game down a Challenge-Only road. Use Challenges to punctuate the tension, create more tension, and make the characters' lives deadly, but also be sure to give the characters breaks in-between so that they can explore, communicate, and role-play.

Players should be ready to end a scene – or suggest an ending, at least – when they feel that things are concluded, that this moment has run its natural course and it's time to move on.

## Mapping the Game

Graph paper or other note pads will be very useful for mapping out the locations of things. Having a reference of where certain special Dangers were encountered, and where certain challenges occurred, will be valuable for a lengthy session.

## Dangers

The central focus of the game involves the characters surviving against multiple **Dangers** that are actively working to destroy them. At the beginning of the game, each player established one of the initial **Core Dangers**. It is essential that at least one of the Core Dangers always be present as a threat in every Challenge, and later in the game this minimum will increase.

**Situational Dangers** are introduced when players create new challenges. They should be jotted down on the scenario sheet when introduced. They can be created and used at will, and can be permanently removed from play. They can also be evolved into Core Dangers at Tension Points.

## Tension

Keeping track of the Danger threat is the **Tension** level, which begins play at 1. The Tension level will increase over time, as Challenges are failed and the Clock counts down (see below). The Tension Level determines the following things:

- How many Core Dangers must be present in every Challenge (and by extension, the minimum number of Dangers required)
- How many Assets devolutions must be made when Refusing or Skating by a Challenge.

When the Disaster Clock reaches 0, a **Tension Point** is reached and, among other things, the game's Tension is increased by 1. If the scenario's Tension ever exceeds the number of players at the table, it's game over. Each player should contribute to narrating the final doom of all the remaining characters. See further below for details on Tension Points.

## The Disaster Clock

There is a central timer that counts down towards the escalation of **Doom**, and the establishment of hope. This is the **Disaster Clock**. Each unit of the timer is called a "minute." The Clock always starts the game as 12. Set a 12-sided die out to represent these minutes.

A variety of things will add or subtract minutes from the Disaster Clock. If a character ever fails to completely overcome the Dangers of a Challenge, then the margin of failure may be applied as negative minutes to the Clock, with additional minutes applied in cases involving helpers. If a player refuses to accept a challenge, the Clock ticks down a minute. If a player rolls more scores than needed in a Challenge, additional scores can be used to add lost minutes back to the Clock (although it can never exceed 12). When the countdown reaches zero, a **Tension Point** has been reached.

When a Tension Point is reached, four things must happen:

- The game's Tension is immediately increased by +1.
- The Clock is immediately reset to 12 minutes.
- One new Danger is added to the Core Danger list.
- A Zero Challenge occurs, which could reveal a new Survival Option.

The first two are self-explanatory. The third requires that a new Danger be written down and added to the list of Core Dangers. If any Situational Dangers have been previously introduced, choose from that list. Otherwise, create a new one.

### *The Zero Challenge*

The **Zero Challenge** is a new challenge with a potentially game-changing Need which should take some form similar to "We need to find a way to escape." The Zero Challenge is basically the first challenge of the newly-increased Tension rating, requiring more Dangers to be overcome. If the Need is acquired, then a new Survival Option is written down and made available to the players. If the Challenge is completely failed, no new Survival Option gets added.

This sets the Clock as a pacing mechanic for the advancement of the story. Not only does it introduce new dangers and escalate the threat factor of the game, but it also introduces possible ways for the characters to "win."

### **Survival Options (Winning the Game)**

Survival Options are introduced when the Disaster Clock counts down to zero and the Tension is increased. There are none established at the start of the game. Survival Options introduce ways to actually "win" the game, allowing the characters to achieve the central established scenario goal(s). The players win the game by fulfilling a Survival Option completely, and accomplishing their own individual character goals beforehand.

When a Survival Option is introduced (through blitzing or skating by the challenge), the narration must be added as part of the resolution of the Zero Challenge. The right of narration of this goes to the player who has racked up the most failures (number, dice, pips, total). That player narrates the discovery of some possible escape route or other such survival outcome. Maybe they find documents outlining an evacuation plan, maybe a possible savior suddenly chimes in over the radio, maybe they find the keys to a remote submarine, etc.

The description of the Survival Option must relate to overcoming one or more of the motivating dangers of the scenario. *For example*, if the primary scenario goal is to defeat or escape from a serial killer, then the Survival Option should be some avenue towards doing that, like the acquisition of a secret weapon or plans to burn down his hideout with him inside. Likewise, if the scenario goal involves escaping from a sinking ship, then the Survival Option should be a means to that end: an escape pod, a rescue ship that needs guidance, coast guard helicopters, maybe even a way to save the ship.

Of course, actually getting to these possible survival options is another story entirely. When the option is introduced, each of the other players (**playtest scale-testing variant**: only the two players to the left and right of the narrating player) must add an Obstacle to it:

- ...but it's on the other side of the ship!
- ...but it's right in the middle of the monster's nest!
- ...but there's only room for two of us in the escape pod!
- ...but only the lead terrorist knows the code!
- ...but the alien computers are incomprehensible!

There's one additional requirement: at least one of these Obstacles *must* be narratively opposed to another character's initial Goal (chosen by the narrator of this new Option).

Characters must then overcome more challenges in order to cross off these obstacles and achieve the Survival Option. Narratively, they can overcome these in an infinite array of creative ways. That part is up to them. Mechanically, they overcome them one at a time by including them in the Need of a challenge, and not failing that challenge.

At least half or more of the obstacles must be overcome in order to make the option attainable. Once a Survival Option is made attainable, the players are close to winning the game. The road is now clear, and all they have left to do is get to that option alive. To do so, more exploration, narration, and then a final Major Challenge is required. Each obstacle that wasn't overcome (either by being blocked, crossed off, or simply not attempted), however, works against the final outcome as a *direct* character sacrifice that happens during the post-Challenge narration. **That's right: if you try to attain a Survival Option, and you haven't overcome all of the Obstacles, then one character *must* die for each obstacle that was left/failed.** This also means that you must have more than that number of characters left alive to hope for any chance of survival.

But even if only one character survives, the game is won.

# A Field Study of Essential Practices For Continued Assurance Of Survival: Challenge Management

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How to stay alive in face of constant adversity! (Rules for challenge management.)

## Challenge Management

This game is meant to be a near-constant flow of **Challenges**. Players will introduce challenges for other players, creating conflict that creates story through a series of escalating life-or-death situations. The acting player then uses dice and Assets to try and overcome them.

### Introducing a Challenge

When you want to introduce a challenge for another character, you must give it a Need and a handful of associated Dangers. For Example:

- You need to get out of this house, because it's *on fire*, the *roof could collapse* at any moment, and there's a *crazy man with an axe* coming to kill you right now. (3 Dangers)
- You need to find out more about where you are, but it's *pitch black* and there's *broken glass and metal* all around you. (2 Dangers)
- You need to find gas to fuel these jet skis before the *ship sinks*, the *monsters* eat you, and you run *out of ammo*. (3 Dangers)

When you introduce a Challenge you take on the role of **Challenger**, you can introduce a number of Dangers up to the total number of currently-established Core Dangers. These can include any mix of established Core Dangers and new **Situational Dangers** that you make up on the spot, but a number of those Dangers *must* be chosen from the Core Dangers list, as set by the current scenario Tension. Thus if there are currently five Core Dangers and the scenario's Tension is 2, you can have up to five Dangers in your Challenge, and at least two of them must be picked from the Core Dangers list. The rest can be made up on the spot, drawn from previously-introduced Dangers, or from the Core Dangers list itself. It's your call.

Dangers introduced on the spot are called Situational Dangers. Keep track of them separately on the central game sheet. Ideas for new Situational Dangers:

- Armed soldiers
- Falling debris
- Sudden supply outages
- Security doors
- Enemy archers
- Stampeded animals

- Toxic Fumes
- Flash Flooding

To determine how many Dangers you should involve in a Challenge, use the following guidelines. At the beginning of the game, a range of two to four Dangers per challenge is good. Four or more Dangers will be difficult to overcome, and should be reserved for thematically important moments. As the game's Tension increases, likewise adjust the range in order to escalate the intensity of the game's dice-rolling moments.

**Why should I ever involve *more* Dangers?:** Involving more Dangers than the minimum can directly modify the current Clock. This will make more sense after the following sections.

### Understanding the Stakes

In every Challenge, your life is on the line by the very nature of the game. Whenever something could potentially kill you, you have to roll the dice to survive. Likewise, every time you have to roll the dice, you could potentially die. Potential Death = Dice, and Dice = Potential Death. Any time you could die, roll the dice, and likewise every time you roll the dice, you could die.

Additionally, the Need of the Challenge is obviously at stake. If you roll the dice and fail to achieve the Need, then it is unattainable by not just yourself, but everyone else. If you simply refuse the Challenge, the Need is still present.

Finally, some Challenges will set the Survival Options on the line. If you win this challenge, then you can circle one of the obstacles for that Survival Option, to show that that Obstacle has been eliminated. However, if you die during a Challenge in which an Obstacle is on the line, then that Obstacle is permanently blocked, and thus cross off the list.

### Refusing the Challenge

If you do not accept the challenge, your Assets will be diminished. Upon refusal you must immediately apply a number of devolutions to your Assets equal to the current Tension rating of the game. You can spread them out across multiple Assets, or apply multiple to the same Asset, it's your choice. *Additionally*, immediately knock one minute off the Disaster Clock. Then work with the Challenger to narrate how you avoided it somehow. By refusing to accept the challenge, you also fail to achieve the Need. The Need is still present, however, and if it makes sense in the current store, it could possibly be attained by another player, or through someone else volunteering a new Challenge.

### Accepting the Challenge, Rolling the Dice

If you choose to accept the challenge, Say So and then get your dice ready to roll. **You always start your dice pool with a single D6 for free.** To add get more dice, you can evoke one Quality, one Knack, one Goal, one Tool, and potentially one evolved Failure (provided it is on your sheet, has a die rank, and is one of the Dangers in this Challenge), with each invoked Asset adding its die to the pool. In other words, **you can invoke a single**

**Asset from each category to add bonus dice.** Each Asset can be evoked an unlimited number of times *per scene*, but only once *per Challenge*. Once ready, roll the dice.

## Exploding Dice

If you can evoke your character's archetype in the challenge, all dice explode, adding new dice of equal sizes for any maxxed rolls. For example, if you're testing to save someone's life on the medical table, and your archetype is The Doctor, then that would be an appropriate situation. Don't abuse this, as the table can veto your use of it.

## Helping Out and Interfering

A character can help out another character in a Challenge by lending one of their Assets to the test. The lending player rolls their own die, and adds its result to the active character's dice rolls. The Asset must be applicable.

Helping someone out can potentially expose you to harm, however. The mechanical drawback to helping out is that if the acting character still fails to completely overcome all of the Dangers, the Clock is ticked down additional minutes equal to the number of helping characters involved.

If a character wants to interfere, she becomes another Danger added to the situation. Since this game is about Not Dying, the defending player is the only one that ever rolls the dice. When a character directly acts against another character, the aggressing character is treated like a Danger. When two characters act against each other, the players have to determine which character has the most to lose, and that one makes the roll.

## Outcome

Each die that rolls a four (4) or higher is a **score**. You can choose to burn Charges on involved Assets in order to reroll those specific Asset dice, should you need to (**Playtest: what about charges adding additional dice, instead?**). Each time you reroll, you can choose to keep the higher of the two results.

For each scoring die, you get to overcome one of the Dangers. Depending on how many you overcome, your outcome will be one of three: Blitz, Skate, or Die. If you roll enough scores to overcome all of the Dangers or more, then you've **Blitzed** the Challenge. Not only did you attain the Need, but you did it so well that you can immediately add a Charge to one of your involved Assets. Choose another player at the table to Narrate your exciting good fortune. Additionally, if the involved # of Dangers was *greater than* the current Tension, then you also get to choose to either add or subtract minutes from the Clock equal to the difference (so if Threat is 4 and you defeated 6 Dangers, you can modify the Clock by 2 minutes).

If you rolled *at least* one score but not enough to overcome all of the Dangers, then you've **Skated** by the Challenge. You attain the Need still, but must make a number of combined Asset devolutions equal to the game's current Tension. Additionally, you must tick a number of minutes off the Clock equal to the number of Dangers you failed to overcome, plus one for each additional helper you involved. On the plus side, you also get to mark or

evolve a Failure (see p.XX). Choose another player at the table to Narrate your rather complicated fortune.

If you didn't score *any* dice, then you're dead. Not only do you fail to attain the Need, but you also perish at the combined hands of the present Dangers. Additionally, tick off Disaster Clock minutes equal to the number of Dangers of the challenge, plus one for each additional helper. Bummer. Choose another player at the table to Narrate your ultimate demise.

### *Blitz Results*

**Achieved When:** The number of rolled scores equals or exceeds the number of Dangers.

- Need is fulfilled.
- Narration Rights go to player of your choice.
- Clock is...
  - If # of involved Dangers = Current Tension, then Clock is Untouched.
  - If # of involved Dangers > Current Tension, choose to increase or decrease Clock by the difference.
- Bonus: Mark a circle next to one Asset, and spend any other Boons if applicable.

### *Skate Results*

**Achieved When:** Scores are rolled, but not enough to overcome all the Dangers.

- Need is fulfilled
- Narration Rights go to player of your choice.
- Clock counts down by number of unbeaten Dangers. If there were helpers, mark off additional minutes = # of helpers.
- Consolation Prize: Mark down a new Failure, or fill in a circle next to an existing one.

### *Death Results*

**Achieved When:** No scores at all are rolled.

- Your character is Dead!
- Need is unfulfilled.
- Narration Rights go to player of your choice.
- Clock counts down by number of Dangers. If there were helpers, mark off additional minutes = # of helpers.
- Boons: None!

## **Narration Rights**

Regardless of outcome, the acting player chooses who gets final narration rights. If the result was a Skate, remember to narrate how each of the unscored Dangers affects that character. In the case of Death, be sure to make it especially gruesome and terrifying.

A note to the Narrator of success: in this game, there are no “critical scores.” Meaning: when narrating the success, don’t consider any additional scores the character may have generated. Those are hers to use as she desires (see “Boons” below). Overcoming the Dangers is success enough of its own, so keep in mind the “just barely made it” spirit of this game. **Always remember the five core themes when narrating success!**

Also, remember: if the Need involved the resolution of an Obstacle on one of the Survival Options, be sure and involve that resolution in the Narration.

## Boons

Boons are the currency of particularly awesome Blitzes. For every score you roll beyond what is necessary to completely overcome all of the Dangers, you gain a Boon. These can be spent to buy additional effects beyond the narrated success. Once your chosen narrator has finished telling the outcome of your success, you then have the option of choosing your Boons. Each Boon can do one of the following:

- Asset Evolution: Fill in a Charge dot next to one of the Assets used in the Challenge.
- Add a fact to the moment
- Lock a Core Danger out of the current scene or until someone dies
- Remove an involved Situational Danger from the game, permanently
- Add or subtract a minute to/from the current Disaster Clock

**Asset Evolution:** You can mark a Charge circle next to an Asset. When an Asset has all three circles marked, it is eligible for evolution.

**Facts:** For example, after climbing that elevator shaft, she has earned some Boons. Enemies are now running down the hall toward her position. She uses a boon to narrate her character sliding across the slick floor and slamming a security panel, shutting the heavy security door and disabling the access override.

**Locking/Removing Dangers:** A Core danger can be temporarily locked out of play. For the duration of the current scene or until someone dies, that danger cannot be brought back into play. If the Danger is Situational, it is removed from play permanently. In either case, the Danger must have been part of the Challenge.

**Adjust the Clock:** You can adjust the clock in either direction, requiring one Boon per minute adjusted.

## Check for Triples

Did three or more of the dice roll the same face result? If so, add a new die to the Hero Pool *after* the rest of the outcome is resolved.

## Failed Dangers

If you fail to overcome one or more Dangers, yet manage to remain alive, regardless of the outcome you will need to mark a failure on your sheet. Pick one of the un-beaten Dangers which you feel affected your character the most in the final narration, and write it down on

your sheet. If already there, write a D6 next to it, and if that's already the case, mark a tally. This is more fully detailed in the character section, above.

## Death

The basic premise is this: A challenge is put in front of you, with a number of components you must overcome. If you roll the dice and manage not to overcome any of them, then you die. So if your challenge is that there's water rushing in, electrical wires are flopping around, an elevator is about to fall on you, and the only escape is a door that can only be reached by climbing some broken pipes, as long as you buy off at least one of them with a score, you're still alive, although probably hurting. But if you fail to achieve even a single scoring die, you're dead.

Maybe when you would be forced to die, you can instead sacrifice one of the Assets you used to narrowly survive, giving you one surviving score in exchange for permanently sacrificing something, be it an item, a skill, whatever.

Dying mid-game does not affect the player count as far as Tension is concerned, because you still have narrative power and are still considered a player.

### So Now That You're Dead...

Should your character die before the end of the game, all is not necessarily lost. New Character? New Faction? Continue as a Challenger?

# Worst-Case Scenarios: Hardcore Mode

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The basic game rules can be considered “Normal Mode.” The following are the rules for Hardcore mode, which focuses on incorporating Fear with an amped-up game difficulty. Hardcore is recommended for people who have played at least once before. There is an added bit of record-keeping involved, in the form of Core Danger evolution tallies. Additionally, players must keep aware of each others’ Fears.

## *Character Creation*

In Hardcore mode, a new type of Asset is introduced: Fear. At the beginning of the game each player picks a Fear for their character. Write this down on the character sheet.

## *Enhanced Tension Points*

In Hardcore mode, the Tension Point system is enhanced to more brutally affect the overall deadliness of the game. Tension Points now evolve Core Dangers, and can immediately kill off existing characters without warning.

## *Asset Limits*

In Hardcore mode, you cannot add new Assets by ticking off Minutes. Assets can *only* be earned and evolved by using Charges.

## *Evolved Core Dangers*

Each time a Tension Point is reached, in addition to adding a new Core Danger, mark a tally next to one of the original ones. These “evolved” core dangers are harder to overcome in Challenges. There is no limit to the number of tallies that can be added.

## *The Code Red Challenge*

Each time a Tension Point is reached, the game reaches a moment of disaster. Immediately pick the character with the most tallied failures on their sheet (break ties with a single-die roll-off). That character must now survive a Challenge against a number of Dangers equal to the new Tension Point. This Challenge is considered to be of “Code Red” difficulty: the player must overcome *all* of the Dangers, or die.

## *Challenge Difficulties*

In the normal game, each die that rolls a four or higher scores against a Danger. In Hardcore mode, the base difficulty of each Danger is still four or higher, but various factors can increase that.

- If a character’s specific Fear can be applied to the Challenge, then all difficulties are raised by 1.

- If any of the involved core Dangers have marked tallies, their difficulty is increased by one for each tally. Thus a core Danger with three tallies requires a roll of seven or greater ( $4 + 3 = 7$ ) in order to be overcome.

With Fear and Difficulties working together, the late-stage game will frequently involve Dangers that can only be overcome by D8 and D10 ranked Assets.

# Always Be Prepared: Appendices

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Inspirations, author's thoughts, etc.

## Primary Inspirations

### *Video Games:*

- Disaster Report
- Hydrophobia
- I Am Alive
- The Last of Us
- Raw Danger

### *Movies:*

- 2012
- Cloverfield
- The Day After Tomorrow
- Day of the Triffids
- Deep Rising
- The Descent
- Feast
- Jurassic Park
- The Mist
- Outbreak
- The Poseidon Adventure
- The Thing
- The Towering Inferno

### *Books:*

- The Worst-Case Scenario Survival Guide

# Unsorted Working Notes

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## Playtesting

### Goals

How to involve goals as things that need to be resolved? Mechanics for resolution? Maybe similar to the survival options? Obstacles must be overcome? How many? Unresolved goals work against Survival Options? Added Dangers?

### Dice

Do the dice work? The base difficulties should be evaluated through hands-on testing. Too easy? Too rough?

### Good Guys And Bad Guys

I have this unexplored idea where the players are forced to “take sides” right from the very get-go. I want to address this at the first playtest. “Do you guys think a built-in faction setup would enhance the competitive side of the game?”

The basic idea is: take the number of players, subtract one, then multiply times two - so four players,  $2(4-1)=6$ . Make scraps of paper, or set aside that many playing cards, or whatever. Half of them are “pro,” and half are “ant.” Each player secretly draws one. Those with “pro” are the protagonists, those with “ant” are the antagonists. They don’t have to be aligned, either.

Now we’ve established multiple sides, and inserted intra-character conflict from the beginning. Maybe even add a rule that your first Goal is now connected to your “faction” of the scenario? Like, say: Good = “Save my kids” and Bad = “Preserve the T-Virus Sample”

Maybe not-so-secret?

## Layout Ideas

### Character Sheet:

- Make sure the five crucial themes are very prominent. Maybe weave them artfully into the sheet’s flavor, like that “Insane” character sheet I love so much for Unknown Armies.
- Qualities, Knacks, Tools, Goals, and Failures – no limit on “slots”
- Three Charge Circles next to each Asset. A spot for Die Size next to each Asset.
- Fear/Weakness (hardcore mode only)

- Depending on how goals are worked in, maybe a Goal section, with each goal also getting a set of obstacles that must be overcome?

### Scenario Sheet:

A sheet or set of cards or whatever that keeps track of:

- Mode: Normal or Hardcore
- Current Tension
- The Disaster Clock (or spot for a D20)
- Established Core Dangers
- Central scenario goal, related to one of the original Core Dangers.
- Established Situational Dangers
- Room for 4 established Survival Options, each with room for a handful of associated Obstacles
- The list of casualties (dead characters)

### Optional Fold-Out Mat

Keep track of all the meta-game information

- Disaster Timer: 20-point track, move a marker around it, spot zero = Tension Point!
- Current Tension: 6-point track, move a marker down it
- Core Dangers: spaces for... ten of them? Write them on a card and place them there?
- Scenario Goal
- Established Situational Dangers

Another option: make it a mat you assemble out of four sheets, each easily printed on your own?

### Credits

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