

DAWN OF THE DEAD

A rules addition makes the game more like the film.

by Edward Bever

In George Romero's gruesome film *Dawn of the Dead*, two soldiers (Roger and Peter), a TV personality named Steve, and his girlfriend Fran flee the collapse of society before a nightmarish onslaught by the undead - live cadavers that hunger for warm human flesh. The *Dawn of the Dead* game recreates in simplified form the protagonists' struggle to create a sanctuary for themselves in a shopping mall. They begin the game dispersed among the shops at one end of the building, and must close each of the four main doors, seize weapons in the sports store, and destroy all remaining zombies. The undead oppose them by trying to kill or infect either all three men, or Fran and any one man. The zombies heavily outnumber the heroes, but the living are both faster, and with their guns, they are more powerful than the ghouls, so the game is a classic confrontation between quality and quantity.

The simulation is fairly simple, basically a beer and pretzels game. Each turn consists of a human player-turn and a zombie player-turn. The human may move any one group of characters up to the movement allowance of the slowest character in the group, blasting away at the zombies as they go. Movement points are never modified by terrain; instead the sizes of the squares superimposed on the mall's floorplan vary according to their contents. Characters shoot by rolling one, two, or three dice (depending on the weapons mix in the group), modifying the result by the range and the effects of intervening obstacles, and then comparing the result with the target zombie's strength. The number is printed on the back of the zombie counter and is only revealed at the moment of combat. The pri-

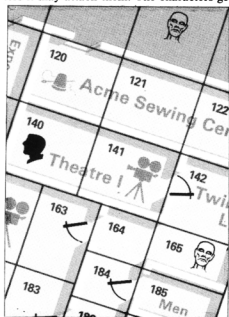
mary danger the characters face while running and shooting is that they may panic or freeze up when shooting a zombie at close quarters. Another character can usually save a panicked and confused comrade, but not without risk to both.

The zombie player-turn is much more structured. The player begins by rolling a die to see if any zombies go berserk, which makes them faster and more powerful. Next the zombie player moves any zombies that have observed character activity, plus a number of additional ones determined by a die roll. If a zombie ends up in a square containing characters it may attack them. The characters get

one chance to defend themselves, but if they do not destroy the attacking zombie, they can be stunned, killed, or infected by it. Infected humans are reduced in strength, and may in subsequent turns become super zombies, which are faster, more intelligent, and more difficult to destroy. At the end of each turn a die roll directs additional zombies to enter the mall through unlocked main doors.

The zombies' activities are so highly structured that a player may not really be necessary. Provision is made in the rules for solitaire play which governs zombie movement and attack, and for multi-player games in which each player controls one or more characters. The main differences between the basic and solitaire versions are the rules covering free zombie movement and hidden zombies. In the basic game, the zombie player determines which zombies move where during free movement. This player also gets to hide, or secretly record the location of five zombies before play starts, placing their counters on the board only when the players blunder into them. In the solitaire version, "free" zombie movement is regulated by a fixed set of priorities, and hidden zombies are generated each turn by a roll of the dice.

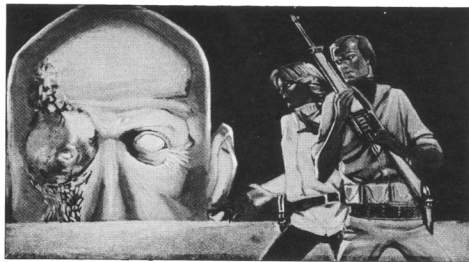
For beginning players, the game successfully recreates the tense and chaotic conflict presented in the movie. As players gain experience, however, they will find the humans tend to have a decided advantage. In both the film and the game, the main source of danger to the humans is their own fear, excitement, and confusion; consequently they may make dumb decisions. Though the rules governing panic recreate this vulnerability when the living battle the dead at close quarters, an expe-



rienced human player can avoid many such situations by proceeding with systematic caution. The characters' initial dispersion and the everpresent danger of ambush by hidden zombies mean that these moments of vulnerability cannot be totally avoided, but the human player can reduce them, and hence also reduce to a bare minimum the zombies' chances for victory.

Several modifications can be made to the game that not only restructure its balance, but also make it more faithful to the movie. One easy modification allows super zombies to open wooden doors (as Steve's corpse does in the film's final scene), and another modifi-

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cation is to change Fran's and Steve's panic ratings. In the movie she proves to be made of tougher stuff than at first appearance; his unreliability becomes a constant source of problems for the group. So, it seems more accurate, as well as more challenging, to assign Steve the higher panic level of 3, and Fran the lower level of 2. A third revision that both reflects events in the movie and complicates the humans' problems is to recreate Steve's tendency to ignore group plans and strike out on his own. This revision requires the following additional section of rules.

[16.0] Impulsive Human Movement

GENERAL RULE:

In the movie, when the four protagonists first enter the mall, Roger and Peter leave Fran and Steve in a secure room and go exploring. Almost as soon as they are gone, Steve takes off on his own, and nearly gets himself killed by a zombie lurking in a boiler room. Roger, too, is a headstrong man, and not every woman would wait as patiently as Fran does. Only Peter, the group's *de facto* leader, seems fully in control of himself. The following rules simulate Steve's (as well as the others') potential impulsiveness.

PROCEDURE:

This rule should be used in conjunction with the revised panic levels described above. At the end of each Human Player-Turn, the

human player must check for impulsive movement. Peter never moves impulsively, nor do any characters stacked with him. Any other character alone in a square must be checked. Roll two dice, and if the result is less than or equal to his panic level, the character moves impulsively. If several characters are stacked together, the *dominant* member of the group is checked in the same way. Depending on the result of this check, each other character in the group either need not be checked at all, or is checked by rolling only one die (see 16.1).

If one or more characters are to move impulsively, the zombie player may immediately move them up to their full movement allowance, subject to the normal rules of movement and the following special rules. These are rule suggestions; players may be able to improve on them as the rules are incorporated into the game.

[16.1] The presence and actions of other characters affects the likelihood that a character will move impulsively.

Any stack of characters will have a dominant character. Roger dominates any characters stacked with him, and they are never subject to Impulsive Movement. Roger dominates both Steve and Fran, and Steve dominates Fran. If the dominant character does not move impulsively, other characters in the stack will not either. If the dominant character does move impulsively, check for each other character by rolling one die. If the result

is equal to or less than the character's Panic Level, that character also moves impulsively.

[16.2] If more than one character in a stack is to move impulsively, they must be moved together, as described in rule 5.2.

Otherwise, impulsive characters move alone.

[16.3] Whenever a character moves adjacent to a visible zombie, the zombie player rolls one die to determine if the character shoots at the zombie.

If the die roll is less than or equal to the character's Fire Rate, the character fires once. If he fires, the human player may choose to have him fire again before moving on, up to the limit of his Fire Rate. Once a character has expended his fire allowance, he may not fire again during Impulsive Movement. If the character does not or cannot fire, he must move immediately away from the zombie to which he is adjacent.

[16.4] A character moving impulsively may attempt to enter a square containing a visible zombie only if he has shot at it at least once and he has enough Movement Points remaining to exit the zombie's square and move the distance specified in rule 16.6.

[16.5] A character moving impulsively may be moved into a square containing a hidden zombie.

If he has sufficient Movement Points to move out of the square and satisfy rule 16.6, he will do so. If he has any shots remaining, refer to rule 16.3 to determine if the character shoots before leaving the square. If he cannot leave the square and satisfy rule 16.6, he automatically fires all remaining shots.

[16.6] A character moving impulsively may not be moved in such a way that he ends his movement within one Movement Point of a normal zombie, two of a berserk zombie, or three of a super zombie.

[16.7] If a character is moving impulsively and moves within sight of Peter, his Impulsive Movement automatically ceases.

If this rule conflicts with rule 16.6, the character continues to move impulsively until he attains the requisite distance from all zombies and then he stops immediately.

[16.8] When a character has completed Impulsive Movement, he returns to the full control of the human player.

A character's Impulsive Movement ends when:

1. The zombie player decides to stop it;
2. The character has fired all his shots at a hidden zombie he cannot escape;
3. The character moves within sight of Peter and satisfies rule 16.6;
4. The character (or stack) expends its full Movement Allowance.

After all characters have been checked or moved, play proceeds with the Zombie Player-Turn. **A**