



# ZOMBIESKIN

 PROTOCOL  
game series *nineteen*

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*Zombieskin* is Game 19 in the *Protocol* game series.  
Inspired by GMZero.

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## ZOMBIESKIN

*Zombieskin* is a story roleplaying game about mutants and zombies — Damned and Scabs — waging an epic battle at the end of the world. As society crumbles around them, the scab horde grows stronger each day. Characters are the Damned, not so average people with genetic mutations, using their gifts to fight the zombie hordes and keep the world from ending. But each use of their mutant power brings them one step closer to becoming zombies themselves...

Now. As the final days of the war tick away, the first child born without a mutation must be protected from the scabs and brought to safety.

Each game in the Protocol series is zero-prep for 3 or more players. The game length is exponentially long, so games with more players take more time to complete. The Protocol Series requires a deck of poker cards as well as tokens to track drama points.

This series presumes some understanding of GMless game protocol: scene-framing, shared authority, and so on. If you've never played a GMless game, try one of the GMZero games such as *Dying Memories*, or *George's Children*. A free pdf of game advice — GMZero — is available for download at [drivethrurpg.com](http://drivethrurpg.com).

## INTRODUCTION

*Zombieskin* is the nineteenth game utilizing the Protocol game mechanic. Light and quick, the system gives players everything they need to start playing immediately, doing away with over-explanation and getting right to the tools.

In *Zombieskin*, players take on the roles of directors outside the action and characters inside the action, using the ebb and flow of four different scene-framing styles to tell meaningful stories about characters in crisis. Specifically, they are mutants at the end of the world, using their powers to fight off the zombie horde.

## GETTING STARTED

Each character is a mutant fighting an endless war with zombies who ravage the earth. As the story goes on, the war intensifies and each use of a mutant's power causes his skin to die away. As the mutants grow more zombieskin, they slowly become what they are fighting against. The characters need names, roles, motivations, and relationships, as well as an understanding of the state of the world. Once each player has completed the following steps, you are ready.

- Name your character
- Select one role for your character — this has no mechanical benefit
- Determine a character's motivation by drawing a card
- Determine a relationship between two characters by drawing a card
- Determine elements about the game world

### DECK SHUFFLING

A standard deck of cards is shuffled at the beginning of the game and again (only) if the deck runs out of cards. Used cards are discarded. Do not return Motivations or Relationships to the deck. The same goes for Scenes and Locations during play.

The use of jokers is optional.

### DRAMA POINTS

Each player starts the game with one drama point and only gains additional points during interludes and interrogations. See page 5.

## ROLES

Roles provide flavor and context, but no mechanical benefit.

- **Half-Past Dead.** His powers have become consumed, he is nearly a zombie now.
- **Jack.** Something has awakened a second power inside of him.
- **Lazarus.** Passes for a zombie, but has none of their weaknesses.
- **Mangler.** Somehow, he can eat the flesh of the dead without turning into one of them. Sometimes it grants the mangler strength. Mostly, it just cures hunger.
- **Mongrel.** He does not possess one single power, but instead a number of smaller, almost imperceptible powers.
- **Prophetess.** There's something about the Damned that only empowers women to "feel" into the future.
- **Scavenger.** Scavengers can eat some of the zombieskin from other mutants, at a cost to himself.
- **Sniffer.** He can sense the zombies before anyone else can.
- **Skulker.** A chameleon who can blend with the surrounding terrain, he is nearly invisible when he wants to be.

## MOTIVATIONS

Motivations are determined by drawing one random poker card from the deck for each character. The motivation descriptions are vague — specificity is your job. For instance, the ♠10 is a motivation of family, impulsively. The player may define this motivation as doing whatever it takes to protect her family.

A list of motivations is on page 5.

## RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships are determined by choosing (any) two characters and drawing one random poker card from the deck. The pair of characters share this relationship. The relationship descriptions are vague. Specificity is your job. For instance, the ♣10 is a relationship of burdensome trust. The players sharing this relationship may define it as an ongoing issue of trust between two brothers who have lied to each other since childhood.

A list of relationships is on page 5.

## WORLD BUILDING

Each player selects one ingredient from the list below. If you are playing a 3-player game, then each player selects two. Now is a good time to determine where you all live together.

- What is the condition of your hair? Skin? Clothes? Belongings? When did you last eat something?
- What is the state of the world? What remains of the old world? What has improved during the collapse?
- How did the ‘disease’ first spread? Was anyone around when this first happened? How long has it been since everything collapsed?
- What do others mean by the term ‘skinless’?
- How infected are you? Who else knows?
- How deadly/fast/vicious are the zombies? What are the other threats to your safety?
- Describe one of your powers and someone else’s power.
- Describe two different kinds of zombies. What makes them different.
- Name and describe the area/town you live in, including geography. What makes it mundane? What makes it special?
- Name and describe the child you have been tasked with protecting.

## MOTIVATIONS

### SUIT

- ♣ Desperately
- ♦ Responsibly
- ♥ Vehemently
- ♠ Impulsively

### VALUE

- A Discovery
- 2 Freedom
- 3 Pride
- 4 Work
- 5 Survival
- 6 Wanderlust
- 7 Fresh Start
- 8 Hunger
- 9 Distance/Time
- 10 Family
- J Retribution
- Q Lust
- K Respect
- Joker

Draw two and combine the results

The sky turned red and grey from worry and labor. Toxic thoughts and abbreviated culture made the world ugly and scarred. The scabs were just like you and me once. Except I don't think they ever gave a crap about what happened to the rest of us. Maybe that's how you become a scab – being dead inside.

## RELATIONSHIPS

### SUIT

- ♣ Burden
- ♦ Complex
- ♥ Fortune
- ♠ Ominous

### VALUE

- A Survival
- 2 Abuse
- 3 Loss/Reconciliation
- 4 Codependent
- 5 Reliable
- 6 Generous
- 7 Long-Term/Siblings
- 8 Contemptuous
- 9 Obsessive
- 10 Trust
- J Rivalry
- Q Anxiety
- K Outsiders
- Joker

Draw again, adding another character to the Relationship

I was born with two extra fingers on my left hand and my shoulders were deformed. By the time I was 5, I could melt metal by looking at it. But when I was 9, my skin became dark and leathery. I knew it wouldn't be long before I was a scab. That's when they came to me and told me I could help fight or be sent out of the community to fend for myself.

## GAME PLAY

While creating a story of their characters' war against zombies, the players take turns directing scenes. Although this document provides the tools for framing the action, map-making and location naming are left to the players. A chart of scenes is on page 8.

Each turn the active player (director) draws two cards, which determine the scene type — vignette, interrogation, interlude, or ensemble — as well as the location. The scene's type (suit) and atmosphere (value) are determined by the first card, while the location is determined by the second card. *For instance, the director draws a ♦6 and a ♣7 indicating an interrogation (♦) about preparations at quiet (♣) wastelands.*

## THE OPENING SCENE

The opening scene of the game is always a vignette at the community. The vignette focus is either Preparation or Display of Power. Determine randomly which player narrates this vignette, but do not draw any cards. Afterwards, take turns until every player has directed four scenes.

## VIGNETTES (CLUBS ♣)

Vignettes involve no actual dialog, merely setting the atmosphere for the story. The director determines the location from the card drawn and narrates a brief scene. A vignette shouldn't take more than a minute or two to narrate.

*The director draws a ♣10 for scene — Vignette about Safety in Numbers — and a ♦Q — Dark Gas Station. "It's been several hours since we saw anything moving. Sticking together helps. So does staying off the main roads. But we need to resupply and that gas station is the last thing before we hit the wastes..."*

### ADVICE

Keep your vignettes short and simple. Narrate enough information to set the tone, but don't overdo it by dragging the action on too long. Concise sentences are a writer's best friend.

## INTERROGATIONS (DIAMONDS ♦)

Interrogations involve the director asking questions to one character. The director selects a player and steals one drama point from him. Then the director asks five questions — in or out of character — which must be answered by that player in character.

If the interrogation is in character, the director may ask the questions from the point of view of an NPC or his own character. This process should feel organic. If the interrogation is out of character, the director asks the questions in an abstract fashion, as though going down a list. The questions can be anything fitting the theme.

*The director draws a ♦4 for scene — Interrogation about Innocent Lives — and a ♠7 — "Grey" Wastelands. The director decides that T.J. and Jo have gone ahead in the grey waste to scout when they come upon a trio of helpless people who will die without medical attention. T.J. turns to Jo and asks a series of question about whether or not they can afford to spare any medical supplies and if they should even report this to the group.*

### ADVICE

Ask leading questions. Avoid yes/no questions, or questions that can be reduced to short answers. What and why questions are great. Did or can questions are not. "Why are you waiting for reinforcements?"

### NPCS

The director may add one NPC to an interlude or interrogation, but the characters remain the focus of the scene. Vignettes do not have dialogue, but any number of NPCs may color the story background. Ensembles may have NPCs, but they are controlled/run by the director. Other players may introduce NPCs by spending one drama point.

**In Zombieskin, scenes are about survival and the cost of having power. When you are the director, make the most of your scenes by having the mutants question the continued use of their powers.**

## INTERLUDES (HEARTS ♥)

Interludes involve two (and only two) characters with a pre-existing relationship. Neither of these characters needs to be the director's character. The director determines the location and sets the scene based on the cards drawn. The scene runs as long as the director likes, without being self-indulgent, calling "scene" when the characters have said or done enough. An interlude involves only one location. Should the characters leave the location, the scene ends.

All players **not** involved in the scene gain one drama point at the end of the interlude.

*The director has drawn the ♥5 for scene — Interlude about Exhaustive Use of Power — and the ♣8 for location — a Quiet Road. The director decides that T.J. and Jo are returning to the group along a quiet road when they spot a cadre of zombies feeding on something. There is no way around this situation, so Jo sets them all on fire. Afterwards, Jo collapses in a heap after expending herself in this manner. The director does not have an agenda beyond this and wants to see where the characters take the story.*

### ADVICE

Interludes are mostly about the drama between two characters. While the interlude can be used to advance the plot, this is secondary to the interpersonal actions and reactions of the characters. An alternative example of the scene above could be a fight that exhausts the pair.

## RESOLVING CONFLICT

In the Protocol Game Series, whenever two or more characters reach a moment of unresolvable conflict one of the following things happens:

- In an interlude, the director decides who wins the conflict, narrates the conclusion, and ends the scene.
- In an ensemble, the scene ends, which leaves the conflict dangling.
- Should the players wish to override any of these rules, they must spend one drama point, or in the case of a tie, more drama points than anyone else. The winner narrates the conclusion.
- Should a scene end unresolved, this creates a cliffhanger effect. Players may wish to resolve this in the following scene. But this isn't always necessary. Use your best judgement. Sometimes the best things are left unsaid.

Vignettes and interrogations have no conflict.

## ENSEMBLES (SPADES ♠)

Ensembles involve all of the characters. Like an interlude, the director determines the plot of the scene, as well as the location. The director may preempt the scene as much as he likes, but once the ensemble starts, the players should let things develop organically. The director still has the right to call "scene" at any moment, but any player may override the director by spending one drama point to end a scene early, or to extend a scene longer.

*The director has drawn the ♠3 for scene — Ensemble about Unintended Consequences — and the ♥6 for location — Burned-Out/Diseased Mall. The director decides the group has reached another town across the waste, arriving at a strip mall that is clearly burned out and uninhabited. It's not only an ideal place to camp, but it might also make a good base of operations to explore the town from. The director does not have an agenda beyond this and wants to see where the characters take the story.*

### ADVICE

Ensembles involve everyone and should be allowed to run their course. But not too long. Eventually the characters will start spewing every kind of theory and idea, which slows play and distracts from the story.

Let everyone get a say, but once you resolve the scene's primary focus, it's time to end things. Don't forget, if there's conflict, the scene ends on its own, unless someone spends one Drama Point.

## DARK SKIES

Players take turns directing scenes. The order is not important. Players may decide to take turns in a random order, clockwise order, or even bid to be the next director. Just make sure everyone is involved and no one directs two times in a row.

The players may also decide to have the game end only after all of the face cards have been revealed (during character creation and game play) for a longer game, or all the aces are revealed for a shorter game.

Once the characters reach their destination, each player narrates his character's involvement in the final clash with the zombie horde. For each drama point a player still possesses, he narrates (in turn) a vignette about battle. Once everyone has spent their drama points, each player determines if his character lives, dies, builds a new home, or is otherwise changed by the encounter. Players should also determine if the child makes it to safety.

## SCENES

### SUIT

- ♣ Vignette
- ♦ Interrogation
- ♥ Interlude
- ♠ Ensemble

### VALUE

- A Desperation
- 2 “Scabs”
- 3 Unintended Consequences
- 4 Innocent Lives
- 5 Exhaustive Use of Power
- 6 Preparation
- 7 Hiding
- 8 Illness/Injury
- 9 Movement/Transportation
- 10 Safety in Numbers
- J Chaos
- Q Internal Conflict
- K External Conflict
- Joker
- Monologue

### MONOLOGUE

Monologues are (optional) solo scenes where the director’s character (or an NPC) delivers a single speech that cannot be interrupted. The director decides who else is at the location. The director gains one drama point.

## LOCATIONS

### SUIT

- ♣ Quiet
- ♦ Dark
- ♥ Burned-Out/Diseased
- ♠ “Grey”

### VALUE

- A Urban Squalor
- 2 Farm
- 3 Factory
- 4 Unfinished Construction
- 5 Armory
- 6 Mall
- 7 Wasteland
- 8 Road
- 9 Water
- 10 Hospice
- J Tower
- Q Gas Station
- K Railyard
- Joker
- Plague-Zone



## DRAMA POINTS

Drama points are used to control the narration and finale. In addition, players may use drama points in the follow ways.

- The director may **spend one drama point** to discard a scene/ location card and draw a new one.
- During an interrogation, the player being interrogated may **spend one drama point** to avoid answering one question.
- If a scene ends with unresolved conflict, any player may **spend one drama point** to shift the conflict to an NPC who has already made an appearance in the story, or **spend two drama points** to shift the conflict to a new NPC.

## OPTIONAL RULES

- If the same suit is drawn three times in a row for a scene or location, discard the card and draw a new one until a new suit appears.
- At the beginning of the game, shuffle the deck and remove 10 cards at random. Do not look at them. Remove them from play and never shuffle them back into the deck.
- Should a player ever run out of drama points, the director may give him one of his, regardless of the scene type.
- On page 10 is a list of advanced roles and backgrounds. Neither is necessary to play the game, but each adds additional color and flavor. No character has more than one. When using backgrounds, these are selected before roles. When using advanced roles, these replace standard roles.
- Once per game, the players may decide to **award one drama point** to a director who has framed a particularly good scene.
- Select a permanent director who does not play a character, but instead runs the game like a traditional RPG. Cards are still drawn for scenes. The game lasts for a number of scenes equal to four times the number of players, or as long as the director chooses.

## OVERVIEW

### CREATE CHARACTERS

- Shuffle a deck of poker cards
- Name characters
- Determine backgrounds (optional)
- Select roles
- Determine motivations
- Determine relationships
- Give each player one drama point

### OPENING SCENE

- Vignette (Preparation or Display of Power)

### SCENES

- Take turns directing scenes
- Draw two cards: one scene type, one location
- Gain drama points during interrogations and other players' interludes

### DARK SKIES

- Take turns narrating vignettes about the final clash with the zombie horde

### END GAME

- Who survives? Who dies? Who builds a new home? Who is otherwise changed by the encounter? Does the child make it to safety?

## BACKGROUNDS

### SUIT

- ♣ Pariah
- ♦ Rogue
- ♥ Guardian
- ♠ Elder

### VALUE

- A Addict
- 2 Unstable
- 3 Outcast/Reviled
- 4 Overshadowed
- 5 Bipolar
- 6 Hated
- 7 Infamous
- 8 Bully
- 9 Regarded/Respected
- 10 Talented
- J Rabble-Rouser
- Q Peace-Maker
- K Authoritative
- Joker
- Chosen One

The community leaders weren't about to risk the lives of 100 people over one child. It was backwards thinking, but they had their reasons. Reasons we would never know, since we were heading out to build a new place to live and never coming back. All to protect some pure-bred child and its mother.

## ADVANCED ROLES

### SUIT

- ♣ Time-Bomb
- ♦ Half-Past Dead
- ♥ Original
- ♠ Savant

### VALUE

- A Flayer
- 2 Flesh-Brute
- 3 Ghost
- 4 Jack
- 5 Lazarus
- 6 Mangler
- 7 Mongrel
- 8 Prophetess
- 9 Scavenger
- 10 Sniffer
- J Stranger
- Q Skulker
- K Trojan
- Joker
- Warlord

The thing they never tell you about walking into the wasteland is that scabs never sleep...

## CHARACTER NAMES

7	Afrin
Amana	Apple
Axe	Bailey
Blue	Brite
Chase	Colt
Denny	Dole
Dollar	Domino
Eaton	Feria
First	Fleet
Ford	Good
Gold	Hugo
Hyatt	Ivory
King	Kohler
Lacie	Lancer
Lang	Lake
Lay	Lee
Lowell	Lucky
Marathon	Mars
Max	May
Michael	Miller
Newton	Oracle
Pen	Pepper
Pioneer	Price
Quest	Red
Rollins	Rose
Scion	Shell
Skyy	Sprint
Sweenie	Sweet
Trident	Van
Vic	Wall
Wendy	Wyeth

## LOCATION NAMES

Anchor Gate  
 The Apeyard  
 Border Crossing  
 The Buzzard Fields  
 The Canyon  
 The Crest  
 Dead Man Monument  
 Eagle Autos  
 Feral Mines  
 Gladstone Wastes  
 Hacksaw Junction  
 Indigo Rough  
 Jackrabbit Quarry  
 Mailbox Lake  
 Murder Alley  
 No Place  
 Northland High  
 One Tree  
 The Onyx Yard  
 The Pylons  
 The Q  
 The Rabid  
 Rising Hill  
 Sailor's Statue  
 Severed Quarters  
 South of Here  
 Swampland  
 Talon Square  
 Wakefield Memorial  
 The Wasteland  
 Washington Point

# SCENES

## VIGNETTES (CLUBS ♣)

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All players **not** involved in the scene gain one drama point at the end of the interlude.

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NAME/ROLE

BACKGROUND

MOTIVATION

RELATIONSHIP

NOTES

SCENES

DRAMA POINTS

Spend one to end or extend an ensemble

Spend one to resolve conflict

Spend one to shift the conflict to an existing NPC

Spend two to shift the conflict to a new NPC

Spend one (during an Interrogation) to avoid answering a question

Spend during final narration

## HELPER MONKEY

Diana Kwalkoski Stoll

## REGULAR BACKERS

Catherine

Dale Murchie

Daniel Boles

Ed Pegg

Fernando

Hana Kucharova

James Wood

José Luis Porfirio

Julian G Hicks

Keith Brake

Stras Acimovic

## IRREGULAR SUPPORTERS

Alejandro Albert Garcia

Alex W

anderland

Andrew Wells

Ben Woerner

Benjamin Tham

Bernard Gravel

Black-Thing

BlackWyrn Publishing

Brett Easterbrook

C P

Caoimhe Ora Snow

Charley Brandum

Chris Carlson

Chris Schoenthal

Chris Shorb

Christian Nord

Clayton Falconpunch

Daniel C

David Margowsky

David McGuire

David Terhune

Derek Guder

Descendingform

Diana Stoll

DivNull Productions

Ed Possing

Felix Girke

FelTK

Filthy Monkey

flashbytes

George Panopoulos

George VanMeter

George Vasilakos

Glazius

Glen Conolly

Greg Chapin

Happion Laboratories

irriion

Jack Gulick

Jake McGrath

James Glover

James Stuart

Johan Kristian Milde

John A W Phillips

John Diffley

Judd M. Goswick

Kairam Ahmed Hamdan

Ketwyld

Khyron

Lars Erik Larsen

Laura Scott

Leslie Weatherstone

Lin Liren

Malk

Marc Majcher

Marcus Johnson

Mark Kilfoil

Mark Nau

Martijn Tolsma

Martin Blake

Michael Bergh Hansen

Michael Leader

Michael McNeal

Michael Wight

Morten Berg

Natalya Alyssa Faden

Nate Miller

Nathan Hillen

Nathan Lax

Nathanael Cole

Nathaniel Brengle

Nils Kullberg

Owlglass

Pablo Martinez

Paco Garcia Jaen

Pete

Philip Espi

Philip Reed

Richard Carter

Robert Carnel

Robert Mull

Robert Posada

Ross Isaacs

Ruth Phillips

Sophia Brandt

Scott Jamieson

Sean Cameron Crane

sehmerus

Seth Harris

Seth Johnson

Shane Hensley

Solid Art Labs

Stephen Kilpatrick

Steve Bean

Steve Dulson

Steven Lord

Steven Watkins

Stew Wilson

Svend Andersen

T. Anthony Moore

Teppo Pennanen

Tijn Rams

Tim Clouse

Timothy Hidalgo

Tobie Abad

Tom Pleasant

Tomer Gurantz

Trevor Smith

Tristan Zimmerman

Vic Smith

Volker Jacobsen



PROTOCOL  
game series