

Disaster from the Future

It is not yet the future. In the future a great tragedy will corrupt the world and it will echo back to us. Perhaps it has already happened then, or perhaps it simply will happen. This talk of time is difficult to describe. Let me begin again.

In the future the worms will come. We do not know from where they will come or if they were always here, sleeping. But they will come in numbers. Not overwhelming numbers, but small, dense numbers. There are not enough of them to kill us all. But we will not know of them until it is too late. We will be unprepared.

The worms will leap into our minds. It will be subtle at first, as they burrow and nest and build. But then the worms will strike. They will take us over completely: body, mind, and spirit. We will resist, but few will resist for long. And the worms need but one to succumb to their treachery.

When one of us is taken completely, the worm will look down and back through his mind, sifting his thoughts, and culling his memories. The worm will find the memory that is farthest from the man, and, through its malicious magics, will travel to that man's past. When the worm arrives, it will find a new and older mind to subdue and take that mind as well. Back and back and back until it comes to us.

But there is hope. We do not know how they track the worm, but their ways are clever and unknown to us. The Lantern Men. They wander through us, unseen, hunting the worms and, upon finding them, tearing them by force from the skulls of their hosts without mercy. The Lantern Men shine their light over the treachery that walks among us. They find and root out the evil that walks back through time, and we thank them for it. Even if we know not who or where or what they are. The Lantern Men will save us.

The Worms

Our story begins long ago in the great city of Braggladdur. It is a mighty city, straddling a powerful river, sprawling against the sea. It is the jewel of hope that marks the end of the great desert, and the strongest of the four green cities. And it is the current battlefield for the fate of the human race.

Far in the future, a race of parasites began the destruction of mankind. Humans simply call them worms. They are five to six inches long and fibrous, like a vine made of wet hair. They came from somewhere (probably a farther future, so it may even be somewhen) and took over the minds of 778 specific human beings. It is suspected that there were only 778 worms all together, and that this was their all-out assault on humanity.

The worms are gradually able to control the bodies of their hosts. Not just bodies, per sei, but their memories and senses as well. When the worm is done, there is nothing left inside that makes the host human at all. And when that happens, the worms jump. The worms find the oldest memory of their host and time travel straight back to it. Usually this leads to the host as a baby or as a small child, and the worm just crawls out of the ear of one host, and straight into the ear of a new one. The process is meant to repeat almost indefinitely, though there is an end goal in mind. The worms intend to find the first sentient human beings to ever exist and slaughter them, extinguishing the human race before it can begin. Presumably, when they get back that far, they're going to take over some enormo-bears or mega-sloths or something, and just massacre the five or so cavemen who attained self-awareness. No one really knows those details for sure.

But the worms still have several thousand years to go. Braggladdur exists thousands of years

ago in the fertile crescent, some time around our classic conceptions of ancient Egypt. Just in a different place. For some reason, the worms are limited in the humans they can occupy. It is suspected that there is an ultra-specific bloodline that must be traced back for the worms to make it. But as it stands, every single infected human in existence currently resides in Braggladdur.

The Lantern Men

There is also another important thing of note. In the far future, humans found a way to follow the worms back through time. They developed a kind of holding chamber for the worms too, something to contain them and muffle their psychic energies. In the future, this will probably have some kind of technical Science name (like Psychic Dampening Non-Terran Suspension Pod), but to the people of Braggladdur, they just look like sleek, metal lanterns. So the time-traveling, worm-hunting humans who hold them are called Lantern Men. And the Lantern Men are bad asses.

The Lantern Men are not all men, but the Braggladdurn culture is pretty non-progressive and downright sexist, so rumors of “Lantern Women” are dismissed as absurd. Besides, we’re talking about deep, deep cover secret agent ninja killers from the future. They could be undercover for decades, waiting to sniff out a worm, and might never make their presence known. So it’s not like anyone sees a lot of them, whether men or women. But their ultra-spy training, coupled with future technology no one from this millenium has ever seen, has earned the Lantern Men a mythological status among the people of Braggladdur.

Somehow the Lantern Men, or their superiors from the future, were able to spread a propaganda wildfire about the worms through the city before they arrived. Everyone in Braggladdur knows about the worms, and that they might be living inside their closest friends or neighbors, and that they should be wary of anyone looking at all suspicious.

The Traitor

Now, one more thing. There is one guy who beat the worms. This guy had a worm inside of him for almost a year and was able to mentally beat it into submission and extract it from his own head. People say that he keeps the worm alive in a clay jar in his house and that he tortured it almost to death to learn its secrets. And this guy now knows how to extract a worm out of anybody. And, more importantly, how to do it without killing the host. I mean, the Lantern Men can pull a worm out of you, but they do it by forcibly drilling a hole through your brain. But this guy knows the worms’ secrets, and if you’re infected and you can find him, he’ll cure you, no questions asked.

People call this guy The Traitor, or The Scarred Man, or The Faceless Fool. It seems that when he pulled the worm out of his head, it messed up his face pretty badly. They say he looks like he was dipped in oil and then set on fire. And he is absolutely hated by the Lantern Men. They have sworn to kill him if they can ever find him. But in a society of veils and turbans and flowing robes it’s pretty easy to hide your face from everyone. And he is out there somewhere, hiding in plain sight, and keeping a worm at home in a clay pot.

The Human

And there is you. You are unlucky enough to have a worm in your brain in a city on the alert for worms in brains. You don’t know who to trust, and anyone could be a Lantern Man. So you’d better find The Traitor quickly, and get him to coax the worm out of your head. Because if you don’t you’ll either

get a hole drilled through you, or you'll just be the next in a long line of your worm's victims. And the human race will be one step closer to extinction.

Setting Up

This is a game for two people. One of you will play the infected human, and one of you will play the forces around that human. We'll refer to these two players as the *Human* and the *Worm*. As the two of you get ready to play, gather up the following things.

- pencils or pens
- a small pile of index cards
- twenty-four small coins (like pennies)
- two larger coins (like quarters or bigger, half-dollars are best if you have them)
- up to nine six-sided dice (d6s)
- up to nine eight-sided dice (d8s)
- one twelve sided die (d12)
- Two copies of the faculty lists (we'll get to those later)

Once you've gathered up these items, take a seat at a table, ideally on opposite sides from each other. Decide amongst yourselves who will be the Human and who will be the Worm. If you are the kind of person who likes to be the GM, you should play the Worm, and if you're the kind of person who likes to be the hero, you should play the Human.

If you are the Worm, start by asking the Human some questions about the character he will be playing. What is his name? How old is he? Who are his family? Where does he live? Is he rich or poor? Does he have an illicit lover? Write down the Human's answers. If you are the Human, listen to the Worm's questions and answer them honestly. While she is writing down your answers, draw a picture of your character and let the answers you give inform the picture. When the questions and the picture are done, put the picture in the middle of the table.

Choose Starting Faculties

Now pull out the d12, the twenty-four small coins, and the faculty lists. It's time to figure out which of your faculties are controlled by the host and which are controlled by the parasite. Each player takes twelve coins and one set of lists. Roll the d12 three times (reroll any number that comes up again until you get a new one) and note the results from the list below.

1. Speed
2. Force
3. Resistance
4. Sight
5. Hearing
6. Touch
7. Taste
8. Smell
9. Friends & Family
10. Enemies & Rivals
11. Sadness & Tragedy

12. Happiness & Victory

Each faculty list has two columns: host and parasite. The left column, host, shows the faculties of a normal person not controlled by a parasite. The right column shows the faculties the parasite can activate in its host to replace the human versions. When the game begins, the human controls all but three faculties. Put a small coin in the host column of each faculty. For each die result you rolled on the d12, move the corresponding small coin over to the parasite side. Those are the three faculties the worm starts with.

Here are the lists for the faculties.

Host	Parasite
<i>BODY</i>	<i>BODY</i>
Speed: You are as fast and reflexive as the average person.	Speed: You can run as fast as a horse and your reflexes are lightning fast.
Force: You can lift a person, push a large piece of furniture and punch through plaster.	Force: You can lift a donkey, push a boulder, and punch through a brick wall
Resistance: You can take a punch to the face, shake off a fall down flight of stairs, and go without food and water for a day or two	Resistance: You can take a sword to the gut, shake off a three story fall, and go without food and water for a week or two
<i>MIND</i>	<i>MIND</i>
Sight: You can read written words, tell one human from another, and understand body language	Sight: You can see heat signatures and have x-ray vision
Hearing: You can understand language and communicate with people orally	Hearing: You can sense your surroundings through echolocation
Touch: You can feel pain and manipulate precise and delicate things	Touch: You feel no pain at all
Taste: You can taste things in your mouth and understand what they are	Taste: You can taste emotions in the air and sense their direction.
Smell: You can smell things like a regular person can	Smell: You can smell the difference between infected and non-infected humans
<i>SPIRIT</i>	<i>SPIRIT</i>
Friends: You can remember your friends and family	Friends: You can recognize other worms from your parasite's past
Enemies: You can remember your enemies and rivals	Enemies: You can recognize Lantern Men who have pursued your parasite before

Sadness: You can remember your sad events and tragedies	Sadness: You can remember sad details from people your parasite lived in before you (in your future)
Happiness: You can remember your happy events and successes	Happiness: You can remember happy details from people your parasite lived in before you (in your future)

EXAMPLE

Hugh and Wanda are playing. Hugh is the Human, Wanda is the Worm. Each of them takes their Body, Mind, and Spirit list and puts a penny in the left column of each entry. Then Wanda rolls the d12 three times. She rolls a 6, an 8, and an 8. She rolls the last 8 again to get a new number and rolls a 3. 6, 8, and 3 correspond to Touch, Smell, and Resistance. Both Wanda and Hugh move the pennies from Touch on the host side, to Touch on the parasite side. So instead of starting the game with a normal, human sense of touch, Hugh's character will start the game feeling no pain at all. They each do the same with Smell and Resistance, moving the penny from left to right. Hugh's character will also be able to smell the difference between infected and non-infected humans, and will be able shake off a three-story fall.

Once you have placed your small coins in the right columns, each of you take a large coin and flip it. Note which side it lands on and place it, that side up, in the center of the table next to the picture of the Human's character. You are now officially ready to play!

Start the Game

The Worm starts the game by asking the human three questions.

1. Why are you running?
2. Who is chasing you?
3. What will happen if they catch you?

Worm, you take the Human's responses to the questions and use them to start a scene. Describe where the Human is, what and who is around him, and answer any questions he asks. Human, you take in what the Worm says to you and respond to her by describing what you do. If the Human's character talks to people, the Worm will pretend to be the people. In other words, you just make up what you're doing (Human) and what's going on in the world (Worm). It's all pretty free form; you're making things up and seeing what happens. The Human's character will work toward finding The Traitor and avoiding Lantern Men. And the Worm will put obstacles in the Human's way and react to the Human's choices.

Posing Questions

But not everything in the game can just be talked through in a freeform manner. There will be many moments in the game where the Human and the Worm will want different things to happen. These are the times to pose a *Question*. Questions with a capital Q are when it's time to break out the dice and see what happens. They zoom in on a moment in the game and make it more important than the others. They are for tense situations, underhanded trickery, breakneck chases, and bloody combat,

to name a few.

If one of the two of you says something that the other one disagrees with, it's time for a Question. If there is danger inherent in the situation, it's time for a Question. If something big is at stake, it's time for a Question. Anyone can call for a Question at any time. And when a Question is posed, it must be answered.

So here's what you do. When it's time for a Question, determine between the two of you whether it is a Question of the Body, Mind, or Spirit. Questions of the Body are for physical things: fights, chases, and the like. Questions of the Mind are for mental things: noticing something is wrong, solving a riddle, etc. Questions of the Spirit are for social things: an argument, asking someone on a date, and so on. It should be obvious which type of Question it is, but if there's a tie, follow this hierarchy. Body beats Spirit, Spirit beats Mind, and Mind beats Body.

Gather the Dice

Once the type of Question is established, each player secretly writes a leading question on an index card and puts it face down in front of them. By leading questions, I mean questions that assume things to be true already. Here's an example: "How will you survive the fall from the roof?" This question implies that someone is falling from the roof, that they will not die, and that they must do something to survive. Compare that to this crappy question: "Will I get away?" This question implies nothing. You can answer it with just a simple yes or no. There are no good questions with yes or no answers. Do not write them. They will make the game boring.

When the questions are written, the players gather their dice. The Human always rolls d6s; the Worm always rolls d8s. Everyone gets two dice for free. You can never roll less than two dice. Then look at your faculty lists. If you are the Human, add one extra die for each small coin on the host side for the type of Question. If you are the Worm, add one extra die for each small coin on the parasite side for the type of Question. If it's a Body challenge and the host controls Force and Speed, but the parasite controls Resistance, the Human gathers four dice and the Worm gathers three.

The Highest Roll

Now roll your dice. Don't co-mingle them. Just roll them all in front of you. Each player finds their die that rolled highest and their die that rolled lowest. Then each player announces their highest result. Compare the two results and see who got the highest number, the Human or the Worm. Now flip over the index cards with the leading questions on them. Each of you read your question aloud. Whoever got the highest result gets to choose which of the two questions will be answered. Then the other player decides the answer.

If the Worm got the highest result and chooses the question "How will you survive the fall from the roof?" the Human gets to answer it. The Human might say: "I tuck my arms and legs in and land in a hay cart as it trundles by," or "I smash and bounce through several awnings on my way to the ground." Because the question is leading, the answer is interesting.

The Lowest Roll

But every time a Question is posed, it gives an opportunity to the Human or the Worm to wrest control of one faculty. Both player now put forward their lowest-rolling dice and compare them. Whoever rolled the lowest chooses a category: Body, Mind, or Spirit. The other player must now choose

one faculty in that category to switch from host to parasite or vice versa. That player must choose one, and if they can't, the low roller gets to choose. You can't ever choose none.

The Large Coins

Remember those coins in the center of the table? Here's what they're for. When someone poses a Question, and you both gather dice, you can use those coins to add extra dice. When you gather dice, look at the coins and note which side is up. Heads is for the Human; tails is for the Worm. If you are the Human, you can flip a heads-up coin to tails-up to steal a faculty from the Worm. And if you are the Worm, you can flip a tails-up coin heads-up to steal a faculty from the Human. You can only do this if there is a coin that's your-side-up.

If the other player controls a faculty that fits the Question type (Sight, Hearing, Touch, Smell, or Taste in a Mind Question, for example) you can flip a coin over and add an extra die *of the other player's size*, to your dice when you steal a faculty. That means the Human can add a d8 and the Worm can add a d6. This does not subtract from the other player's dice; it just adds one to yours. You are able to exert control over your enemy for just a moment and use it to your advantage. This does not change the positions of the small coins.

The Priorities of the Players

Each player in the game has different priorities that they must keep in mind for the game to function. The Human's priorities are pretty simple.

1. Evade the Lantern Men
2. Seek out The Traitor
3. Don't let the Worm take control of you

The Worm's priorities are a little more devious and complex.

1. Screw with the Human's perceptions of the world
2. Never let the Human feel safe for more than a minute or two
3. Disguise the Lantern Men and put them everywhere
4. Freely divulge the way to The Traitor

These need a little more elucidation than the Human's priorities. So let me expand on them.

Screw with the Human's perceptions of the world: When the Human's faculties get turned over to the Worm, the human becomes less and less able to perceive the world like a normal person. This is especially true with the Mind and Spirit faculties. If the Sight coin is on the parasite side, make reading body language important. If the Human can't remember his enemies and rivals, make sure they come up when he doesn't know who they are. When you describe the world around the Human, make note of what the Human can and can't perceive and describe things accordingly.

Never let the Human feel safe for more than a minute or two: Don't let up. Make the Human fight to be saved. Keep things interesting by keeping them tense.

Disguise the Lantern Men and put them everywhere: Make sure the Human feels that any other person in the game could be a Lantern Man in disguise. Do this by testing the Human and looking for tells with every other character, whether they are a Lantern Man or not. And at seemingly random intervals, have a person pull out a future drill and try to drill a hole in the Human's head.

Freely divulge the way to The Traitor: Do not be subtle in this. Drop clues all over the place.

Have The Traitor pop up in the background and describe him. Make sure all the people the Human talks to know him, or know someone who knows him, or have heard a rumor of where he hides from the Lantern Men.

The End of the Game

The game can end in one of three different ways. Either the Human finds The Traitor and gets his worm removed, the Lantern Men catch the Human and kill him and the worm both, or the Worm takes control of all the Human's faculties and travels back in time. No one really wins or loses at the end, though it gives a good feeling of finality to the game.

But when the Worm wins, you can choose to come back and play the game again, but next time farther into the past. As the worm travels back through its various hosts the stakes get higher, and the game takes on a different tone and setting. Now go try it out!

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Thanks for reading!