

Surviving the Zombie War

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What is the Zombie War?

This term is a misnomer. The zombie outbreak will destroy any government or military infrastructure within a matter of days or weeks. After that the human race will be its own army and anyone left alive will be a soldier. And the only way to win this war will be to stay alive.

Combatants

1. **Zombies.** Not only are they the top contender, but they will probably represent a majority of the population in a very short period of time. In fact, by the time you realize the severity of the zombie threat, there will most likely be more of them than us.
2. **Survivors.** Hopefully you fall into this category, because that's who this is written for. Survivors are simply those dispossessed humans trying to find someplace they can go to be safe.
3. **Marauders.** There are scavengers drawn to every disaster. While decent people will be trying to survive the apocalypse, looters will be picking through the rubble for some way to profit from it. When there's nothing left to loot, they'll quickly evolve into gangs of bandits and thieves. This is the Mad Max syndrome. Some people were never fit for a civilized world anyway, and they'll instantly embrace the lawlessness of the Necrocracy.
4. **Crazies.** Hell on Earth has a tendency to eat at people, in this case literally. Some survivors are likely to be so traumatized that they'll be holed up somewhere waiting for someone to set them off. Don't be the one to do it.
5. **New World Order.** When society collapses, some people will adapt to anarchy while others hold to the mores enforced by the previous administration. Some will jump at the chance to improve on the model, however, and suddenly you'll start running into self-appointed militia men and citizen soldiers who expect you to follow the law of the land because their guns are bigger than yours. Or worse yet, they'll want to recruit you.



The First 48 Hours

Most zombie stories are about the initial outbreak and are good cautionary tales about the first 48. Most people will not survive the first 48 hours of the outbreak. First off, you won't know it's happening for the first couple of hours, which will eat up critical response opportunities. Add to that the initial denial due to normalcy bias and some early rookie mistakes like crashing your car into a telephone pole or boarding yourself up in a farmhouse and you've lost four hours of good travel time. Meanwhile the zombie threat is spreading exponentially.

In the first 4 hours, there will be dozens of zombies in your area. That's when you'll probably start understanding the scope of the problem.

By the end of the first 24 hours there will be hundreds, which is why people who board themselves up on the first day aren't able to run by the second.

By the end of the first 48 hours there will be thousands of zombies in a well-populated area, because by then 50% or more of the population will have been turned. Another 30% of the population will probably be dead, because the purpose of zombie attacks is not infection, but predation. That will leave the zombie population ravenous and enraged, with a swiftly diminishing food supply.

By the time they run out of food they will be in large enough numbers to successfully lay siege to any fortification and wipe out anyone still living in it. Critical mistakes in the first 4 hours of the outbreak lead to most people not surviving the first 48 hours. Your best bet is to get out of the area while there are still other people around for the zombies to eat.

First 48 Filmography:

1. *Night of the Living Dead*: Classic negative example. Not understanding the nature of the threat, they all hole up in the same farmhouse and practically end up killing each other before the zombies even get to them. Rookie mistake.
2. *Dawn of the Dead* (original and remake): They try to fortify a mall, which is one of the least defensible places on the planet. Death wish.
3. *Return of the Living Dead*: Hoping to be rescued, they call for help and the military nukes the town. Points for understanding the scope of the problem, but getting out of town would have been better.
4. *Resident Evil*: Realizing that they've released the zombie plague into their lab, they seal the building off and try to kill everyone in it. Good effort, Umbrella Corporation, but containment is always impossible.
5. *House of the Dead*: 24 hour party people get into a gun shipment and go John Woo on the lumbering dead, but eventually they get surrounded and have to hole up in a mausoleum. Making a stand never ends well; eventually you're just going to end up in a zombie pirate sword fight. Might sound like fun, but it's actually just really really stupid.

The First 100 Days

The trend we are now seeing in zombie movies like *Zombieland*, *Land of the Dead*, and *28 Weeks Later* (and the *Walking Dead* comic), is what life in the First 100 Days of the outbreak and beyond will be like for the surviving minority of living humans.

Anyone who can survive the first 48 hours has a better than average chance of surviving the first 100 days. Once you're free of the immediate zombie population it's just a matter of staying clear of other populated areas. That means your survival is now a matter of lifestyle choices. Where you go and who and what you take with you will now determine if you can survive in the Hell on Earth world of the living dead or if you'll become another casualty of the Zombie War.

Fast Zombies vs. Slow Zombies

There is some debate about the nature of zombiism (or Zombie Behavior Spectrum Disorder, as it's referred to in the University of Florida's Zombie Disaster Preparedness Simulation) and how it presents symptomatically. The walking dead seem to be slow moving and stiff while the more modern zombies are merely infected with a virus that has made them feral. These are not technically zombies because they are in fact alive. *28 Days Later* and *Zombieland* approach the condition as a malady afflicting the living, but these are not zombies in the strictest sense.

This is not to say that there can't be "fast zombies" among the walking dead (in this case the running and jumping dead). The *Dawn of the Dead* remake introduced the concept of the fast zombie as undead. It could also be argued that the Deadites in the *Evil Dead* trilogy were an early form of fast zombie. In truth the affliction can present itself both ways. It all depends on the nature and rapidity of the zombie infection, as well some basic metabolic factors.

The simple fact of the matter is that everything we will be able to learn about zombies and their condition will come from observation, since all conventional science will be wiped out when society collapses. And those observations will be limited to more practical concerns, such as the best ways to escape or destroy them.

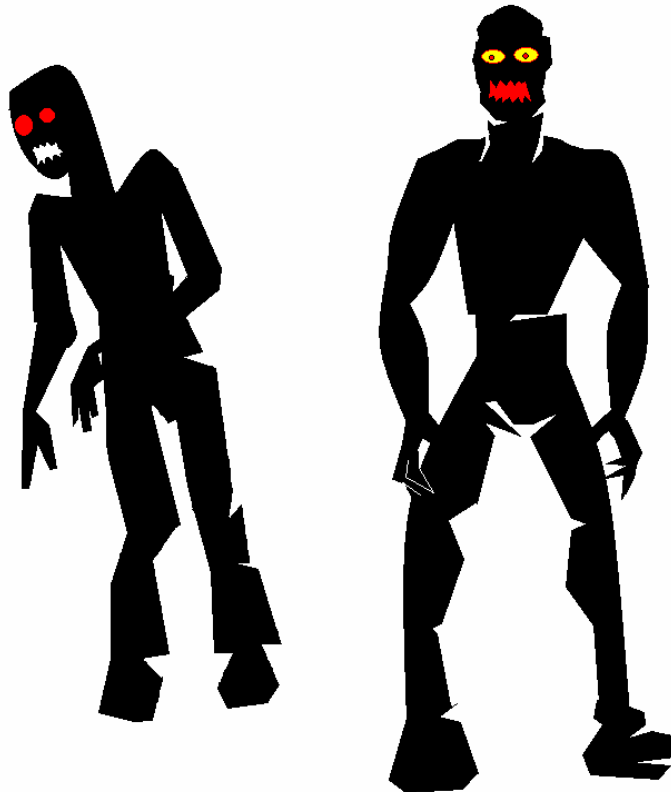
Unfortunately, the cause of the infection will be irrelevant. Whether it was something in the air or water, or a wave that passed over the Earth, the widespread contagion will have already occurred before anyone has any time to study it. And if it continued to be a threat, then there'd be no hope for survival. If whatever triggered the initial outbreak happened on a global scale, we'd all become zombies whether or not we ever got bitten.

If humanity survives and civilization is somehow restored, some study of the disease might be prudent to prevent another outbreak. Even this is problematic, because study requires keeping samples of infected blood and tissue, as well as - God Forbid - an infected subject in some cases. This always seems inevitably to cause an outbreak rather than preventing it.

Stage One Infection - Bitten, but not presenting symptoms. You see these guys all the time in movies, getting bitten and not telling anybody until it's too late. Usually they're impaired due to drug or alcohol use, which is probably what's slowing the infection until, inevitably, something scary happens and their heart rate accelerates to the point where the infection takes hold and they go zombie at the exact worst time for the group.

Stage Two Infection - Feral Behavior (Fast Zombie). Once the infection takes hold, everything in the body seems to go into overdrive. The heart beats way too fast, adrenaline pumps through the body, blood vessels and capillaries burst uncontrollably (as evidenced in the blood-filled eyes of some zombies), and they lose all sense of reason, deferring instead to rage. This puts them in a berserker state that is vicious, but will eventually degenerate. The body can't physically sustain this behavior, so you're more likely to see a lot of these fast zombies in the first 48 hours, but in the first 100 days and beyond you'll be dealing with the more classical slow zombies.

Stage Three Infection - Re-animation (Walking Dead). Life functions have ceased, but unexplainable electrical impulses keep the body animated. Brain functions are limited to a mindless need to seek food. If you can steer clear of them - taking special care to avoid large groups of them - you can wait them out until their bodies finally deteriorate beyond the ability to remain mobile. Then it's just a matter of walking around their prone corpses. Just don't pick one up by the teeth to toss it in the incinerator or accidentally step on its mouth.



1. TRAVEL NORTH

You have to keep moving to stay alive, but you don't want to navigate the dense network of overpopulated cities that surround most people residing in semi-urban environments. While no place is truly safe, the better places to be will be places that are not preferential to zombies.

Zombie-friendly areas:

1. Cities & Suburbs
2. Tropical or temperate climates
3. Farmland

Metropolitan and suburban areas are the obvious hot spot for zombies, just because that's the highest concentration of people. If you're in a well-populated area, don't stop moving until you're clear of it.

The warm weather in tropical climates will accelerate decomposition, but it will also make them more active until their parts fall off. Living people in warm climates tend to wear very little, which will offer no protection against zombie bite and other dangers that zombie attacks will provoke. A beach is a buffet to zombies because you have tons of nearly naked people lying around helpless and half-conscious. And once they go after the swimmers there's the added danger of sharks being attracted to the blood. And you know what that leads to... zombie sharks.

Farms seem safer because the individual houses are more remote, but it's still a populated area with a lot of people to infect. They'll be drawn to farms for the livestock, then for the people too. This is also the first place people want to come to during the end of the world, which increases the food supply, thus attracting more zombies, in turn making more zombies. Farms aren't particularly well fortified, either, so if you have to make a stand somewhere this isn't the place to do it.

It's a good idea to have an escape strategy beforehand with a rendezvous location that's a safe distance from the population. And make sure the rendezvous is a good jumping-off point for traveling North. That's the direction you want to go.

Why North? Because in the Zombie War, the cold is your greatest weapon. Take a tip from the Russians on this one: It's very difficult to invade a country where the conditions are already unforgiving on a good day. Life in the snow and ice will be dangerous for the living, but we can adapt for the weather to defend ourselves. Zombies don't adapt to external conditions because they usually don't have to. Those that are not deterred by the cold will eventually find themselves frozen to the ground. In *The Walking Dead* they were safe during winter months, but they didn't use the opportunity to make for cold country.

If you're not close enough to cold climate areas, make use of other unforgiving terrain. Jungles have many dangers, but they're just as dangerous to zombies as to the living. Plus they're full of living things that will keep a zombie occupied. Deserts are helpful for the opposite reason: They're so devoid of life that zombies will avoid them in favor of more fruitful stomping grounds.

2. TRAVEL LIGHT

Roads will probably be useless so you won't have the luxury of a car. Horses or dirt bikes might be an option, but in either case don't pack them with anything you can't carry yourself or leave behind. Very few things will save your life, but there's plenty that can get you killed.

1. Don't take a car. The roads are going to be trashed and you'll spend more time trying to keep it running than it will be worth. Plus, driving into a zombie herd or a pileup (or more than likely both) will just get you killed.
 - a. This happened in *The Walking Dead*, and it wasn't pretty.
2. A dirt bike might work for a while, but it will require gas and parts.
3. If a vehicle is convenient, take it as far as it will go, but don't try to maintain it.
 - a. Gas stations will be overrun by marauders if they're not completely tapped out. If your vehicle is out of gas, leave it.
 - b. Frequently changing or abandoning vehicles will also help you to avoid being tracked by dangerous humans.
4. Horses are the best transportation, but they're living creatures that might have other plans or could be turned to zombie monsters.

BAG OR NO BAG? My recent adventures have taught me that an action bag is cumbersome and contrary to easy travel. If you do carry a bag, I would carry only essential items and leave anything you don't need behind. If you have a car you can carry more, but in either case I would make sure to always keep the most essential items on your person at all times and not depend on any external resource to carry them.

Useful items:

1. Guns & ammo
2. Knife
3. Lighter
4. Flashlights & chem lights
5. Basic first aid
6. Walkie-talkie, radio (police scanner) & batteries
7. Food and water

Don't carry too much of any of these things. Plan your travels around seeking them out, but carrying too many survival supplies can be detrimental to survival. Evading zombies is the first rule.

Guns:

You can reasonably carry several pistols on your person or in a duffel. I would keep a primary and backup handgun on your person at all times.

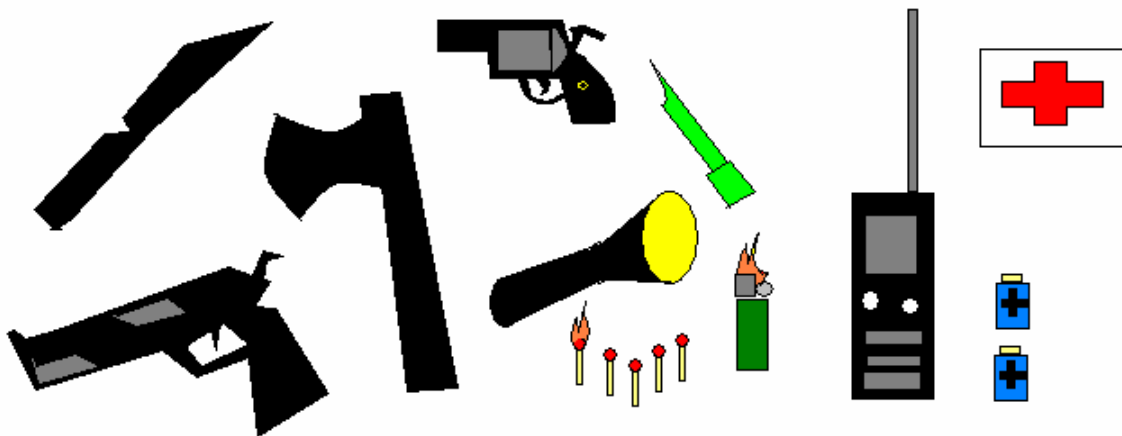
1. The primary should be an 8-shot or more semi-automatic with hammer action and laser sight.
 - a. Hammer action gives you the option to cock the gun for quicker firing in a pinch and laser sights help you line up head shots faster.
 - b. Keep a couple extra magazines on your person and a couple more in your bag if you have one.
 - c. On laser sights, don't count on 100% accuracy. Test it out and practice keeping a steady hand. Laser sights don't guarantee a hit, they just make it easier to line up the shot.
 - d. I'd keep this strapped to your side like a six-gun. It won't be in your way as much and it won't hurt to show anyone you run into that you're heeled.
2. Your backup should be a compact revolver, preferably a smaller .38 designed for concealability and capable of firing .357 rounds for a stronger punch.
 - a. This is a good weapon for an ankle holster. It can also fit easily into a pocket.
3. Shake down any slide action weapon to work out the kinks; new guns should be fired a couple hundred times to break them in so they don't jam. Keep it cleaned and oiled.
4. Don't be too stingy with your ammo. You need to be proficient with every gun you own, and to stay in good form they have to be fired every now and then.
 - a. Ammo becomes less reliable over time, too, so there's no use holding onto the same stock too long.
5. If you stumble upon a massive cache of ammo, resist the urge to overstock. I'd use that as an opportunity to get in some much needed target practice and hide the rest. You might be out that way again.
6. Keep your shells if you can. They might be reusable, but I suspect ammunition and empty shells will become a form of currency in the zombie war.
 - a. People with the means will re-load them and recycle them, so the empty shells will have value.
7. Carry a rifle or a shotgun, but probably not both. Keep it in your bag if you have one or get a shoulder-strap.

ON AUTOMATICS VS. REVOLVERS: While semi-automatics fire more shots, they're also more likely to jam and take longer to reload. Revolvers are more reliable and load faster. I prefer the auto because you can keep a couple of extra magazines at the ready, which gives you more rounds to work with in a pinch.

The most important thing is to have something that works right and shoots straight, because like my dad says: "If you're fighting something that takes more than 6 bullets to kill, you're dead anyway."

Tools:

1. Carry a pocket knife and a hatchet. They're both useful as weapons and as tools.
2. Flashlights: Keep a decent LED light on you; they're bright and lightweight. Pocket pen lights are good. A heavy duty maglite might be good in a bag.
3. Don't waste time on batteries. Focus on replacing any flashlight that isn't working.
 - a. If batteries become available, replace any as needed, but don't carry extra batteries. They'll just weigh you down.
 - b. Keep some rechargeables in case you find a power source, but otherwise do with what you can find.
4. Stock up on disposable lighters and matches instead. They're easier to come by and easier to carry than batteries and flashlights.
5. Chem lights might be useful for emergencies, but I wouldn't pack more than one or two and I wouldn't use them liberally.
 - a. In movies they're always throwing them down a hole to see how deep it is; I wouldn't call that a very practical use.
6. Walkie-talkies: If you need to maintain communication, forget anything that requires a central node or a recharge station.
 - a. Walkies work on common batteries (or rechargeables), they're lightweight with a limited range and communicate peer to peer.
 - b. CB's and ham radios might also work, but be careful who's listening. They have a longer range and might attract marauders or representatives of the New World Order.



3. KEEP MOVING

The need to settle down someplace remote or worse yet establish some kind of compound never ends well in zombie scenarios. Eventually they'll find you and box you in or post-ap crazies will try to kill you for your fort. The world is over; the only society likely to form from the ashes will be some sort of feudalism.

1. Avoid other humans.
 - a. When the situation goes bad, so do most people. If I've learned anything from movies, people are scarier than zombies when it all goes down.
 - b. Read *Cell* by Stephen King or *The Walking Dead* for examples. The Zombie War will make the surviving population mostly crazy. You could end up in a gladiator pit like in *Land of the Dead*, shot in the face for asking for help like in *The Happening*, the military may try to appropriate your women to boost morale like in *28 Days later*, or the cornered mob might instantly start worshipping the first Bible-thumping psycho they meet like in *The Mist*. And then they'll just start sacrificing the kids to the monsters, because that's what crazies do.
 - c. Traveling light means keeping the number of people in your party to a minimum. Too many people means dragging around someone who will hold up the group, get you in trouble or turn everyone over to the New World Order weirdoes trying to rebuild civilization in their own image.
2. Beware of people in uniform, especially uniforms you don't recognize. Anyone still in uniform after society crumbles is not to be trusted for any of a number of reasons:
 - a. Best case, they're trying to re-establish a sense of normalcy in a world gone wild. These kind of control freaks tend to crack up when their sense of order is screwed with, so it's best to avoid them.
 - i. In *The Walking Dead*, the ex-cop goes crazy and they end up having to shoot him.
 - ii. In the *Dawn of the Dead* remake, the mall security guards go power-mad and take everyone prisoner, until eventually they get beat down for suggesting they might rape the woman.
 - b. Worse than that are those still affiliated with some unit of the military that is either so removed they haven't gotten word that the world ended or they're actually tied into whatever branch of the government caused the collapse.
 - i. Guys in hazmat suits should also be avoided, because they're aware of the situation and most likely there to "cleanse" the area.
 - ii. In Romero's *The Crazies* the military instantly quarantines the infected area, gathers up all the civilians, and executes anyone who resists.
 - iii. In *28 Weeks Later* military snipers target the infected at first, but when it gets too difficult to distinguish the difference they just start shooting everybody. Then they quarantine the area and try to kill everyone in it.

- iv. In *Day of the Dead* the military guys take over their stronghold and throw anyone they don't like to the zombies.
 - c. Worst case, they're part of some newly formed self-appointed army out to impose their new order on everyone they find. This happens in more than just zombie apocalypses:
 - i. In *The Postman* Kevin Costner is recruited by the New World Order until he manages to establish the postal service as the new form of government, with the help of Tom Petty.
 - ii. In *Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome* Tina Turner builds an empire around a gladiatorial death cage.
 - iii. In *Waterworld* Dennis Hopper becomes the overlord of an oil tanker full of crazies.
 3. No looting and no trespassing.
 - a. Abandoned stores will either be picked clean or they won't be abandoned long. Learn to strike up trade or find supplies elsewhere.
 - b. Don't go walking into a house just because it looks abandoned. People won't think twice about killing intruders.
 4. Avoid churches, hospitals, & disaster shelters.
 - a. People will go to churches for guidance and end up dying there, like in *The Stand*, creating either a mass of zombies or a big mess. Or they'll form a kill-crazy cult like the psychic mutants who nuke the world in *Beneath the Planet of the Apes*. Even if they don't have psychic powers or an A-bomb, that's not a bunch you'll want to stumble into.
 - b. Hospitals will be full of dying and helpless people, and as soon as the outbreak happens everyone will be rushing there to spread the infection. Not a good place to go. You see this in *Planet Terror* and *Left 4 Dead*.
 - c. Shelters - any place groups of people will be crowded into would be a bad place to be. Look for places people wouldn't normally go.
 - d. Prisons are especially bad because people are trapped in there, so it would be an ideal place for creating a massive zombie population. They learned this the hard way in *The Walking Dead*, where they encountered the trifecta of prison zombie scenarios:
 - i. If the genpop has been turned and trapped inside the prison, then that's just a spring-loaded horror waiting to be set loose.
 - ii. If the population hasn't been turned, then that means zombies came on them in sufficient numbers that they killed all the prisoners, which means there's a huge zombie population roaming free in the area.
 - iii. If the prisoners managed to fight off the zombies and free themselves, then the prison is probably some kind of Mad Max-style feudal fortress run by lifers who managed to fight off a zombie army with their bare hands. That makes them worse than just about anything.

4. FIGHT TO LIVE

Don't make a stand or try to find the cure. Only fight zombies when you can't avoid them. And be mindful of the Zombie Rules of Engagement:

1. Beware of blood spatters and contagion.
 - a. Melee weapons should be considered disposable.
 - b. In *Zombieland* he chooses weapons from the surrounding area, then discards them. This is an excellent practice for avoiding passive infection.
 - c. Try to avoid bloody close-quarter kills if you can. Avoiding the bite's no help if you're going around rubbing wounds with the dead.
2. Know the difference between Dead and Dead dead
 - a. You can't be too cautious when taking a zombie down. They've already died once.
 - b. In *Zombieland* this is represented as the Double Tap Rule.
 - c. In *Evil Dead* he goes all out. If he's not sure you're dead he just chains you to a table and dismembers you with a chainsaw.
 - d. Don't be overzealous with the living, though. You don't have to put a bullet in someone's brain just because they shut their eyes.
 - e. Learn the difference between dead and unconscious. The dead don't breathe, for starters.
3. Avoid any form of attention. Bright lights and loud noises will only attract zombies, not rescue.
 - a. No fireworks. They use them to distract the zombies in *Land of the Dead*, but it's easier to just steer clear of zombies than it is to give them a light show.
 - b. Bright lights are never good. In *Zombieland* they bring on the horde by restoring power to an amusement park. And in *Left 4 Dead*, bright lights startle the witch! Never a good thing.
 - c. In *The Walking Dead* they defer to melee whenever possible because gunshots attract roamers. Loud noises can also attract a herd from miles away.
 - d. I think sign language will become more prevalent in the Necrocracy. This is a noisy little planet these days, with all the cars and generators and ringing phones, but with all that gone it will become eerily quiet. In that world, you're not going to want to be the only noisy thing getting noticed.
4. Posing as a zombie can be problematic.
 - a. In *Shaun of the Dead* they pass through zombies just by acting like one, but I don't think that would work in a real zombie scenario.
 - b. Bill Murray plays the part using makeup and wardrobe in *Zombieland*, but it ends up getting him killed by the good guys. It should go without saying that zombie pranks are also a really bad idea.
 - c. In *The Walking Dead* they smear detritus on themselves, which makes the most sense, but this is gross and increases the risk of infection. It also might not work, and then wouldn't your face be red?

5. Identify yourself as alive.
 - a. It's a good idea not to sneak up on anybody, zombie or otherwise. Make sure you know who's in the area to avoid surprises on either side.
 - b. In *Night of the Living Dead* the rescue team shoots the hero because they think he's a zombie. Don't poke your head out the window without identifying yourself first.
 - c. Develop a universal greeting that is unmistakably human, like singing.
 - d. Never groan, growl or snarl.
 - e. Sleep on your side to avoid snoring. It might attract zombie attention or be mistaken for zombie groans.
6. Burn your dead.
 - a. You don't want to take the time to bury them anyway, but more pragmatically this is necessary to fight the zombie threat.
 - i. The dead may still be susceptible to re-animation, so the best way to avoid that is destroying the body.
 - ii. If they're infected already, the body becomes a health risk to everyone and should therefore be destroyed.
 - iii. Fresh kills may attract zombies, dangerous animals, or cannibals. Burning the bodies eliminates that threat.
7. Combat training tips I learned from *Left 4 Dead*:
 - a. Learn to run backwards. When they're closing in, it helps to run and shoot at the same time.
 - b. Crazies should take point. When the zombies pop up, I shoot everything. For this reason it's best if everyone stays behind me. Until I start running backwards through the ranks, then all bets are off.
 - c. On a straight sweep stick to small arms and semi-autos to save ammo. But if they start to swarm you, go full auto. Saving lives is more important than saving bullets.
8. Defending the Perimeter:
 - a. Door greeters (like a motion-activated talking frog or gnome) are easy to come by and might help to alert you of intruders. They might attract intruders if they go off all the time, though (like mine does).
 - b. Door alarms are simple to set and have the same advantages, but chances are, if a zombie's coming through the door you'll know it.
 - c. Motion-activated lights would be good for keeping the zombies distracted while you make your escape. Lights also get the attention of anyone in the immediate area without attracting the attention of anything far away.
9. Never save the last bullet for yourself (This is the *From Dusk til Dawn* rule).
 - a. If every bullet buys you one more second to live, then use that second to figure out how to get another second. The object of the game is survival.

5. THE FUTURE OF HUMANITY

There has been some criticism that these rules are contrary to community and risk losing your humanity, but a zombie bite will relieve of your humanity in a hurry.

The goal is to survive the First 100 Days so that you can find a safe place to settle down and restore some semblance of civilization. But re-populating the Earth and re-building society aren't practical goals in the first 100. Society's not even done being torn down yet. In the first 100, the only reigning administration will be the Necrocracy. There's no sense trying to hold a Constitutional Congress while the distinguished gentleman from Alabama is trying to eat your head.

Help the people you find in need if you can, but keep everybody moving. Don't add numbers to the group because you think it'll make the group stronger, but if you want to save some folks along the way, go ahead. Just keep them moving to higher ground and don't lose sight of the fact that you're trying to keep them alive.

There's hope on the horizon if you can stay alive. Zombies can't live forever because their bodies will rot right out from under them, and they can't continue to spread the infection at the same rate because they'll simply run out of living people to infect.

Most of the population will fall victim to zombies in the first 100 days, so all the remaining minority has to do is lay low until they all fall apart. Then you can rebuild society. Just remember to keep it simple, stay clear of strangers and cremate your dead from now on. In another generation or so the zombie threat will be all but forgotten. You just have to make it that far.

