Campaigns in *All Flesh Must Be Eaten*

John McMullen

There's this perception that survival horror games are for one-shots. That you can't run a long-term campaign in a game like *All Flesh Must Be Eaten*. That everybody dies at the end and what's the point of a second week of that?

This perception—like the belief that you can only run a zombie game if you keep a severed head on your desk—is incorrect. And I intend to show you a couple of ways you can run a long-term campaign chock full of living dead mayhem.

(This article incorporates ideas from lots of folks on the *AFMBE* mailing list, including but not limited to Mud Puppie, Edward Perkins, Ghost Ship, Bob Fletcher, Kelly Dasher, and Albert Bruno III.)

You've got a few options if you're intent on a long-term campaign. Here are some:

1. Start the campaign *before* the zombies rise. Get the players involved in whatever will cause the dead to rise. The most likely setup, to me, is that the zombies are the result of some powerful spell, and the players don't manage to stop it in time. The rise of the zombies might be the turning point in any kind of hidden occult or conspiracy game (think of the backgrounds of *WitchCraft, Call of Cthulhu, Delta Green, Bureau 13, Chill, Mage, Ars Magica, GURPS Voodoo, CORPS* 1st edition…)

    On the plus side, your players have time to get to know each other and the NPCs; they really get to feel it when you tear the world away. Plus, you can have the fun of killing various recurring characters or having them escape to torment the player characters further.

    On the negative side, it takes quite a while to get to the zombie-killing fun, and you're less likely to end up with player characters who interact like strangers trapped in a George A. Romero movie. And—this is important—after the dead rise, you have the same problem as #3, below.

2. Let them die. Work out some kind of overarching story-plot and have the campaign run as a series of stories that may or may not involve the same characters. If anyone *doesn't* die at the end of an adventure, you have the option of bringing them back. What's important here is continuity of players, not characters. The *players* have the fun of seeing the world situation evolve, even if their characters don't.

3. Start when the zombies rise and just keep going, introducing new characters as old ones die, just like any other campaign (although possibly more frequently). This is the real problem, and the one we're talking about here.

If you think zombies are only good for a single night, then your focus is too narrow. What happens when the dead rise? Lots of violence, of course, and one more teensy little item: The collapse of civilization.

Things. Fall. Apart.

The modern world is a tightly interconnected web of dependencies. Without electricity to run the pumps, you can't fill your car. Without your car, you can't get to the grocery store—but that's okay;

the refrigeration's off and the food is spoiling. Spoiled food means illness and empty bellies, and shortly after that it means riots, violence, and mob rule.

And that's *without* zombies.

Zombies are just the trigger that pushes civilization over the edge and keeps it tumbling. They're the flavour of this particular apocalypse.

After that first shocker adventure, the Cast needs to find a reason to live...they need to deal with the problems of food, and water, and electrical power, and scavenging for medicine, and ammo—lots more ammo. :-)

Depending on the type of Deadworld you run, you'll put the point of no return closer or farther. For example, the *Mein Zombie* Deadworld has some pretty nasty zombies and the threat of Nazi world domination, but back in the US of A, no one's threatening his neighbour with a shotgun. (At least, no more than usual.) In the *Rise of the Walking Dead*, everything with a backbone that dies becomes a zombie, which makes vegetarianism look like a pretty good option. The more people die, the harder it is for civilization to come back. And that's the key to your campaign.

Your players aren't just fighting zombies. They're trying to survive. They're dealing with the other half-crazed people out there who would also like to survive. There may be other threats: perhaps nature herself.

And your players are also fighting themselves. (Use the Essence loss rules!) The stress and strain can eat away at anybody.

The search for ammunition alone can eat up entire adventures, with only one or two zombies thrown in for good measure:

> *The four Cast Members have found a door leading to a fallout shelter. They're sure it contains food, water, ammunition and they want in. The problem is that six members of a street gang found them standing outside it. Now they want the Cast Members to go away so they can get in. Nobody has ammunition left; one gang member tried firing his zip gun but it was fouled and blew up in his hand. He's sitting over there in shock.*

> *The leader of the gang pulls out his knife and threatens one of the Cast…who takes him up on it. The Cast Member gets a nasty cut but manages to club the gang leader on the head and he falls unconscious. As the Cast are dealing with the angry gang members, their leader gets up. He died from the concussion…*

Maslow's Hierarchy of Adventure Seeds

You know your first adventure: The dead rise, and the players try to survive. Eventually, at least one of them does. (Otherwise, go to campaign option 2 in the first part of this article.)

If you ever took a psychology course, you probably ran across Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Basically, the desires we each want to fulfill, arranged in a pyramid. Most people aren't concerned with one level until the previous one is fulfilled.

As a zombie master, you can look at it as a source of adventure seeds, or the structure for an entire campaign:

1. Physiological needs (food, water, and basic survival)

    - kill that zombie!
    - get more food; this food's bad

- find potable water
- get first aid supplies
- deal with that black widow spider bite
- find shelter, with an exit
- get reliable, sturdy transportation and fuel

2. Safety (protection, organization in the social structure)

- find other like-minded survivors
- deal with survivors who are *not* like-minded

3. Love, affection, and belongingness

- Search for family members who are missing or who were distant when the disaster struck
- Gaining entrance into a family group or a community

4. Esteem (respect from others, self-respect)

5. Self-actualization (the need to be involved in something you were born to do, your calling)

Obviously, steps 1 and 2 are a big part of any post-apocalyptic game, but you can move on to the higher steps too. Maybe the players will find or found a settlement, work to gain respect in it, be able to concentrate on what they do best (which for most role-playing characters takes us back to denying somebody else of stage 1 and 2, but I digress).

Steps 3, 4, and 5 are pure acting. Whether that flies in your game depends on your players and you. Anybody can use starvation as a prod, but only people who *want* to will role-play a game involving a character's search for self-respect, or finding his or her calling.

However, just because Maslow put them in a hierarchy doesn't mean you have to. Mix and match; your Cast Members are coming from a functional society where they had most of these needs met, or they might still be struggling with getting respect from others even as they're trying to take the head off that zombie.

People have killed themselves for being shunned; people have died for lack of respect, lack of love, and loneliness. Any level of this hierarchy can be lethal for the right character.

> *Norton has been "adopted" by a motorcycle gang. They make him do clean-up tasks and make fun of him, beat him up if he tries to escape, and he hates it—but, he thinks, it's a protection of a sort. Then, outside a town where the zombies are clustering around a small band of survivors they tell him: He can be a full member of the gang if he just gets a pistol and badge from a zombie cop. Norton doesn't know if it's another practical joke or a legitimate offer. Going in might kill him, but living like this will surely kill him eventually. Will he do it?*

For more ideas, check out the Post-Apocalyptic Shopping List at the end of this article, a collection of suggestions about things that wear out, break, fall apart, or will be in short supply once the dead rise. Any of those can motivate or complicate your next adventure. ("We need to go into the zombie-infested city for a *bra*?")

Putting It All Together

Here's a sample campaign narrative, just to show you how it might work. Your group will do different things—don't they all?—but you can see how it might work.

The dead rise—and everything breaks down. Your Cast Members survive long enough to get away from where they were first trapped. They scavenge food, water, and a mobile home with a full tank of gas, and go looking for a safer place to stay.

One person remembers a good spot; his family used to spend summer vacations near there. It's defensible, has fresh water, and is winterized. The trip up requires them to scrounge up a new tire (some auto accidents left sharp debris on the road), food, water, and ammo, and they find a woman who's sick. She *says* she's a doctor. Do they take her along, risking she'll die and threaten them all? She's the only survivor of a huge zombie horde that's heading in the same direction.

When they get there, they discover that other survivors got there first. They have to petition the enclave to let them in, or start their own. If the doctor is really a doctor, maybe she's their bargaining chip. Or maybe it's news of the three thousand zombies on the way….

Or they find little groups who have their own crackpot ideas to explain the rise of the dead and anyone who doesn't believe is a threat and should be converted or exterminated.

Eventually they find shelter. And then they're part of a community. Are they trusted? Perhaps. Perhaps not. There's still lots to learn, however.

They learn that even though you have a strong fence around your enclave, it doesn't matter if someone inside dies of a heart attack and turns into a flesh-eating monster in the gymnasium, where no one has a gun. They discover that someone has to go into the zombie-infested city to see if there are any books on how to cultivate your own penicillin.

There are no doctors, no dentists, no chiropractors, no naturopaths, no optometrists. Somebody breaks his or her glasses and can't see. Is he or she now a liability instead of a help? And what does your Cast do with them?

With an eye to the future, they want livestock. They organize a trip to find dairy cattle or goats or chickens that are wandering around the countryside (all of which are very skittish, because the zombies have been trying to grab them, too).

Something is killing the cattle, and they discover that some soft-hearted person let the tigers out of the zoo instead of letting them starve when civilization fell. There's a pair of tigers in the area— maybe more (where did the elephants go?)

The Cast will be trying to repair a generator so they can run an electric alarm system or even movie night for the kids. They'll be trying to decide if that now-pregnant teenage girl who finally did it with her now-dead boyfriend the night the dead rose should have an abortion, because they don't have food to support a pregnant woman...and she may not want one, because it's all she has of her beloved Ricky, so she runs away after disabling the fort's power supply and taking most of the ammo....

Maybe they don't like the way the others are running things; maybe they think the others are foolish and setting themselves up for being overrun by one huge zombie horde later, even though everyone else is exhausted and is willing to put up with the problems. They're safe, right?

So one Cast Member tries to become mayor. The others help or hinder.

Do you even want the PCs to be in charge? Maybe not. Just because they're the Cast doesn't mean they need to be in charge. It's certainly more convenient if they're not in charge: they can be ordered to do things. "The condensator coil for the well pump is shot. Go to Vault 13 and get theirs."

Still More Adventure Seeds

Other adventure ideas you can use to build a campaign:

- What caused the zombies, and can it be reversed?
- Searching for a doctor or scientist or someone with specialized knowledge (in some groups, that'd be a farmer).
- What if the zombies change after most of the living are gone? Now they're intelligent, or they're all out in the desert looking up and waiting, for something…
- What if zombie lords arise? At first they'll be saviours, but what are their ultimate goals?
- What if a cult has learned to live in some kind of co-existence with "their" zombies? Almost but not quite a zombie lord situation.
- What if there's a major fire in the fort? People dying, burning zombies staggering from the flames, the perimeter in danger of being breached...
- What if your settlement is overtaken by religious hysteria?
- Exploratory trips to see what's happening "out there"
- A freak hailstorm flattens the crops, and folks have to scavenge for food again.
- A player decides he wants to be a traveling salesman; what does he need and how does he prepare?
- The group looking for missing or lost loved ones/relatives
- Convoy guards: for relief convoys, trading between communities, relocating to a new, less zombified area, et al...
- In addition to looking for folks with special skills, why not ones with special equipment? "Two days ago, I saw a vehicle that would haul that tanker. You want to get out of here? You talk to me."
- Resistance to warlords or gangs trying to carve out their niche in the "New World"... or maybe even resisting the Federal government when it finally shows up.
- Setting up rescue/first aid/relief stations... this could be taken to *any* timeframe after the rise.

It's Not Really About Zombies

At best, the zombies are an environmental hazard/dramatic device. They can get old real quick if there isn't anything a bit more "meaty" (ahem) to sustain interest. George A. Romero is emphatic about this: in his movies, the zombies aren't the real threat; *people* are.

Think about this: if you were doing a campaign set in an underwater city, would you imagine that every episode had to be about the threat of the bends, drowning, and finding more air? Of course not; those are a background threat, like sharks, brought in when you need to up the ante in a particular adventure. Once the cast survives past a certain point, that's all zombies are. They shouldn't be careless, or they'll find themselves trapped in an old farmhouse and low on ammunition—but for old pros, that's avoidable.

Think about TV shows like "The Fugitive" and "The Incredible Hulk": in both of those, the Cast is constantly on the move, meeting strange situations and threats. The fight for survival gives your Cast license to meddle in the affairs of others, as it gives other characters license to meddle with your Cast.

Another good source is the "Deadworld" comic series. A little closer to zombie source material, excellent atmospheric stuff, and it clearly shows the threats other than zombies.

What Will You Need?

So in a game with a high mortality rate, what do you want? It depends on your players and your wants, of course, but here's what I'd look for in thinking about what to put in my campaign:

- There must be a place for new characters to come from; if a character dies, the player needs to be able to introduce a new one.
- There must be something besides zombies to keep the characters going.
- Fifty-two weeks of "survival!" gets stale. There have to be other people to interact with.
- Lastly, for my players, there must be a possibility of a "happy ending," in that the players should be able to feel that they accomplished something. Your players may be the same.

The Post-Apocalyptic Shopping List

This list is almost entirely the result of brainstorming by the *AFMBE* mailing list, and the credit is theirs. This started off as a thread about things that would be in short supply after the rise of the dead. (In fact, the majority of the list came from Kelly Dasher, and I just cut and pasted them in. She is hereby acknowledged.)

Use any of these to confound your players in small ways or to force them into action.

Survival gear

- Good, sturdy backpacks—they'll wear out if you're overloading them and dragging them around through combat and survival conditions
- Shelter that hasn't been trashed by looters, zombies, gunfire, fire, explosion, driving the car through the mall or into the living room
- Windows that still have glass in them, in buildings *and* vehicles
- Tents—of course, do you want to be in a nylon tent when the zombies come by?
- Sleeping bags and blankets
- Waterproofing
- Boy Scout manuals. Plant identification and herbal remedy books.
- Pillows that haven't gone flat or moldy
- Sterno and chemical warmers
- Bug repellant

Weapons

- Ammo, ammo, ammo
- Gun cleaning supplies—a dirty gun is an unhappy gun
- Some kind of lighting—do you want to be reloading ammo by candlelight?
- Powder—can you make your own? Black powder's not terribly difficult to make, but your rifle probably isn't designed for it
- Bowstrings; new arrows—can you make your own?

Clothing

- Clean underwear when and where you need them
- Shoes and shoelaces

- Gloves
- Small things (like buttons) or the things that you have to save for a year before you need them again. Where are you going to get winter clothing if the stores are full of summer supplies?
- Velcro wears out, especially if it isn't cleaned regularly. Zippers break. Where's that duct tape…?
- Sewing needles, safety pins, and thread for clothing and equipment repair
- Bras or other support in which the elastic hasn't given out (the average bra is designed for 180 days of use). The elastic bits in spandex will start wearing out, too. And the waistband in underwear. And the elastic woven into socks to help them stay up.
- Stockings and pantyhose—denim may continue to be the fashion in survival
- Any nice, delicate fabric
- Belts—especially if you're toting around tools, weapons and ammo on them as well as holding up your (de-elasticized) underwear.
- Holsters, if you're quick-drawing a lot especially.
- Almost anything made of ballistic nylon will need to be replaced, since it's nearly impossible to fix once it tears. Hope your PCs can cure and tan hides. (If animals become zombies, they'll have lots of hides to learn with.)

Mechanical/Vehicle

- Vehicles left outside and untended for six months are going to be in poor shape.
  - Road surfaces are going to start deteriorating—potholes in asphalt, gravel washing away, plants starting to grow through things; anything the state normally cleans up will still be there, blocking the roadways: accidents, abandoned vehicles, trees, power lines, garbage…
  - Boats—they require a lot of care, and they can be traps as well as escape routes
  - What about unmaintained bridges—those suspension cables aren't good forever once they're hung. And what do you do if you're in a car or a boat and you come to a drawbridge in the wrong position?
- Car parts—you don't want to break down on the run, or jump into the car when running from a horde and have the car not even start.
  - Older vehicles (pre-1978) are pre-electronic; of course, they're older and may be in worse mechanical shape…
  - Various fluids used by modern cars (brake and steering fluid, anti-freeze, etc.)
  - Pumps to lift gas, and pump water, and water filters
  - Tires—rubber degrades, and once you start running over zombies, driving cross country or through malls, you start getting a lot of flats
  - Motor hoses and belts
- Lubricants (oils and WD-40) for all machines: vehicles, hinges, and guns all need oil to keep working
- Small engine parts for your generator
- Nails—most hardware stores actually have very few on premises
- Hand tools, like hacksaw blades, drill bits, scissors—are you going to know how to sharpen your own blades without ruining them? Do you know how to work a brace and bit drill when your power drill runs out of batteries, or where to find one? Even hammers break, especially the handles.

- Can anyone make a still? You can use alcohol as a fuel or a disinfectant, you can trade with it, and you can drink it. Of course, you need someone who knows what to do

Personal toiletries and hygiene

- Toilet paper
- Toilets that work
- Soap
- Toothpaste
- Bug repellent
- Hairspray and other aerosol can sprays
- Contacts and glasses—forget about contacts, and the chance of finding spare glasses in your prescription is slim to nil. All plastic degrades, including your lenses, and plastic lenses scratch up a lot more. (Learn to grind glass.)
- Time for a bath or shower
- Feminine hygiene products
- Good haircuts
- Non-infected piercing
- Razor blades
- Deodorant.
- Toothbrushes you want to stick in your mouth
- Chewing gum and breath mints (could affect your Seduction rolls)
- Nail files
- Q-tips
- Cotton balls
- Sponges
- Baby stuff—diapers, food, formula, wipes, oil, rash cream. Pedialyte may taste like sweat, but it's more efficient than Gatorade. Diapers (seriously). Big wounds require big Band-Aids, they are tremendously absorbent for all sorts of purposes, and you can soak them in gasoline for a very different Molotov cocktail effect. (The absorbent material in sanitary napkins was originally developed as a replacement for cotton bandages, back in WWI.)

Medication and health care

- Any medications requiring refrigeration, such as insulin.
- Condoms or birth control—people aren't going to stop having sex, and they probably won't want to have children for at least a while
- Vitamins—nobody's going to be farming for a while; once the frozen and canned stocks run out or are looted, there'll be a commensurate rise in diseases. Without certain vitamins, debilitating illness will rise drastically (the origin of the word "limey" derives from the age of sail, when the British Navy used limes to stave off scurvy and other debilitating diseases)
- Anti-psychotic drugs—Lithium, Prozac, etc. How are the people suddenly without these drugs going to start acting? (And think of the poor junkies looking for that next fix of cocaine, heroin, marijuana or speed.)
- Surgical supplies—who wants to make a run at the hospital, where the first wave of injured ended up? Sterile anything will be rare, or even band aids and antiseptic

- Painkillers—aspirin often contains caffeine; see "stimulants"
- Stimulants—caffeine withdrawal is a bad time
- Sports wraps, nice padded crutches, joint braces.
- Antivenin. (Will you have time to go collect snake venom? Will you know what to do with it afterwards?)
- Allergy medication
- Asthma inhalers

Utility

- Strong magnets—they're useful and hard to make
- Anything rats will eat (which is anything) that is stored where rats can get to it (which is anywhere), including wax, soap, anything in a cardboard box or a bag, paper products including books, waxed cardboard shotgun shells, leather goods, clothing, sleeping or injured people...
- Cigarettes (don't forget that tobacco has medicinal uses, too, including preventing infections.)
- Animals—pets, guard dogs, transportation. Critters to eat, too, but a horse is more versatile and useful than a car, and easier to maintain. Cats protect you and your food from vermin. A few good laying hens are better than a single fried chicken in terms of survival.
- Fastenings
  - Rubber bands
  - String and rope (some kinds of polypropylene rope degrade in sunlight)
  - Hair clips
- Lighting:—reading or sewing by oil lamp or candles gives you a headache, ruins your eyesight, and spoils your night vision if you're suddenly attacked.
  - Candles
  - Flints and mantles and such for lighters and lanterns (and the natural gas/propane/oil to fuel them)
  - Lightsticks
  - Electricity/batteries to run the lights
  - Flashlights—those bulbs might break easily
- Film for cameras, and places to develop it (though maybe one of the Cast has a home darkroom)
- Fuels—they're often volatile and we tend to store them in holes in the ground.
  - Vehicle fuels—gasoline, electricity, natural gas/propane
  - Heating and cooking fuels—remember that wood still has to be gathered, cut and dried before it's useful. Existing woodpiles may be looted early, or may be the source of bonfires
- Batteries, both non-rechargeable and rechargeable, especially with the jury-rigged ways folks are going to have recharge batteries
- Writing pens for scribbling down notes or directions to safe places
- Telephone and Internet will only last as long as the electricity does—all the switching systems need to be powered and monitored
- Sporting goods—that's the first thing everyone loots (with food), whether or not they need the stuff
- Metal left outside is going to rust up, including the locks on fences, outbuildings, tool sheds, bikes, etc.

- Empty, non-rusted out dumpsters—use as shelter, low-tech tank, zombie trap…if you can empty them first and the lid's sturdy
- Furniture that hasn't been burned or used as barricades or weapons
- Fire extinguishers—need to be recharged. Be awful if the Cast picked up a fire extinguisher to put out a flame and it didn't work…
- Recreational activities that require no power, are not strenuous, do not produce babies, are quiet, do not attract zombies or other hostiles, and don't require a lot of light.
- Good musicians with instruments.
- Duct tape. The handyman's secret weapon.
- Chemicals
  - Acids, hydrogen peroxide, anything chemical that will break down or is volatile, especially if it's stored in plastic bottles or other not completely airtight containers (opened and not resealed)
  - Other chemicals, like picric acid, gradually become more volatile, even explosive, as they age

Food

- Seeds for next year's crops—most commercial seeds sold for gardens don't breed true, or you wouldn't need to buy seeds again next year
- Cheese—it's not just spoiled milk
- Milk—but dairy cattle need to be milked every day
- Beer
- Fresh meat—and maybe Pepto-Bismol, until you learn how to properly clean and cook an animal
- Readily available drinking water—in the city you can bet that'll be snatched up by looters and survivalists alike
- Fruit
- Vegetables
- Refined sugar—almost everyone in the U.S. is physically addicted to sugar, it's in everything, and while you're breaking the addiction, you'll be depressed and headachy
- Chocolate —maybe you want to save it for the premenstrual women or zombies will pale in comparison.
- All the soda is going to go flat—drink the plastic bottles first
- Eggs—you need animals
- Yeast
- Yogurt culture
- Other leavenings used in baking, so fresh bread is now the *heavy* bread.
- Coffee, tea, hot chocolate—the packages in the stores will last for a while, but eventually mildew will get them, or the buildings will be too dangerous to enter.
- Means of storing food
  - Tupperware, plastic bags, canning jars, vacuum sealers, preservatives, non-electric dehydrators...
  - Coolers, thermoses, and those little blue ice packs
  - Things to carry/store good water in—glass is heavy, *water* is heavy, plastic isn't that tough either; ever drop a gallon of milk and have it explode?

- Non-electric can openers—they do break, and they make things *much* easier!

Skills

If anyone is able to settle a colony during a rise of the dead, they'll need skills to get it running and keep it running

- Carpenters
- Electricians
- Plumbers
- Blacksmiths and farriers
- Mechanics: can you build a plastic-injection system? Can you run it? Can you fix a tractor? Can you weld bars onto your truck cab?
- Tool and die makers
- Doctors
- Farmers
- Pharmacists
- Dentists—Can you see an adventure built around the epic quest for a dentist? You might want to watch *Castaway* for one view of home dentistry
- Teachers
- Gunsmiths
- Chemists (for making new ammo)
- Just about everything else you can think of.

See also

This web sites can point you to lots more post-apocalyptic shopping:
http://www.keyway.net/~sinner/tribe8/weaversloom/scavengorama.htm

And you might want to look at this book for more hints about how things work and how they can break down:

http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0395938473/qid=979597778/sr=2-1/ref=sc_b_1/102-1166694-2529769

You might also want to check out a few survival guides for ideas about what can go wrong without civilization.