

HARD DAYS

*a social game by Jonny Garcia
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HARD DAYS

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Theme: Fiction, post-apocalypse

Total duration: 120 minutes

Preparation time: 30 minutes

Minimum number of players: 4

Maximum number of players: 7

Organizers: 2

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The Setting

This larp is set in the future, where humanity almost vanishes from Earth. A terrible zombie epidemic killed 90% of the Earth's population and the few who managed to survive are struggling to keep going. Although this larp has a grounding in a zombies and survivors scenario, the goal is to create high-pressure situations and force the characters to make tough decisions, which include other characters' lives.

Hard Days is suitable for 4 to 7 players; two organizers are necessary. There are two groups in this larp: The Family and The Survivors. The Family is a group of three people: The Protector, The Future, and The Realist. The Protector and The Future are a couple and The Realist is The Future's sibling. The Survivors are a group of four people: The Strong, The Freshman, The Hope, and The Survivor. They are people who try to create a community to have a better life.

In developing this game, I created a few questions that guided me during the design process. My goal in playing this game is to figure out the answers to these questions.

- How are the two groups going to interact with each other? Are they going to be passive or violent? Are they going to be animals or humans?
- Is it worthwhile to have a baby in a world where no future can be assured?
- How hard is it to make decisions?
- How will the players handle the supplies, especially the food?
- How do we deal with the fact that we are going to die, especially if it is imminent?

The Game

This game needs at least four, maximum seven, players plus two organizers, and takes 2 hours to complete, including 30 minutes of preparation and 90 minutes in game. You don't need a special space for Hard Days, but you will need to use a place where you can split up the players in two groups. It is best if the spaces are separate and the two groups don't have any interactions. Before the game starts, each group has to make some decisions about the backstory. During the game the two groups are going to meet each other, and this is the big event of this game. In the last 20 minutes The Future, who is pregnant, is going to deliver the baby. This is the second major event of the game. Hard Days has some basic combat mechanics, but the goal for this game is to put the players on the spot and forces them to make tough calls. The guns are used to create a pressured mood. From step one to five the players have thirty minutes, followed ninety minutes to play the game (step six). When the players are ready, read the introduction letter to them.

Introduction Letter

I don't know how, but it happened. It was maybe 3 or 4 years ago... we don't know anymore because we lost track of time... we just know it was long time ago. After the end, everyday have been a journey through surviving. A week looks like a month, a month like a year... The only things that last from the old times are few survivors and zombies... hundreds of them... not hundreds, thousands... Most of the population turned into zombies, but humans killed the others that survived. People got crazy and scared, and I realise that fear is the most powerful emotion that we can have. Fear keeps us alive and fighting for another day. These days find food is very hard, and survive are very difficulty. It isn't like any zombie movie that I watched...

First Step: Mechanics

Once everybody is ready, explain the game mechanics.

Places

In the first half of the game there are two play areas. The first and primary one will be The Family Group's residence and the second is the journey of The Survivor Group. At 45 minutes, about halfway through the game, the two groups are going to meet each other. You should tell them this.

Weapons

There are two kinds of weapons: knives and a gun. Both are mortal: if someone gets stabbed/cut or shot they are going to die, but they can be saved with a first-aid kit. If you die, you are out of the game. The difference between weapons is the range and time before death. A knife wound takes longer to kill someone; it is the player's call when they are going to die but they **MUST die!!!** On the other hand, a gunshot will put the person down immediately, and if they don't get help in 5 minutes they will die.

To use a knife as a weapon you just need to **gently** touch someone with the tip, which will represent a stab. To cut someone you just have to **gently** slash the knife, and this is enough to kill someone. Again, this game is not about combat but instead making hard decisions and killing someone is one of these. There is no struggling, if you fight with someone who has a knife, you are going to die. You can **finish someones experience** during the game. If you kill them, that person is out of the game. **This is not an easy decision to make.**

The only way to kill a zombie is shooting at it.

Zombies

If a zombie touches someone, even a simple tap, that person infected and they will turn into a zombie shortly. The exact moment to turn is the player's call, **and they should use it to create an interesting moment.**

Healing

Someone who possesses a first-aid kit can heal a wounded person. The first-aid kit is a bandage, to use it the bandage has to be wrapped around the wound. Knife wounds should be cured by no longer than 10 minutes after the injury. A gunshot wound has to be healed in less than 5 minutes.

If you are healed, it doesn't mean that you have been magically restored to your full health. You are not going to die, but you still are in pain, so **role play it**. You can limp or pretend you can't move your arm; whatever you chose **makes it real and visual**. Unfortunately there **isn't** anything that can be done to cure an infected person.

Starving

Some people at beginning of the game will be starving. This has no effect in terms of mechanics, but **has effect in the game's fiction**. Eating is a basic need for human beings, and be **starving is a terrible feeling that can make people do crazy things**.

You can show signs of tiredness, headaches, dizziness, and weakness during the game. Interpret this behaviour as an *opportunity to develop relationships with other players*. **If you are starving, role play it!**

Second Step: Set up the groups

At the beginning of the game the organizers should split the players into two groups: The Family and The Survivors. The only restriction regarding gender is related to The Family group which has a couple, man and woman, where the woman is pregnant. The characters don't have names, they just have a title representing their significance in the game but feel free to give real names for the characters. I advise you to use nametags because it facilitates the immersion as players will call each other by their characters' name instead of the player's names. As soon as the groups split up, they should move to their respective game sites.

Third Step: Introduction

Once each group gets to their respective sites, you should hand out the letters below:

The Family Letter

The last months have been very hard as The Future can't travel anymore; she is extremely pregnant (fuck!). The Protector has been doing his best to get supplies, food, and make sure everybody is safe! Very soon the baby will arrive in this crap world, and I always wonder what will happen. The Protector has also been paranoid about everything, maybe the idea of having a kid is freaking him out. The Realist always thinks about the worst scenarios, but deep inside of each of us we know that he isn't totally wrong, we just don't want to see it, it is very hard to live without hope!

The Survivors Letter

In the beginning it looked like a new start. We had found hope in this community, but life, especially now, always put us down. We used to be about 25 souls trying to survive as best as we could, but last night our common fear struck us, and it didn't end well! During the night our camp was attacked by hundreds of zombies... we have no idea where they came from, but there they were! Very few of us survived. The Strong who always kept us alive; The Freshman who is the newest member of our community; The Hope who keeps us sane and believing in a possible better future; The Survivor who is sometimes our saviour and at others our worst nightmare.

*At some point in the game your group is going to meet the other group. When it is time, you should move to the other groups place, but **don't rush**, you have time. Remember that this is a new territory and none of you have been there before; the other group knows their territory very well. **They are strangers**, and you don't know anything about the people out there. **In these days people can be crazy.***

Forth Step: Characters

After each group reads their letter, they have to decide which characters they are going to play. First read the introduction about each character, and let the players decide who is going to play whom. Once they have decided, hand out the characters sheet, which can be found in the Hand Outs section. Some of the characters are required in this game, as identified below.

Characters' Introduction:

The Family Group

The Protector (required)

You have been keeping this family safe since the beginning of the apocalypse, but you are very tired and losing hope. Very soon you will be the father of a little baby, are you ready?

The Future (required)

You are the future of humankind because you are pregnant. Human beings have almost vanished, but you have the gift of life, soon you will be a mother! How is your baby going to survive in this terrible world?

The Realist

You are The Future's young sibling and the only thing that you can think that this world is a piece of shit and there isn't hope. Sooner or later all of us will be a zombie or dead, but your sister will have a baby. How can she do this to an innocent child?

The Survivor Group

The Strong

Since you and The Hope got together and kept adding new people to try to build a community, you have been the one who keeps these people alive and safe! But, what's going to happen when you are gone?

The Freshman

You have been alone in this world for a long time and somehow you had managed to survive by yourself. In the last couple of weeks you started to live with this "community". At least that is what *they* called it.

The Hope (required)

Human beings need just one thing to keep going: HOPE. That is the only thing everybody needs. We need hope to believe in a better world, to believe in a possible future, to not kill each other. Without it, we aren't human.

The Survivor (required)

The world is what it is, and it is not going to change for the better; it is only going to get worse! You do whatever is necessary to keep *yourself* out of trouble and alive, even when you have to do something *not very nice*.

Fifth step: Fiction Decisions

Before the game begins each group has to describe their world. Bear in mind the players should talk about each question and answer it in character. This step makes the players start to think as their characters and begin their social interaction. ***This is a very important step.***

Family Group:

- Where do you live? What does it look like?
- What is your approach when you meet strangers?
- What has been disturbing the relationship between the couple and why?
- What will be the baby's name?

Survivor Group:

- Where were you when the camp was attacked? (You were all separated).
- How did you manage to escape?
- What has happened to the group that is somewhat related to The Hope and his/her spirit of believing?
- Who is the leader of the group? Why?
- What is the next step after what happened?

Each group starts with few supplies following the list below:

The Family Group

- A gun with 2 bullets
- One first-aid kit

The Survivor Group

- Two knives
- One food supply

If a group doesn't start with a food supply, they will be considered starving, ***role play it!***

Sixth step: Let's Play It

The game will last for 90 minutes and ends when the new baby is born. The organizers have to inform The Future's player in the last 20 minutes of play that the baby that is ready to come to the world.

Before the game begins, hand out the letters below. The props should be placed in their respective scenarios. For the Survivor Group spread out everything they have, so they can find it on the ground as if they searched the campsite and found it.

During the game the two groups are going to meet each other, 30-45 minutes after the beginning. The Survivors Group are going to discover the Family Group's place. The outcome of this meeting is the reason for playing. They could be violently fighting each other, or one group kills the other one, or they even can make an agreement and live together. Lets play to figure it out.

Family Group Starting Message

Another day, another opportunity for suffering. The Future woke up with terrible pain and contractions. The Protector is very worried about his wife's health. The Realist believes that this is just a normal day in this abnormal world.

Survivor Group Starting Message

It is almost sunrise, and a few hours have passed since the attack. During the past few hours you have been hiding, avoiding the zombies, and trying to stay alive. Maybe now it is safe to go looking for the others who might have survived the attack and find some supplies. Everyone is separated and doesn't know who is alive.

Staff Notes

Scenario

This game is designed to be run in two different places, where each group will start. Because there are two different places, and the groups shouldn't interact with each other before they meet, two organizers are necessary. Each one should watch a group.

This game doesn't require any scenery, but if you can, try to make the Family's place look like a house. You can put some symbolic objects such as tables, chairs, pillows, cutlery, and etc.

Props

This game requires some props.

- A toy weapon that can really shoot, but with limited number of ammunition. Something similar to a Nerf.
- 2 ammunition for the gun.
- 2 knives. Use something hard that can be used to pretend to cut or stab someone. Since the goal of the game is about hard decisions, do not encourage players to kill each other by providing something that looks like a real knife.
- 1 piece of food to be the food supply. A chocolate bar is suitable.
- 1 bandage to be the first-aid kit. To use the bandage someone has to wrap it around the wound.
- A doll to be the new baby.

Dynamics

The staff should be aware of the time as in the last twenty minutes The Future's player should be told it is time to have the baby. If The Future is starving (doesn't eat any food supply) when the baby comes, the baby will be dead, *deal with it*.

Handouts

Characters' Introduction

The Family Group

The Protector (required)

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The Future (required)

You are the future of humankind because you are pregnant. Human beings have almost vanished, but you have the gift of life, soon you will be a mother! How is your baby going to survive in this terrible world?

The Realist

You are The Future's young sibling and the only thing that you can think that this world is a piece of shit and there isn't hope. Sooner or later all of us will be a zombie or dead, but your sister will have a baby. How can she do this to an innocent child?

The Survivor Group

The Strong

Since you and The Hope got together and kept adding new people to try to build a community, you have been the one who keeps these people alive and safe! But, what's going to happen when you are gone?

The Freshman

You have been alone in this world for a long time and somehow you had managed to survive by yourself. In the last couple of weeks you started to live with this "community". At least that is what *they* called it.

The Hope (required)

Human beings need just one thing to keep going: HOPE. That is the only thing everybody needs. We need hope to believe in a better world, to believe in a possible future, to not kill each other. Without it, we aren't human.

The Survivor (required)

The world is what it is, and it is not going to change for the better; it is only going to get worse! You do whatever is necessary to keep *yourself* out of trouble and alive, even when you have to do something *not very nice*.

Characters' Sheet

The Protector (required)

You are responsible for keeping this family alive! The last few months have been very difficult. Your partner, The Future, is nine months pregnant and the baby will arrive at any moment. Since she is pregnant and not in good health, you have been living in the same place for the last 3 months. Getting food and supplies are very challenging tasks. You have looted everything around your site and every time you have to go scavenge you have to journey great distances, sometimes this takes multiple days. This little baby could be the future or your family's death sentence; the baby is your strength and your weakness; your baby is a blessing and a curse. You have come this far, and you are not going to give up hope. Nothing will stop you protecting those you love!

You also live with your wife's sibling who doesn't help you keep your spirits up. He/she always says unhelpful things about how our world is a big piece of shit. Sometimes you wish he/she just shut up.

Questions

- Is it really worthwhile to have a kid in this terrible world?
- How is your relationship with your wife?
- What do you really think about your wife's sibling?

The Future (required)

You are a woman who bears the future, a baby, a new soul for this old and terrible world. You don't know if it was good to get pregnant in this shit world but now the only thing that you can think about is the future! In the past few months you have been sick due to not having enough food, and you and The Protector, your husband have settle down in one place. You are not able to do more than walk — anything other than that could kill the baby. You also share the same home with your young sibling, who always focuses on the worst possible scenarios. During the larp try to role-play your sickness, showing signs of tiredness, starvation, headaches, etc.

In the last 20 minutes of the game you will be told that the baby is coming. ***You have to role play it!***

Questions

- What is it like to be a mother in this world that has no future?
- How is your relationship with your husband?
- How is your relationship with your sibling?

The Realist

You live day by day and you know that tomorrow you will be dead no matter what you do. Today that is how the world is and it will kill you sooner than you can imagine. You share a home with your sister, The Future, who is pregnant and the baby could arrive at any moment. You also live with her husband, The Protector. You see his value in keeping the family alive and safe but are frustrated that he always wants things to go his way.

Questions

- What do you think about having a kid in this world, where you can barely find food?
- What has your brother-in-law, The Protector, done/said to you that you will never forget?
- How is your relationship with your sister?
- What is your particular opinion about strangers?

The Strong

You and The Hope were the first ones to get people together to try to build a community and try to create a better life. You always had been in charge of scavenges to find food and supplies, in other words, you always kept those people alive, until yesterday. Those people were your people and now they are gone. Last night your camp was attacked by hundreds of zombies, and you did your best to save people, but you were bitten in the effort. You know very soon you will turn into a zombie, but nobody else knows about it. When you are gone there will be no one else to keep your people out of trouble.

You were bitten last night, and ***you have to role-play it***; during the game pretend you are sick. You ***have to*** turn into a zombie during the game; when it is going to happen is your call! As a player, use this element to create an interesting situation during the game. As zombie, ***you walk slow and make strange noises***, and your **thinking is impaired. If you are killed during the game**, you automatically turn into a zombie. Maybe you can lie down for a while, then turn into a zombie. The only way to kill a zombie is using a gun. If you are killed as a zombie, you are out of the game.

Questions

- What you are going to do about the bite? Are you going to tell anyone? Or, are you going to keep it as a secret? Are you going to jeopardise everyone's safety? Or you will be a nice guy and die alone?
- How did you get bitten?
- What is going to happen to your people when you're not there anymore to protect them?
- Who is the person you trust the most? Why?
- Who is the person you trust the least? Why?

The Freshman

Before you met the group, you had been alone in the world, and you know pretty much how to survive by yourself. You have been with those people for about three weeks. You notice that this group has a strong feeling of family but not everybody includes you in this feeling.

Questions

- Why won't the group fully integrate you yet?
- How did you meet these people?
- Why did you decide to be with them?
- Who is the person that you like most? Why?

The Hope (required)

You and The Strong knew each other long before the apocalypse. Since the world as you knew it ended, you two have been together and trying to create a community. This was originally your idea and it worked for longer than you expected. Just when you really started to hope for a better world, the camp was destroyed. You still have hope, because you have nothing else. You truly believe that human beings shouldn't be alone. People can be better than what they seem. You always believe in the greater good. Maybe everything is just another Gods plan, who knows?

Questions

- What do you think about The Freshman?
- What do you think about The Strong?
- What do you think about The Survivor?
- What bothers you most about The Strong?

The Survivor (required)

The world will not get better and if we don't stay sharp, we will be dead very soon or even worse than that. Today, history doesn't matter. There are no reputations or good will. Today is only surviving and when it comes down to it, you will do whatever it takes to survive.

Questions

- What is the most terrible thing you have done in order to survive?
- Why do you keep going? Wouldn't it be easier to just die and find some peace?
- Who is the person that you don't like? Why?

Introduction Letter

I don't know how, but it happened. It was maybe 3 or 4 years ago... we don't know anymore because we lost track of time... we just know it was long time ago. After the end, everyday have been a journey through surviving. A week looks like a month, a month like a year... The only things that last from the old times are few survivors and zombies... hundreds of them... not hundreds, thousands... Most of the population turned into zombies, but humans killed the others that survived. People got crazy and scared, and I realise that fear is the most powerful emotion that we can have. Fear keeps us alive and fighting for another day. These days find food is very hard, and survive are very difficulty. It isn't like any zombie movie that I watched...

The Family Letter

The last months have been very hard as The Future can't travel anymore; she is extremely pregnant (fuck!). The Protector has been doing his best to get supplies, food, and make sure everybody is safe! Very soon the baby will arrive in this crap world, and I always wonder what will happen. The Protector has also been paranoid about everything, maybe the idea of having a kid is freaking him out. The Realist always thinks about the worst scenarios, but deep inside of each of us we know that he isn't totally wrong, we just don't want to see it, it is very hard to live without hope!

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Fiction Decisions

Family Group:

- Where do you live? What does it look like?
- What is your approach when you meet strangers?
- What has been disturbing the relationship between the couple and why?
- What will be the baby's name?

Survivor Group:

- Where were you when the camp was attacked? (You were all separated).
- How did you manage to escape?
- What has happened to the group that is somewhat related to The Hope and his/her spirit of believing?
- Who is the leader of the group? Why?
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Starting Message

Family Group Starting Message

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Survivor Group Starting Message

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