

# RESTLESS

A CARD-BASED, FREEFORM HORROR RPG  
OF PURSUIT THROUGH THE RUINED WORLD

*J. Walton*

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This game was created by J. Walton based on a discussion with Marshall Miller and Jason Morningstar, as well as the games *Mystwood* by Gray Pawn and *The Sundered Land* by D. Vincent Baker. Its was sparked by the Golden Cobra game design contest and made during the 72-hour Trad Games Jam. It is indebted to the muses Emily Care Boss, Jackson Tegu, and John Harper.

The themes and content are inspired by the novels *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy, *The Passage* and *The Twelve* by Justin Cronin, the *Resident Evil* series of films by Paul W.S. Anderson and starring Milla Jovovich, and the first few volumes of the comic series *The Walking Dead* by Robert Kirkman, Tony Moore, and Charlie Adlard. There are surely others as well.

Love and thanks to Hannah Joseph for editing and feedback, as well as to all the early playtesters.

# HOW TO PLAY

*Read aloud & follow these instructions at the beginning of the game, repeating them if new players join.*

*Restless* is a game for 3-8 players about a group of survivors being hunted through the abandoned ruins of the world by a monstrous, unyielding horde. The game is intentionally vague about what these monsters are like: they can be zombies, shadow creatures, robots, or whatever else you decide. Sometimes the nature of the *Restless* can even shift during play.

A single session of *Restless* can range from 1 hour to 4+ hours, depending on how long you decide to play. A session is composed of a number of different situations called “Verses,” which are the cards with white text blocks on the front. To begin play, shuffle the Verse cards together, face down, and then draw one from the top of the deck.

The first instruction on every Verse card is to consult the yellow “Refrain” card, which is repeated between Verses. The Refrain card tells you how to choose and describe the survivors and also about the role of “non-survivor” players. The survivors and non-survivors will likely change between verses, and the Refrain is also when players can drop in and out of the game.

*(Continued on the reverse side...)*

*(Continued from the reverse side...)*

Each Verse will take roughly 30 minutes to 1 hour, depending on how quickly you play. At the end of each Verse, the players will be asked if you want to play another Verse. If not, some or all of you are welcome to stop.

Each of the Verse cards, along with the Refrain card, is meant to be read aloud one paragraph at a time. You can either have the same person read an entire card, or switch readers between paragraphs, but you should definitely switch readers between cards.

*It is very important to stop at the end of each paragraph and follow the instructions in that paragraph* before you proceed to the next part of the card. There are sometimes surprises and unexpected developments that are introduced in later paragraphs of a Verse card, and these can be spoiled or even cause minor problems if they are revealed beforehand. Additionally, it can be difficult to keep track of everything that a card asks you to do, so it's better to proceed one step at a time.

If you occasionally make a mistake and read more than one paragraph at a time, that's okay. Just back up, read the next paragraph you need to do again, and proceed from there. But try to remember to proceed slowly and deliberately, one paragraph at a time. (Note that the numbered choices on "The Citadel" Verse card are considered part of the preceding paragraph.)

*If you are ready to begin, draw your first Verse card.*

# CREATING YOUR OWN VERSES

After playing *Restless* a few times, you may be inspired to create your own Verse cards to shuffle into the deck or even to create your own custom deck. Here are some things you may want to keep in mind:

1. Always start with the Refrain, or some other means of reminding the players what the game is about and assigning characters and roles.
2. The designer's job is primarily to ask interesting and loaded questions of the survivors & non-survivors, leaving the answers open-ended.
3. Be clear about the order of operations, using paragraph breaks and other techniques: who's supposed to say or do something and when?
4. Make sure that your Verses work for both the minimum number of players (2 survivors and 1 non-survivor) and the maximum (8 players with a mixture of roles).
5. Make sure that both the survivors and non-survivors always have interesting things to say and do.
6. Don't say or require specific things about the nature of the *Restless*, since that can vary between sessions and groups.
7. Always end a Verse with the *Restless* eliminating one or more of the survivors, since this encourages the rotation of players through roles and makes every Verse dangerous and significant.

# CREATIVE COMMONS LICENSE

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# THE REFRAIN

*Read aloud and follow these instructions  
each time you draw a Verse card.*

You are being hunted through the abandoned ruins of the world by a monstrous horde you call the Restless. They are without fear, without mercy, and are unremitting in their pursuit. You may be able to kill or destroy a few of them, but they are countless in number and still growing. Your only hope is to escape them for as long as you can. And so you run.

Each player should say if you are (1) playing a new survivor character, (2) playing the survivor of a previous Verse card, or (3) helping portray the Restless and the abandoned ruins of the world as a “non-survivor.” You should have at least 2 survivors and at least 1 non-survivor. Do this now.

Then: each survivor should say (a) *your name and look*, (b) *the things that you are carrying and how*, and (c) *the way you came to know one or more of the other survivors*, either before or after the world was destroyed.

Each non-survivor should describe *a sign or trace of the Restless or their missing victims* that the survivors have come across, perhaps in the last day or two of travel across the desolate terrain.

*Once you are finished,  
return to your current Verse card and continue.*



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# RUNNING ON EMPTY

*First, repeat the instructions on the Refrain card.*

Then: your group has run out of one or more critical resources: gasoline, cigarettes, food, water, baby formula, bullets, toilet paper, batteries, tampons, prescription drugs, medical supplies, or something else. Go around and have each player, say something simple and basic that you no longer have.

Just over the ridge, in the fading hours of twilight, you see an abandoned gas station and mini-mart. The non-survivor players describe what it looks like and list a few signs that it has been previously disturbed.

The survivors decide how you want to approach this: are you all going to check it out together? Will some of you stay behind? Do this quickly.

Play out your reconnaissance of the station. The non-survivor players decide which of the things you need are there and reveal the unexpected: a tire iron, flashlight, keg of kerosene, headless corpse, etc.

Then, if you left survivors outside, they spot the Restless coming. Do they shout and risk drawing attention? Do they quietly flee? Play this out.

The non-survivor players then describe how the Restless destroy, kill, absorb, or consume 1 or 2 of the survivors. The survivors say what they do about it, but they ultimately have no say in who they must now leave behind.

*If you decide to continue playing, randomly draw another Verse card.*



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# FRIENDLY FIRE

*First, repeat the instructions on the Refrain card.*

Then: Split the survivors into two groups. If you were traveling together previously, you have become separated. Decide how.

Both groups are running from the Restless when you meet unexpectedly and violently amid the dark and confusion. The non-survivor players say where you run into each other and what's going on around you.

Take turns having a survivor mistakenly attack one of the survivors in the other group with whatever weapon is available. Reap the consequences of this debacle until all the survivors have attacked or someone manages to halt the violence.

The survivors then assess and respond to the consequences, but have to get the injured up and moving as quickly as possible, because the Restless are still coming.

The non-survivor players then describe how the Restless destroy, kill, absorb, or consume 1 or 2 of the slowest or most severely injured members of the combined group. The survivors say what they do about it, but they ultimately have no say in who they must now leave behind.

*If you decide to continue playing, randomly draw another Verse card.*



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# SANCTUARY

*First, repeat the instructions on the Refrain card.*

Then: the survivors have found or built a shelter to hide or protect you from the Restless. Decide what the shelter is and where it is located. Each player also says one or two things about the shelter and what's inside or in the surrounding area, describing how you assembled or discovered those things.

While you're in the shelter, the animal attraction between two or more of the survivors could become overwhelming. Each survivor says who you are secretly or openly attracted to, and compatible groupings then say how you sneak off to find some place to consummate your shared passions.

Each survivor who is not engaged in this manner then says how you also let your guard down, relax, or let your emotions out, whether a little or a lot.

Next, have each survivor say how the group's inattentiveness exposes you to potential danger from the approaching Restless. The non-survivors say how many are approaching, from which direction, and how. Survivors who hesitate or are distracted have no chance to prepare or escape.

The non-survivor players then describe how the Restless destroy, kill, absorb, or consume 1 or 2 of the survivors. The survivors say what they do about it, but they ultimately have no say in who they must now leave behind.

*If you decide to continue playing, randomly draw another Verse card.*



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# DREAMS & NIGHTMARES

*First, repeat the instructions on the Refrain card.*

Then: the exhaustion is overwhelming. Decide where you make camp for the night, not in a shelter but out in the open. Say who's taking the first watch, and then each survivor says what you do before falling asleep.

When only the watch remains awake, each of the non-survivor players says something about the night. Is it eerily silent or full of noises? How does it smell? What are the weather, clouds, and moon like?

All of the slumbering survivors are dreaming of the past. Take turns having each survivor describe the memory you are reliving, but then have the non-survivor players alter one or two details to be disturbingly surreal, sad, or frightening. Play out the nightmare, ending with the survivor being woken up to take your turn at watch. Before switching to the next dreamer, describe any changes in the mood of the night.

The final survivor to dream should be the first one on watch. They are awoken in the dim light of the morning by their own dying screams as the Restless consume them. The non-survivor players describe how this happens.

The other survivors then describe how they wake and flee. The Restless can destroy, kill, absorb, or consume 1 more of the survivors if they like.

*If you decide to continue playing, randomly draw another Verse card.*





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# THE PRISONER

*First, repeat the instructions on the Refrain card.*

Then: you have come across an abandoned research facility of some kind—medical, scientific, or military. Decide how and where you found it, and then describe its environs, letting the non-survivors take the lead. Briefly play out wandering through its trashed and deserted corridors and labs.

Then say how you discover it: a single Restless imprisoned in a cage, showing all the signs of having been tortured or experimented on. It lashes out violently when it senses the survivors, but it is weak, injured, and trapped.

Have a debate about what to do with it. Don't bother being polite with the other survivors: assert your opinion recklessly. During this debate, the non-survivors describe what the imprisoned Restless does as it watches, waits, bides its time, and perhaps makes overtures to one or two of the more sympathetic or less threatening survivors.

If the debate resolves what must be done, have at it: whatever you decide, it probably doesn't go well. The non-survivor players are welcome to describe how the imprisoned Restless (alone or with its arriving fellows) destroys, kills, absorbs, or consumes 1 or 2 of the survivors. If you voluntarily set the imprisoned Restless free, it will not harm those who have directly aided it.

*If you decide to continue playing, randomly draw another Verse card.*





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# CONTAMINATED

*First, repeat the instructions on the Refrain card.*

Then: at least one of the survivors has been wounded by the Restless in a non-fatal manner. If this isn't already true, say how it occurred. The non-survivors say how the infection has grown worse and what form it takes, preferably something strange and disturbing.

The wounded survivors then say how you have been concealing your infected injuries from the others, and then the other survivors say how they nonetheless discovered it. Play out the confrontation that results.

It is time to make some difficult decisions; the group has stopped for a break in the mid-afternoon (the survivors decide where), tending as best you can to these infected wounds. What will you decide: Leave them behind? Euthanize them now? Amputate a limb?

Whatever you decide, it doesn't go well. As you enact your choices individually or collectively, one or more of the wounded succumbs, becoming partially or wholly one of the Restless (non-survivors say how).

The players of the transformed then describe how you personally destroy, kill, absorb, or consume 1 or 2 of the survivors. The survivors say what they do about it, but have no say in the final outcomes.

*If you decide to continue playing, randomly draw another Verse card.*





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# THE COMMUNITY

*First, repeat the instructions on the Refrain card.*

Then: after several long weeks of running and watching your companions perish at the hands of the Restless, you finally make it out of the wilderness! A military checkpoint stands before you, a tank- and artillery-protected gate in an immense and impenetrable wall that extends across the horizon. Play out this encounter. You can approach joyously or cautiously, but the non-survivors will play the soldiers and medical staff there as friendly, welcoming, understanding, tolerant of suspicions, and eager to reassure you and bring you inside where they can attend to all your needs. A chopper to take you further into the Free Zone should arrive any day now!

Next, cut to several weeks later. You are living in the community behind the wall, free of the Restless. You are eating well, sleeping in beds, learning how not to be exhausted and afraid all the time. Everyone keeps repeating: "That chopper should arrive any day now!" But something's not right. Play out a few moments from your day-to-day lives where a few of the survivors express their concerns to each other in secret. The non-survivors should regularly intervene with forced smiles, reassurance, and distractions.

Then: the non-survivors reveal the dark pact the community has made. Play out how you discover it and how you are all killed or assimilated.

*If you decide to continue playing, randomly draw another Verse card.*





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# THE CITADEL

*First, repeat the instructions on the Refrain card.*

Then: fate or misfortune has brought the survivors to the citadel of the Restless. The non-survivors say where this is and what it looks like, using some or all of these words as cues: *within, frozen, corrupt, trapped, growing, forgotten, electric, human.*

Next, the survivors choose one of these options:

1. you are imprisoned here and must escape (describe your cages);
2. you are desperately assaulting the citadel (describe your plan, but only choose this option if this is at least the third Verse card of the game).

Start heading in or heading out. Play out a few parts of this journey, with the non-survivors choosing from this list and describing (no repeats):

- A. a chamber where the Restless are born, made, or spawned;
- B. a long, dim hallway between banks of humming spheres;
- C. a viewing chamber from which you gaze upon the world's desolation.

In each of these places, the non-survivors can choose to have the Restless destroy, kill, absorb, or consume 1 of the survivors. If you survive all three, you escape or arrive at the heart of the citadel. End on this cliffhanger.

*If you decide to continue playing, randomly draw another Verse card.*



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