

Free Content Friday – Outbreak: Undead.. April 2021

RAG & BONE – BLACK BILE

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No Future

The viral infection that killed 99.9% of the human life on the planet did so without mercy, it had no concerns for political lines, national borders, religious or ethical beliefs, social status, or profession. Everyone was susceptible. Everyone lost friends and family. Only a small selection of people resisted the first wave of air born illness that brought humanity to the edge of extinction.

In the post-apocalyptic landscape that makes up the *Outbreak: Undead..* “Rag & Bone” campaign setting, there are fewer and fewer uninfected, living people left to carry the sputtering torch of civilization. There are fewer healthy, stalwart souls that are

capable of maintaining communities, of scraping together enough resources to survive in small groups and collectives, let alone on any scale that would maintain what we recognize as a city. And while there are some very notable exceptions, most survivors, typically, live solitary and isolated lives.

Daily, the scattered remnants of those in the wilds and ruins, or in the rare and fragile fledgling communities are still fighting and struggling against the Reaper virus twenty-five years after the world was devastated by the pandemic that killed over five billion people.

While the remaining 0.01% of the population were seemingly immune to a lingering airborne infection, the virus mutated and evolved. Those that died from the infection retained some dangerous and horrifying semblance of intelligence, awareness, and mobility. To those still alive, without a better means to frame the situation, the reality of the illness shifted to a much different and far more terror inducing means of transmission. To those wayward survivors, in simple terms, the dead were rising and attacking any living creature within their path.

Many scientists and any true clinical research were lost in The Fall, there were a handful of brave investigators and doctors that did their best to collect as much data and medical documentation as possible and they passed in on through some of the first Rag & Bone to emerge in the early days of the new millennia.

In 1995, technological advancements had yet to reach the level of our, real, modern world. This is true in the medical field too, although many of the more resource intense advancements were fully lost in the chaos of the final days of 1995. Humanity was hurled back into a level of technological advancement that more accurately resembled the 19th century than the 20th.

Given all of this, there are some handmade books that are circulated throughout the various small communities of the world. Some more comprehensive than others. All of them deal with “The Risen”, “The Dead”, “Romeros” or—less eloquently put—the zombies

The Rag & Bone merchants that wander between these scattered groups and individuals collect more than just goods and material for barter and trade, they gather information, rumors, and news. For some, it is the only means of communication available to them. These books and the information that is constantly added to them makes up the best and only documentation of the phenomena that is at the forefront of life in the world that most survivors endure. And like the virus itself, this collection of knowledge grows and mutates as it is passed from hand to hand.

Within this small collection are a number of excerpts and some mechanical information that should help you to play or run sessions within the Rag & Bone universe. Most of this knowledge will be considered common knowledge but I will mark any sections that might be best left to the Game Master to keep to themselves until the proper time within a campaign.

So, read with caution. These pages, like so much of this setting, are dangerous.





DAY ZERO

The first cases of the H1N95 viral strain were discovered in multiple locations throughout the world. Many news outlets reported severe cases of the flu but the timing and the speed at which the infections turned from mild symptoms to deadly was shocking and most witnessed the results firsthand before learning about the details from the radio, television, or newspapers.

To the best sources available, the strain was a member of the long line of Swine Flu that had been becoming more problematic annually. The aggressive and wildly more transmissible strain, however, was lightyears beyond what considered within reason for a naturally evolving strain of this sort of flu and—as there is no concrete science available to verify any of these suspicions—most have resigned themselves to the belief that the initial wave of infection was already unstoppable by the time that it was apparent.

The insidiousness of the H1N95 influenza variant was that it lay dormant for an extended period in initial stages of the pandemic, spreading wildly before hosts began to exhibit symptoms and then mortality rates that were unmatched in any pass season. The first phase of the spread was likely also the reason that any real determination of origin was impossible.

After every major metropolitan area in the world had already begun to show cases of symptomatic infection, the governments of the world went to work but they were far too late. The virus had already spread to nearly every corner of the globe and once it had, the virus became deadly very quickly.

In the later stages of these infections, after the majority of containment efforts had failed, including mass scale bombings in some regions and nations, failed isolations, and more than a few inhumane

and egregious instances of governmental control, things when from unthinkable to unbelievable. Those that had been killed by the infection, had begun returning to some parade of life. The dead were rising and walking the streets.

Even those that were not directly affected by the initial infection found themselves desperately running and fighting against their reanimated loved ones. And with so many dead, the onslaught of chaos and terror that spread across the world was like a match in a pool of gasoline.

Everything fell apart quickly then.

THE FIRST GENERATION DEAD

At first, freshly risen from their deathbeds, funeral homes, or even the large burn piles that were operating throughout most of the major cities of the world, the dead began dragging themselves through the streets, slow and without any semblance of their former personality in search of living flesh. They moved as if sleepwalking and only upon coming into close proximity with an uninfected victim, would they sharpen their focus and attack, moving more quickly.

These initial attacks were easy to avoid but many discovered the nature of the situation too late and were bit by the dead. Once the more deadly concentrated virus had been passed, it was only a matter of time before the victim would also succumb to their wound which would fester and spread, and then die only to join the other dead. The dead would feast on their fallen prey and—unless there was another more immediate target—they would do nothing but consume the flesh of their victim.

The lucky ones ended up fully consumed and were not given the time to raise from their death. Those less fortunate would return partially devoured, languishing in a horrible state where they had fallen.

The virus had altered itself to travel more effectively through the population and had hijacked human bodies to do it. The spread was no longer airborne but the sick were producing a thick black mucus that filled their lungs and often seeped forth from every orifice in the later stages of infection. It is this Black Bile that would transmit the infection through the bite of the dead and it is the Black Bile that would become the primary signal of late-stage infection. Impossible to ignore and highly contagious.

This first generation of the dead lasted for a number of years before reports and records began to show some disturbing facts about the nature of the virus and the victims that it had claimed.

While the dead were cold and without a natural pulse, rumors began to circulate that the dead were—in fact—not truly dead. Some believed that the virus had brought the victims to a state of suspended animation, almost a hibernation of sorts in which their heart and brain function, breathing and all bodily functions were arrested as the Black Bile altered the host and took control.

Some level of brain function must be present as attacks to the brain are the only reliable means of killing one of the Dead, known as Romeros in some regions, Sleepers in others, The Risen and Infected are also popular terms at this time. Additionally, there is no understood science that would allow an organism of complexity such as that of a human being to be mobile and somewhat functional on any level without a portion of the nervous system remaining intact.

Moreover, as the years passed while some rot and decay were very apparent—some quite severe—the Infected reached a state of equilibrium and the natural state of decay halted. The Dead stopped deteriorating and their population remained active. Once the majority of humanity had been slaughtered, the Dead slowed and would—without exterior stimulation and sustained nourishment—would become dormant. This state of dormancy would last until they were disturbed, and they seem capable of remaining in this limbo for many, many years without any detrimental effects.

The Black Bile sustains the Dead. And while, over the years, the majority of the oldest amongst the Infected have become far less recognizably human, their general musculature and nervous system remains sufficient to stir them into action should some living creature draw their attention.

However, now, over twenty years after The Fall, some small numbers of the Risen have begun to evolve and change as the—some fear—The Black Bile is, once again, proving that nature is nothing if not endlessly patient and horribly ingenious in its innovation.



THE TWIST OF THE KNIFE

If these rumors of abominations and agile Risen are to be believed, some portion of the massive herds that roam the wilds and haunt the ruins of the cities of the world have adapted to the increasingly rare and resistant prey. There are reports of Risen that can run at speeds beyond that of a normal healthy human, reports of massive mutated Risen that are capable of lifting massive amounts of weight and crushing the unfortunate within its grasp, and rumors of Risen projecting Black Bile at their targets.

More disturbing, however, are the reports that some of the Risen are resistant to the destruction of the brain. Some have claimed that it appeared that the dead have begun a process of regeneration not unlike some species of lizard and frog that prevents simple attacks to the head from eliminating a threat.

Numbers at this point are not clear, as most of the dead are operating much as they have all of these years. We need more data, more people in the wilds willing to investigate these claims and to relay it to someone able and willing to share that knowledge here.

Is that person you?

H1N95 – The Reaper Virus – Black Bile

A highly contagious viral infection that is transmitted via the black mucus produced by late stage infected individuals, typically through a bite but it can be passed via other ingestion or by contact with open wounds. It began as an air-borne disease, however, the virus mutates and adapts extremely quickly and—after wiping out the majority of the population—the air-borne variation has died out. Or perhaps it has only gone dormant.

The speed in which the Reaper Virus gestates is wildly unpredictable. It is assumed that genetic markers make an enormous difference as two individuals infected by the same source can exhibit extremely different incubation times and initial symptoms. However, once the infection surpasses the Initial Symptom phase, the Mid-Infection and End Stages are quite similar in appearance and rarely linger more than 1-3 days before killing the host.

In some cases the virus remains undetectable for weeks before manifesting any symptoms. These outlying cases are referred to a Trojan Horse infections. Such occurrences have caused the rapid downfall of a number of secure and cautious survival settlements.

Incubation: 🕒 40-600 (2-30 days)

Initial Symptoms: Fever, Cold Sweats, Vomiting, Diarrhea, Wet, Rumbling Cough

Mid-Infection Symptoms: Delirium, Hallucination, Numbness of Extremities, Black and Purple Veining and Bruising

End Stage Symptoms: Black Bile expulsion via Vomiting, Coughing, and Diarrhea, Necrosis, and Convulsions

To determine the progression of a Reaper infection, secretly roll {**Endurance%**} to determine a characters incubation period, each

BLACK BILE VIRAL CHART & TRACKING

In way of mechanical usage in your home games of Outbreak: Undead, a character's Viral total is an important track that allows you to measure the amount of exposure and infection that they have been assigned. It can have a variety of detrimental effects depending on the type of Outbreak game that you and your players are undertaking, in a Rag & Bone campaign, the specifics surround the infection are clearly defined and both the symptoms and the afflictions that are caused by a Black Bile infection, are listed in the chart included below.

Each level of viral will create a potential for the Bile to spread or—potentially—for it to be repressed using a variety of methods. While infection is—to the best of any single person's knowledge—incurable, there are ways for a character to manipulate their Viral track in new ways.

Of course, I will not be sharing all of my secrets with you in this section, but—if you keep a keen eye on the information that I've already given you, and if you are staying up to date on our current sessions of Rag & Bone, then I wouldn't be surprised if your diligence wasn't soon rewarded.

I'm not finished with you yet...

level of Viral that a character carries adds ■ to the roll for each 2 points of Viral they have.

Each 🚫 causes Viral to increase by 1. Catastrophic failure will increase this to 2 Viral.

SYMPTOM MANIFESTATION

VIRAL 1-2: No or mild symptoms. The infection has not fully taken hold. This is typical of Black Bile contact that is not transmitted via a bite. A Romero bite will transmit at least 3 immediate points of Viral if successful while touching the Black Bile will only convey 1. Roll 1d6 for each level of Viral, on a 6 a mild symptom must be taken.

VIRAL 3-4: Mild symptoms. At this point in the Reaper infection, an individual is apparently ill but the nature of that illness may be camouflaged or confused, as the nature of early Reaper infection is varied and insidiously deceitful and difficult to diagnose outside of obvious bites. Roll 1d6 for each level of Viral, on a roll of 4-6 a mild symptom must be taken.

VIRAL 5-6: Mild to mid-infection symptoms. Roll 1d6 for each level of Viral, on a roll of a 6 a mid-infection symptom must be taken, otherwise a mild symptom must be selected.

VIRAL 7-8: Mid-infection symptoms to end stage infection. After this threshold has been reached a 1d6 must be rolled for each level of Viral, and on a 1-3 a mid-infection can be selected but on a 4-6 an end stage symptom must be taken.

VIRAL 9-10: End stage infection. The character loses 50% of their SPEW attributes, however their Resist Pain checks are considered automatically successful and their Damage Threshold becomes 13,

as their bodies become desensitized and emaciated.

These final levels should also be checked as they increase with a **1d6** roll, on a 6 the character must make an immediate {**Endurance%**} check or Succumb. On any other result, the character begins End-Stage Black Bile expulsion. If the character is able to prolong their life in this state, they should make a new **1d6** roll every **⌚60**.

