**MDA Analysis: If Only it Were Zombies**

*If Only it Were Zombies* is a tactical, euro-style board game. The game’s gameplay focuses on positioning and maximizing advantages against the enemy, as well as teamwork between the players. The elements of the game change between each play, and the core combat mechanic is based on chance (rolling a six-sided die). However, players may take advantage of items, positioning, and teamwork to allow skilled play to succeed.

The game has a very quick setup, requiring only one tile to be placed initially, and a handful of tokens to be given to each player. Most of the game’s setup takes place during the actual gameplay as additional tiles are placed. The downtime between player’s turns is quick, players have rapid turns and the movements of the Things are all quick to determine and place. The success or failure of most actions in the game is resolved through a die roll to add an element of randomness and unknown to the game.

The cooperation of IOIWZ is very prevalent, one of the most important aspects of the game. Players must work together to defeat the Things and progress through the game. The rules are intimidating at first, but their length merely serves to cover potential issues or loopholes; once the core rules are learned the game is simple.

IOIWZ plays pretty quickly, with most games resolving in about an hour once players are familiar with the rules. The pacing of IOIWZ focuses on steady action and engaging tactics, without being dominated by lightning-fast reactions or degenerating into a boring grind.

**Mechanics**

The basic game of IOIWZ plays in about an hour, less for experienced players familiar with the movement and setup. The game pits the players against “Things”; hostile, automated creatures that hunt the players down. Throughout the game new areas become available, along with new items to use and Things to combat.

While not strictly speaking mechanics, the art style of the game plays into the overall “feel” and so impacts the aesthetics. IOIWZ is a minimalist game visually. The map tiles have only the basic information needed to play the game, without any environment or other art added. The game manual itself is similar; the brief story section near the start is intentionally vague and lacks any details to identify a setting, instead focusing on creating a frame of mind for the reader. With few exceptions (the Things’ pictures and items) there are few specifics defined, leaving the players to create their own narrative for the setting; even the Things’, which are depicted, are intentionally vague and contradictory: a robot, a Cthulhu monster, a ghost, and a creature whose details cannot be seen.

The only defined visual elements to the game are the Things themselves and the items; these are all public domain images ([www.openclipart.org/](http://www.openclipart.org/)). Having images for the various weapons and items is intended to add a more satisfying experience for the players, picking up a small image of a shotgun is more fun than picking up a tile that says “Shotgun” on it. Secondly, the only visual elements of the game are the Things and items, which are also the prime tactical considerations of the game. The limited art draws the player’s attention to the elements that are the central parts of the game, eliminating distractions.

The game takes place on a series of tiles. Tiles are drawn from a shuffled stack at the end of each Thing phase, and they are placed next to any existing tile. Each tile contains 9 squares
arranged in a 3x3 square. There are marks on the tiles to indicate the initial placement of items and Things, as well as walls to block movement. Placed tiles expand the play area and add additional monsters and items. One special tile has the package on it, the goal of the entire game. Once this package tile, and the package item on it, come into play the game becomes more difficult: Things move faster and spawn more viciously. The game contains 26 tiles, 2 of which are the special start and goal tiles. Initially the game was scaled for 22 tiles (20 tiles, and the 2 special) but the end result had too many busy tiles without enough simple tiles with few items or Things. Adding additional tiles allowed for more room layouts and changed up the flow by not making every tile placement a major strategy changer.

The success or failure of many actions in the game is determined by a 6-sided die roll. The die is rolled and compared to a number, for most combat actions the player has to roll a 4 or better to succeed, and Things succeed on a 3 or better. This way Things have an edge in combat to combat the player’s intelligence and superior weapons. Many factors grant bonuses or penalties of 1 to these rolls, and more than one factor can apply to a single roll. For example, a player can be firing at a target lit up by a flashlight (-1) while near an ammo box (-1), this grants a total bonus of -2 and the best possible firing situation: 2 or better to hit. The numbers have been specially chosen so that a player can never reach a point where they hit without rolling (“1 or better”), and the Things’ can never have a penalty worse than 5 or better.

A player has 3 health, which is lost by being attacked by Things, and restored through certain actions in game. A player who loses all his health is “wounded” which forces them to drop items and limits their actions and movement. Wounded characters never worsen, but if all four players are wounded at once the players lose the game. Both players and Things may move in 4 directions: up, down, left, and right; diagonal movement is not possible.

A basic turn consists of moving your character and attacking. The actions a player can take are partially determined by the items they’re carrying. In addition, default actions are always available to any character, reviving a wounded player or attacking a Thing with their bare hands. The success or failure of a player’s actions is determined by a die roll. Because movement and attacks are determined by die rolls there is a possibility that a player may roll poorly and accomplish nothing during their turn. To counter this and keep player interest, players also get a “free action” each turn. This is either moving a set amount (two spaces) or gaining an extra attack. This gives players who need to move or kill a particular thing an extra attempt to do so, while opening up extra tactical options and keeping play more interesting.

As mentioned, the items change the possible actions available to a player. A flashlight grants bonuses to attack Things and penalties to Things’ attacks; also, things may not spawn into a square that is lit by a flashlight. Medkits allow a player to heal themselves or other allies. Ammo boxes grant attack bonuses to nearby players with firearms and allow special grenade attacks. Pistols grant additional attack range and have a special “critical effect” that allows players to make two attacks at once when rolling a 6. Rifles grant an extreme range, easy hit, and a powerful critical effect (roll 5 or 6) that automatically kills two things, but can only fire into tiles lit by a flashlight. Shotguns grant a powerful attack, and gain a second attack if an ammo box is nearby. Melee weapons make a player harder to hit by Things, and grant a critical effect (roll a 6) that grants the player additional movement (two spaces) and a second attack.

The cap on the number of each item is 4, based off the number of players in the game. There are 4 each of the weaker items, the pistol, flashlight, and melee. These items lack the power of some of the other items, but are also useful in almost any situation. Adding more of these versatile items ensures that the players will have access to usable items at any phase of the
There are 2 each of the most powerful and situational items. This is both to limit their over-use (a team full of medkits would eliminate any challenge) and make them feel more unique and special when used.

Things move in a special phase of the game after each player has taken a turn. The amount of Things that move each phase is determined by a die roll, and which Things move is determined by proximity to a player (closer Things move first). Things move two squares at a time, three later in the game. After Things move any Things adjacent to a player attack, possibly damaging a player or even spawning additional Things (if they roll a 6).

The Things are unintelligent and do little more than move towards the nearest player and try to kill them. The success or failure of a Thing’s attack is determined by a die roll. In addition, if no players are injured during the Things’ phase a special rule, boundless Things, comes into play which spawns 1-3 (1-4 during the late game) Things directly next to players. This mechanic keeps the players on their toes (danger could happen at any moment) and increases the difficulty if the players are doing too well.

Winning is achieved by either killing all the Things in the game area or by retrieving the package item and bringing it back to the starting tile with all the players. Losing happens if all the players are wounded at one time. Certain special tiles may also win or lose the game when certain conditions are met.

**Dynamics**

The dynamics of IOIWZ try to create a tactical and thoughtful game. The Things attack relentlessly, but unintelligently. A player who tries to play alone, running off to fight and collect items without their fellow players, will quickly find themselves surrounded and overrun by Things. On the other hand, a smart player, working together with their team and supporting each other will find a much easier game.

Things are easy to kill or out-smart, as their actions are structured and predictable. The Things simply move towards the nearest player when they act, players can take advantage of this to set traps or force the Things to attack the best equipped player (perhaps one with a powerful melee weapon that grants a bonus defense against Things) or even alternating which player is closest and forcing a Thing to simply walk back and forth.

The items add more dynamics to the game, particularly rewarding smart, cooperative play. The most powerful weapons like the rifle and shotgun cannot be used effectively by a single player. The shotgun benefits greatly from a nearby ammo box and the rifle requires its target be lit up by a flashlight. While it’s possible for a single player to carry both items (ex: shotgun and ammo box) it is not optimal to do so (ex: a sniper rifle can fire 8 tiles away, the flashlight only lights up 2 tiles away). Other items like the melee weapon and medkit allow a player to take on a role within the team, similar to a tank or healer in an role-playing game. A player with a medkit is a powerful asset to his team, keeping everyone healthy and active; but grants no direct combat ability.

The tiles themselves are one of the most important influences on the dynamics of the game. The placement of the tiles creates the layout of the play area, creating choke-points or death traps depending on how the players act. Each tile has a different layout, walls, items, and Things. Again, placement is key: placing a tile with many Things near the players could result in the group getting overrun; placing a powerful weapon within easy reach could give the group the edge they need to succeed.
Aesthetics

The key aesthetics of IOIWZ are challenge and fellowship, with the lesser aesthetic of discovery. The dynamics of the game work to create a game that is difficult, but contains no direct conflict between players; creating a game that is satisfying and difficult to win, but does not result in hurt feelings since players cannot “win” at the expense of the others.

The Things present a constant threat to players, always moving forward and forcing the players to outplay them. This is the primary source of the challenge aesthetic. The Things move steadily and as a group, so it’s nearly impossible for a single player to defeat a group of them. Even with multiple players, playing foolishly will quickly result in a group of corpses. Mechanics like the boundless Things and the Things becoming more persistent and quick once the package has been placed create an atmosphere of constant, driving danger. The players are either taking damage or being surrounded, there’s never time to truly rest.

All the dynamics of the game strive to push the players towards cooperation, and the fellowship aesthetic. Most obviously, the difficulty of the game means players must work together to stand a chance of winning. A team that works and communicates together is required since optimal play requires a wide variety of items and players can only carry two items each. The dynamics of the combat and Thing movement reward players who work together, protecting weaker supporting players and focusing the Things’ attention on better prepared players.

The aesthetic of discovery is also present. The rules of the game allow for many varied dynamics, allowing for players to constantly create and learn new ways of playing the game. In addition, because of the random tile order each game each layout is different. Players must discover the play area anew each time.
Playtesting

Initial Playtesting (Midterm)

During the earliest playtesting I was worried about the rules being overly complex going in so I used my parents as testers, they have little experience with the kind of tactical games I’m trying to create.

My testers pointed out a number of key problems with the game. The main issue was some of the rules being too complex or poorly described. In particular the rules for spawning additional Things during attacks were very cumbersome. I cut out the Thing spawning when players attack and removed a second roll that was taken every time a Thing might spawn. To go along with this change, instead of having players roll high to hit (5-6) and low (1-2) to dodge I normalized all the numbers to be high rolls. The original numbers were confusing and required frequent checks back to the rules.

Another complaint was that the rolls to successfully attack a Thing were too difficult. The mechanics of the game let numerous Things attack all at once, and if the few attacks the players get miss it makes it nearly impossible to win. The original player attacks (and Thing counter-attacks) put the characters at far too much of a disadvantage. To counter this most of the player attacks were made 1 point easier (i.e. 4+ to hit instead of 5+) and the Things’ made 1 worse. Since the shotgun already had a 50% hit ratio I gave it a double attack so that it’s still the most powerful weapon (to counter its existing drawbacks).

My testers also said the items were too numerous for the deliberate turn-based system, and that the radio and special tiles added too many things to keep track of during the game. I removed the radio and special tiles for simplicity, since the game is still complex and challenging enough without these elements. Once some more testing is done on the core game I’m planning on re-adding some of the special tiles (but not that radio). Since the radio was removed I also removed death from the game as without radios there would be no easy way to respawn players. This also had the benefit of simplifying the health system immensely.

To go along with all the simplifications I re-worded many of the rules. The medkit, general item, attacking, and tile placement rules all got significant overhauls. One of the larger re-writes was the Thing phase. I re-vamped all the rules to make the entire phase much cleaner and less ambiguous. Originally, ALL the Things moved at once EVERY turn and the closest player to each Thing directed movement. Under the new rules a single player directs during Thing phases (with players taking turns), and only a limited amount of Things move each phase. This has the benefit of making the Thing phase run much faster (a big problem under the old rules) and reducing the chances of an unstoppable rush of Things.

Final Playtesting, 1st phase

This iteration of the game saw many changes, the radio and special tiles were completely removed with no plans to reincorporate later. The clarifications I decided on adding from the midterm playtesting were made (always roll high to hit), and a number of tweaks to the weapons’ stats were made.

One major issue I spotted from the midterm playtesting was that the Things weren’t dangerous enough, lucky or skilled players could simply kill the nearby Things and then operate in relative safety. To counter this I tried to make Things more dangerous by allowing them to attack diagonally and move through walls. This made it harder to force Things through choke points and made them more mobile, as well as doubling the squares from which a Thing could
attack a player. This iteration of the rules also saw the addition of the boundless Thing rule, another change to increase the difficulty and make the Things a more constant threat. In this version as many as 6 Things could spawn at once from the boundless rule.

Some changes made Things easier for the players. The slain and killed statuses were removed, replaced with a wounded status. This meant players were never totally out of the game, they’re always able to act each turn so there’s never any length of dead-time in the game. All player attacks were normalized to 4, making the bare hands and pistols easier to hit with.

The testing session was very insightful. Play began with a few tiles with a handful of Things and some basic items (pistol, rifle) but none of the really useful and powerful items (medkit, ammo box). One tile placed next to the start had a small army of three Things and posed a significant danger to the players.

At the start one player charged the tile full of Things to try and hold them back from the other players so they could group up and get ahold of some weapons, while the rest of the team started moving towards the weapons and killing a few of the solo Things. During the Things’ phase they quickly overran the charging player using the new diagonal attack and walk-through-walls, dropping him to wounded in the first turn. This was a massive change from early rule sets, no player had even been slain (early version of wounded) within the first 5 or so turns before.

Play continued and the players lucked into placing the armory tile (ammo box, medkit, pistol, no Things) early on. The three active players rushed into the room to gather the valuable items while the wounded player tried to crawl back to the group. This was when the game became a mess. The players finally had some powerful items but were unable to hold of the Things. The new diagonal attack made it almost impossible to out-maneuver the Things, and the boundless Thing rule quickly filled every available space with Things whenever the players started to make a slight comeback.

After a couple turns it became obvious that the game was going to be a loss, but it would take another ten or so turns to play out that loss. The players quit the game early here. Already armed with the most powerful weapons in the game, the players couldn’t make a dent in the Things near them, to say nothing of all the Things waiting on further tiles once the closer ones were killed.

All-in-all the bulk of the changes for these rules focused on making the Things more dangerous and this succeeded tremendously. The new rapid, spawning, long-reaching, wall-walking Things proved to be impossible to beat. However, the rules were also simpler, requiring much less checking of a weapon’s rating (since they’re all 4) and other complications.

My players said that the biggest issues were feeling like they were unable to properly fight off the Things (spawning too fast) and that the pacing was off (tiles coming out too fast for the game to be truly tactical).

Final Playtesting, 2nd phase

The rules saw a lot of great changes for the second phase. A short backstory/flavor-text section was added. Some simple house-keeping rules were made: players starting on the start tile on an item may pick it up immediately, the flashlight rules were clarified and shortened.

Play was streamlined, players could pick up an item if they moved into its square instead of having to wait until after their turn was over to pick it up. Players with a flashlight were allowed to use their bonus on any Thing even if they were facing another direction.
The attack penalty for attacking while wounded was removed, while realistic it made an already penalized status almost entirely worthless and went against the entire point of wounded: to provide a negative status while still involving the players in the game.

Things’ movement was simplified, the rule about moving from a lit square next to a player in favor of unlit ones next to a player was removed as it was an extra level of complication that was easily forgotten and turned Thing moving into a puzzle game. Also, it was clarified that a Thing couldn’t end its turn inside of a wall. Perhaps most importantly, Things lost the ability to attack diagonally.

Items were changed in the players’ favor. Critical effects were added to some weapons to give players a way to kill more Things and add excitement. The medkit no longer required a roll to heal a player (it was hard enough to stay alive) and was given a 2 square range to help with movement headaches.

This was the largest playtest yet, and the most successful up until this point. I had three testers, whereas early tests only had two. The game proceeded similarly to earlier ones at first, but the new weapon rules quickly came up when players were able to blast two Things in a single turn when they rolled particularly well. The critical hits really added a burst of “fun” to the game without breaking the tactical nature.

One major complaint from the players was that bad rolls were really ruining some turns. A single bad movement roll could put a player out of range for attacks and prevent them from taking any actions. And a bad attack roll meant a player’s entire turn was “wasted” because of a single roll.

Another issue was the pacing, still a problem from before. The players and I narrowed down the problem to being the speed of tiles being placed. This had already come up in earlier testing, but with all the other changes made I didn’t want to also overhaul such a large system and not be able to properly gauge it’s effects.

For most of the game the players put down tiles mostly at random, only late in the game did they start talking about strategizing tiles to maximize their chances. They also didn’t truly work together for most of the game. Initially, they stayed close together, but didn’t communicate their intentions so multiple players were both moving to pick up the same item, only to learn neither of them wanted it once they arrived.

While the tweaking of the Things went a long way towards making them more manageable, the boundless Things rule was forcing the players into a stalemate. While they were no longer being completely over-run, it was obvious the players would never be able to fight off the constantly spawning Things long enough to win, and losing would take far too long to play out. When one player started fooling around with Mah-Jong on their iPad we ended the game early.

Final Playtesting, 3rd phase

The backstory/flavor-text was finalized. The rules for throwing, picking up, and using items were cleared up, made easier, and generally brought up to the same technical standards the more important systems already had. The game was changed to be for 1, 2, or 4 players, each controlling 4, 2, or 1 player tokens respectively. This was easier (and much more feasible given time constraints) than attempting to rebalance the game for fewer than 4 players. Line of sight rules, which had previously been common sense and judgment based were finally codified for the game.
One of the largest changes was the goal of the game. The original goal, reach the end with all the players, was added mostly as a “everything is looking good, oh wait, how do you win?” measure and was never developed as fully as the core tactics of the game. This goal was scrapped in favor of a “retrieve the package” mission that fit much better into the fast-paced tactical nature of the game. Now players had to get to the package tile, grab the package (using up one of two inventory slots) and run back to the initial tile. No longer did all four players have to be alive on the final tile, so true martyr tactics were finally a viable option and the end game becomes more of a tactical “race while fighting” than a “siege the 8 Things” war of attrition. Since the package signals a change from the game from “gathering and arming” to a “finish the mission and get out” some changes like boosting Things’ movement and making boundless Things more powerful were added.

The tile system was massively overhauled at last. The initial start tile and four starter tiles remained unchanged. However, the player controlling the Thing phase (once after each set of turns) placed two tiles after the Things acted, instead of placing a tile at the start of every player’s turn. This cut down on the pace of tiles by half and reduced the bookkeeping by sectioning all the placement into one time of the game.

Player’s turns were also changed a lot. The original turn going back to the original rules was: move, attack, in that order. The new turn became: move, attack (in any order), followed by a free action. The free action is either a set amount of movement (no chance of a bad roll fouling up movement) or an additional attack-type action. This solved many of the problems in the game up to this point. It solved a single bad roll ruining an entire turn by giving the players a minimum of three movement per turn (instead of 1) or gave them access to an additional attack if they really needed to mow down some Things (or double up on heals). This also added a whole new layer of tactics into the game and a new set of meaningful choices for the players.

Players could now pick up items on the move and use them that same turn! And the movement penalties from the ammo box and shotgun were removed. Balance changes had made these items comparatively less powerful and the penalty remained as little more than a bookkeeping nuisance. Wounded players were given two movement instead of one, helping to ease the pain of being knocked down and cutting back on the worthless feeling, while still keeping the players from being fully functional.

Things saw many changes as well. In the rules document the Things’ rules were split into sections to make parsing and checking easier. Rules for Things avoiding light were completely removed as they were more of creating more of a hassle than a tactical situation. Thing movement was simplified to make moving Things easier once Things were farther from the players. The original movement rules called for measuring all the Things out and moving the closest ones, the new rules only demanded exact counts for nearby Things (~6 squares away) and allowed for guesstimations for further Things. Finally, boundless Things was capped at 4 Things, because 6 was too many.

As mentioned, the shotgun and ammobox lost their movement penalties. The flashlight gained the ability to be placed or thrown on the ground to function like a lantern instead of just being carried. This opens up tactical options like throwing the light into a room to expose more Things than a carried light could do. The rifle was boosted to get its critical effect on a roll of 5 or 6, combined with its effect of killing a second Thing without needing a roll this made it the most powerful weapon to go with its difficulty of use.
This game playtest was immensely successful. The new pacing of tile placement worked perfectly, tiles were placed thoughtfully and their impact was judged before play resumed. Just as importantly, the layout of the game area didn’t change drastically every time a player took a turn, so players were able to make shorter-term but still important decisions instead of being flooded with a constant stream of new items and Things.

The new Thing rules struck a good balance between threatening without overwhelming the players. Early in the game two players were brought to wounded, but the new free actions and increased wounded movement meant the group was able to think and act to fight off the Things enough to make a comeback and restore the group.

The extra movement gave players the mobility to finally see the effectiveness of the rifle weapon used for the first time. One player took the flashlight and melee (best possible defensive build) and charged into Things while the rifle player, armed with an ammo box for the bonus accuracy, aimed at duos of Things to maximize damage. While the melee/sniper duo worked together, the other two players worked with pistols and a medkit to keep the group healthy and pick off any flanking Things outside of the light the sniper couldn’t target.

When the package came into play the players placed its tile so they had a wide open area to take advantage of the melee/light and sniper combo. Since they group no longer had the clear the entire tile the players used a grenade to clear out a sizable chunk of the Things while another player (who rolled well on their movement) ran in and grabbed the package and ran back out.

This brought the players to a fast-paced rush back to clear out and reach their starting tile. The players took full advantage of the new mechanics; when the melee/flashlight player was wounded he choose to drop his flashlight, the new dropped flashlight rules lit up a wider area than when the light was held and allowed to rifle player to land an otherwise impossible shot.

At the end, all the players were non-wounded on the starter tile, but the package was just outside the tile. Player 4 (last player before Thing phase and another wave of Things attacking) was up. Since player 4 had two items already they couldn’t grab the package this turn, the dropping item rules dictate items can only be dropped at the very end of the turn. However, one of the player’s items was the ammobox, and another player pointed out they could use the grenade attack in an empty area (normally a HUGE waste of a powerful item) which consumed the ammobox item and still left them with movement available! Seeing my players work within the game’s mechanics and discover awesome, unintended ways of playing them out was a great experience and exactly what I had in mind when I crafted the system.

This latest playtest was a huge success, and the first one that felt like playing a fun game, and not merely playing a game which seems like it could be fun. Most of the changes from this playtest are minor formatting issues in the rules themselves or tweaks to weapons.
The game box: a shirt box, graphics are printed on 80 lbs paper and attached using a craft glue stick. Box top and bottom reinforced with cardboard.
The game box opened.
The map tiles of the game. Each tile is a 3x3 grid of 1"x1" squares, printed on 110 lbs paper with 10 mil lamination. Game elements are drawn on with fine sharpie markers. The weight of the paper and lamination gives the tiles weight and thickness to hold up to play and shuffling and gives them a more substantial feel.

The reference cards, detailing the order of play; and player cards, providing spots for players to place their health and items during play. Both are printed on 30 lbs paper with 5 mil lamination, the thicker-than-normal paper and lamination gives the cards durability. “Order of Play Reference” and “Items Reference” are front/back, “If Only it were Zombies” and player cards are front/back.
The game tokens, printed on 110 lbs paper with 10 mil lamination. They are placed in coin envelopes (the corners poke and tear through bags). The thickness of the paper and lamination makes the tiles very durable and provides some weight so that the tiles don’t “blow away” as the initial prototypes with regular printer paper did.
The game manual, printed on 26 lbs paper with 5 mil lamination, bound with black 1/2” coil binding. The heavy paper and lamination gives the manual permanence and prevents tears and bends.
If Only it were Zombies
We’re not sure

exactly what happened, or even when. So little historical evidence remains and much
of it is contradictory. Most of it is concerned with the Time before the Things appeared,
glorious stories that tell of a land where people were free to move around as they
pleased, without living in constant fear. After so many years living and hiding from the
Things I wonder if such a time ever happened.

A few years after the Things appeared

there was a lot of time spent trying to understand the them. The thought at the time was
that if we understood what they were, why they attacked and killed so relentlessly, that
we could better fight them; perhaps even find some common ground and reach a peace.
We never made much progress, it was as if every new attempt to understand, every
new theory about their nature or origins served only to further complicate and empower
the Things. We can fight them with our weapons, and they’re afraid of the light. I’ve
always remembered one thing I read in one of the ancient documents,

...we were ready for aliens, or zombies, or even alien zombies. Even demons. Maybe we didn’t even know
or believe they existed but at least we had seen a thousand times over how we would fight them, how we
would beat them, how we would win; in the movies and stories that surrounded us. But we didn’t get
zombies. Zombies follow predatory instincts, zombies are predictable. Zombies are limited by the amount of
dead. Zombies don’t walk through walls and they don’t appear out of thin air like some damned magic
trick. If ever there was a more natural predator of man we would have been extinct long ago, and looking
at events now that might not be too far off...if only it were zombies.

Hope is lost

the things beat us in the conventional sense a long time ago. Years lost their meaning
around the time our last survivors banded together and did What We Had To Do.
Maybe someday, a million tomorrows from now, mankind will build a new world and
carry only horrific, apocryphal memories of what has transpired.

But let’s move on

there’s more to be gained from forgetting than remembrance. The actions you take
today may be the first steps towards our future, but probably not. In all my time I’ve
known only two things, the Things themselves and the feeling inside me that refuses to
give up and forces me to push on and give them hell.

I like to imagine

the Things have emotions like us so I can pretend to feel them hate us.

I guess I’ve said about enough, probably too much, but I feel like this brief time I spend
with you is the least I can do in lieu of any proper ceremony,

Give them hell

and come back alive.
**If Only it Were Zombies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>26 tiles</th>
<th>![Image of tiles]</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4 player tokens</td>
<td>![Image of player tokens]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 health tokens</td>
<td>![Image of health tokens]</td>
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<tr>
<td>56 Things</td>
<td>![Image of Things]</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 6-sided die</td>
<td>![Image of die]</td>
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</tbody>
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| 4 flashlights | ![Image of flashlights] |
| 2 medkits | ![Image of medkits] |
| 2 ammo boxes | ![Image of ammo boxes] |
| 4 pistols | ![Image of pistols] |
| 2 rifles | ![Image of rifles] |
| 2 shotguns | ![Image of shotguns] |
| 4 melee weapons | ![Image of melee weapons] |

The Package | ![Image of package] |

Your goal is to collect the “package” and get it back to the starting location, killing Things along the way. Things are weaker when in brightly lit areas and are easily killed by conventional firearms. While weak individually and not capable of using weapons, they tend to hunt in groups and are more than capable of taking down the unprepared.

*If Only it Were Zombies* is intended for 1, 2, or 4 human players. For one player the single player controls all 4 player tokens, in a 2 player game they each control 2, and with 4 players each player controls one player token.
Setup
Place the “Start” tile in the play area. Shuffle the other tiles and place them in a face-down pile. Place the package tile at the bottom of the pile (or in the middle at some point for a shorter/random game).

Each player rolls the die to determine turn order, players who roll the highest go first; with ties being settled with re-rolls. The player who goes first in the turn order uses the “Player 1” token, the second player uses “Player 2”, and so on.

Each player gets one tile at random from the top of the tile stack and places it either next to the “Start” tile or another tile that has been placed. Once an initial 4 tiles have been placed, each player in turn order picks a square on the Start tile and places their player token. If a player starts in a square that contains an item they may pick it up now.

Tiles
Anytime a tile is placed check the tile to see if any Things or items should be placed on it.

Tiles must be placed next to an existing tile, the side of one matching up with the side of another. Some tiles have one or more sides blocked off by walls, when a tile is placed there must be at least one space a player may use to move onto that tile.

Turns
A player’s turn proceeds in 3 phases: a move, an attack, and a free action. The player may take the move and attack actions in either order they wish, but the free action must always be taken last; after the free action a player’s turn is over. A player may choose to skip any (or all) of their actions during their turn (if they do not wish to move and have no combat actions to take for example).

Wounded players do not get a free action and suffer other penalties, see the Health section for more info.

After each player has taken a turn the Things act (see the Things section for more info).

Moving
To move a player rolls the die to determine available movement, the player can move up to that many squares during their turn. A player must move in straight directions (up, down, left, or right), they may not move diagonally. A player may move through other items and other player’s squares. A player may not move through walls or Things or end their movement on a square occupied by another player.

After a player moves they must choose which direction they want to shine their flashlight in, marked by their player’s facing (see Flashlight rules). During other player’s turns and Thing phases this facing determines which squares are lit.

Wounded players do not roll to move, instead receiving 2 movement each turn.
A player may pick up an item from any squares they move through and use that same item during this turn.

**Attacking**
A player may attack with any weapon they are carrying or with their bare hands (bare hands have an attack rating of 4 and may only attack adjacent Things). The special traits of a weapon’s attack are detailed in the *Weapons and Items* section. The attacking player rolls the die and compares their result to the attack rating of the weapon, if the roll meets or exceeds the attack rating the attack hits. A hit Thing is killed and removed from the board.

A player with a flashlight always gains the *lit* bonus when attacking a Thing within 2 squares, regardless of facing.

Certain weapons have special effects when a player rolls a “6” on their attack roll; consult the weapon’s section for these effects. For weapons that allow additional attacks that require a new roll (pistol, melee) the player *may* receive the benefits of the critical effect again if they roll another “6”. The only limit to the number of times a player may benefit from a critical effect during their turn is their luck and supply of appropriate targets.

There are a few special attack actions; these are covered in the *Health* and *Weapons and Items* sections. For example, using the medkit to heal a player is part of the attack action and consumes a player’s attack action for the turn.

**Free Action**
The free action is a special action always taken at the end of a player’s turn. The player may either move 2 spaces (unaffected by item movement penalties) OR take an additional attack. All other rules for movement and attacks apply as normal. *Wounded* players do not get a free action.

**Line of Sight**
Certain weapons and abilities are able to be used at range, beyond adjacent squares. Items cannot be used through walls, but may be used across squares containing unattended items, Things, or other players.

Common sense can be used to determine most line of sight questions; there is no need to break out rulers for obvious situations. For longer ranged shots, like an 8 square rifle shot, the following rule can be used to determine line of sight:

To determine if your player has line of sight to a square (and thus able to fire into it) use the 2-3 rule: pick 2 corners, draw to 3 corners. Simply pick 2 corners of your square and draw imaginary lines into the four corners of the target square. If at least 3 of those lines from each of your 2 corners reach the Target square without crossing a wall than you have line of sight (hitting the edge of a wall along the grid does not count as crossing the wall).
The diagram at the right shows an example of the line of sight rules. The first Thing in the upper-left square is a valid target for the player. The player is able to reach at least 3 corners of the Thing’s square using the top-left and bottom-left corners of the player’s square. Note that one line from each set touches the tip of the wall that meets the gridline, this is the edge of the wall so the line is still valid.

The second Thing in the upper-middle square is not a valid target. While 2 valid lines can be drawn that touch the edge of the wall, the third line crosses the wall and thus denies line of sight.

Flashlights

If the player has a flashlight their facing determines where they’re pointing their flashlight. Things are disoriented in the light are weaker when attacking. A held flashlight provides light in the square the player is in, the 2 squares in front of the player, and the 4 squares on either side of the lit squares (see diagram).

A flashlight lying on the ground provides light in the square it is located in and the 8 squares adjacent and diagonal to it.

Attacking a Thing in a lit square grants a -1 bonus to the attack rating of a weapon. Furthermore, Things attacking from (but not into) a lit square receive a -1 penalty to their attacks. A player with a flashlight always gains the lit bonus when attacking a Thing within 2 squares, regardless of facing.

Things, Movement

After each player has had a turn the Things act. At the start of every Thing phase one player rolls a die (the first player in the turn order rolls on the first Thing phase, the second player rolls on the following Thing phase, and so on), that number determines how many Things move during this phase. The player who rolls is considered the acting player for this Thing phase.

Begin by determining which Things will be moving during this phase. First, look at any Things on or adjacent to a tile with a player. Things closest to a Player move before Things farther away. Things already adjacent to a player will not move. If there are multiple Things with same movement priority (same distance from a player) the acting player chooses which Things move.

If all Things on or adjacent to a tile with a player have been moved and additional Things must still be moved then Things on further tiles must be moved. Tiles containing Things near players
move before tiles further away, the exact square count between a Thing and a player is unimportant, simply move the appropriate number of Things on the chosen tile. If all Things on the first tile have moved and additional Things must still move, choose a second tile, and so on until all Thing movement has be exhausted.

Any moving Thing gains 2 movement (3 once the package is in play) and moves towards the closest active player, if two or more players are the same distance the acting player decides which player the Thing moves towards. Things may move through walls or other obstacles, but may not end their movement inside an obstacle, another Thing, or a player. Things may move through other Things or wounded players, but may not move through active players or end their movement over a wounded player.

The acting player must use all available movement for Things and may not waste movement that isn’t towards a player.

**Things, Attack**

After all the Things have moved, any Things adjacent to a player attack (unlike movement, they cannot attack through walls). If more than one player is a valid target for a Thing the acting player decides which player is attacked. The player being attacked rolls a die, if the result is a “3” or more (“4” or more if the Thing is in a lit square) that player is hit, and that player loses 1 health token. In addition, if the roll is a “6” an additional Thing is added next to the defending player in a valid square: one which is adjacent to the defender and not lit, if no valid squares are available then a Thing is not added. After the package is in play, Things added in this way attack as soon as they’re placed, and may spawn additional Things depending on their rolls.

After all Things movement and attacks have been resolved check if any players received any damage during this phase, if not follow the **Boundless Things** rule below.

**Boundless Things**

If no players were injured (lost 1 or more health) during the Things’ phase they react by calling up more Things. Roll a die and subtract 3 from the result, if the result is 1 or more that many Things are added to the game area. Once the package is in play you no longer subtract 3 from the Boundless Thing roll. Instead, add the amount of Things equal to the number rolled, to a maximum of 4).

Things added this way are placed adjacent to an active, non-wounded player in a square which is not lit, if no spaces meet this criteria a Thing is not added. The acting player for the Things phase determines the placement of these Things.

After these Things are placed they attack immediately if the package is in play using the normal Thing attack rules (“3” or more hits, “4” or more if in a lit square). Any results of “6” spawn further Things as normal Thing rules.

**End of Turn**

After resolving the Things phase the acting player takes the top 2 tiles off the top of the stack and places them into the game area. The next turn then begins with the first player.
Health
Each player starts with 3 health. Each time a player is successfully attacked by a Thing they lose 1 health. When a player reaches 0 health they are wounded. A wounded player still occupies that square, however Things will no longer attempt to attack them and may now move through his square (but may not end their movement in the square). A wounded character may only carry a single item, if they were carrying 2 items they chose one item to drop in the square where they were wounded. As a final note, a wounded character may not carry the package.

During a wounded player’s turn they may only move up to 2 squares when moving (do not roll). When attacking a Wounded player may not benefit from the Critical effect of weapons.

They may not use rifles, shotguns, ammo boxes (except to use the grenade attack on their current square), or medkits (except to use the full heal on themselves). Wounded players no longer receive a free action each turn. Wounded players may not revive other wounded players.

Any other player may revive a wounded player by reviving them (no roll is necessary, this action succeeds automatically), revived players gain a single health. A player may only be revived if there are no Things next to the wounded player or the reviver.

Weapons and Items
A player may only carry two items at a time. When a player picks up an item they remove the item token from the board and hold onto it. If a player wishes to drop an item they may place it on any square within 2 squares of themselves, including the square they occupy. Items may only be dropped at the end of a player’s turn, after all other actions and movement have taken place, and a player may not drop an item they used during the current turn.

A player may carry more than one of a single item type, but there is no benefit to doing so (other than perhaps carrying an item to hand-off to another player).

The items and possible actions are as follows:

Bare Hands- a player may always attack with their hands, this weapon is not considered an item and may not be dropped. A player may attack adjacent Things with their hands with an attack rating of 4. There is no critical effect with bare hands.

Reviving- a player may always revive nearby wounded players, this weapon is not considered an item and may not be dropped. A player may revive adjacent wounded players by using their attack action (this action succeeds automatically, no roll), the wounded player is revived with a single health.

Flashlight- a player with a flashlight generates light that hinders Things and assists players. Alternatively, a flashlight on the ground provides light in the square it is located in and the 8 squares adjacent and diagonal to it. See the Flashlight section for more info.
Medkits- a player with a medkit may use it on adjacent players or himself instead of making a normal attack. When using the medkit the player selects themselves or an ally within 2 squares and restores 1 health to that player, this restores a wounded player. Alternatively, the player may restore all missing health to himself or another player within 2 squares (even if that player was wounded), using the medkit in this way consumes it (remove the medkit from the game).

Ammo Box- a player with an ammo box has no need to conserve ammunition; they may fire more freely and gain a -1 bonus to their attack rating with any pistol, rifle, or shotgun they are carrying. Other players within 2 squares of this player also gain the -1 bonus. A player may never benefit from more than one ammo box at a time (the maximum bonus possible is -1). Finally, a player may use a grenade to attack a square within 4 squares of themselves, any Things in that square or the 8 adjacent and diagonal squares are killed, any player in those same squares is wounded (already wounded characters are not further injured). Using the grenade attack consumes the ammo box (remove the ammo box from the game).

Pistol- a player with a pistol may attack a Thing up to 3 squares away with an attack rating of 4. Critical effect: if a “6” is rolled on the pistol’s attack roll the player may make a second attack against a second Thing adjacent to the original Target, the range of this second target from the player does not matter.

Rifle- a player with a rifle may attack a Thing between 2 and 8 (not adjacent) squares away with an attack rating of 3 (this rating already includes the bonus for attacking into a lit square). A rifle may not attack into an unlit square. Critical effect: if a “5” or “6” is rolled on the rifle’s attack roll the player selects a second Thing adjacent or diagonal to the Target to be killed and removed, the range of this second target from the player does not matter.

Shotgun- a player with a shotgun may attack a Thing up to 3 squares away with an attack rating of 4. If the player is supplied with ammo (carrying or within 2 spaces of a player with an ammo box) they may make a second attack against a second Thing within 2 spaces of the first target. There is no critical effect with the shotgun.

Melee Weapon- a player with a melee weapon may attack adjacent Things with an attack rating of 4. Also, any Things attacking this player receive a +1 penalty to their attacks (“4” or more to hit, “5” or more if the Thing is also in a lit square). Critical effect: if a “6” is rolled on the melee weapon’s attack roll the player may choose to move 2 squares after the Thing is removed and then make an additional attack if their new position is adjacent to a Thing.

Package- the entire reason your team volunteered to brave the Things and an almost certain violent, terrible death. You don’t know if it’s some sort of weapon, a medical breakthrough, some piece of the past, or just another dead-end in the struggle against the Things. Whatever the package may be, it’s worth at least as much as your four lives put together so show some respect and don’t drop it (you may still drop or throw the package item, there is no penalty for doing so).
**Winning**
If the players manage to kill all active Things they automatically win the game.

More likely, the players can win by having the package and all **non-wounded** players reach the reach the starting tile while no Things are present on the tile.

**Losing**
If all the players are **wounded** at one time the players lose the game.

**Tips**
*Have the most toys.* Without the proper use of items your team will be overrun by the Things, it’s only a matter of time. In particular, medkits go a long way to keeping your team healthy and fighting at their peak effectiveness.

*Bring an assortment of gear.* Having an assortment of weapons and gear available to your team greatly increases your versatility and chances of success.

*Watch your teammates and work together.* You might be able to win the game for your team by leaving them all **wounded** while you make it to the back to the start with the package, a grenade, and a prayer. But you’ll find much more success by working together to cover and support each other (and you can probably get one of them to carry the stupid package, too!).

*Someone has to play the cleric.* The “optimal” group is a melee/flashlight, a rifle/ammox box, a pistol/medkit, and a shotgun/ammox box. That said, don’t be afraid to try out other combinations and loadouts, there are many potential synergies between the items.

*Use your range to your advantage.* Many of your weapons and items are usable beyond the squares adjacent to you, meaning you can target and kill Things before they even reach you. Always be aware of the maximum ranges for your items.

*Positioning is key!* Be aware of the items carried by your teammates and the location of Things. Ammo boxes and flashlights provide a powerful boost in certain squares, these bonuses could boost a basic pistol’s attack rating as high as 2! Things move through walls so that empty armory tile with the ammo box in it may be full of Things in another turn.

*You’re not Rambo.* You can only carry 2 items, which doesn’t give you enough versatility to survive long on your own. You can only make one attack, which won’t let you hold off even a small charge of Things. Even the most powerful weapons, the shotgun and rifle, are difficult or impossible to use effectively without having another player support you.

*You’re not Seagal.* Or Van Damme. Before items or other modifiers are taken into account a Thing has a 66% chance of hitting you, you have a 50% chance of hitting the Thing. While your health means you’ll come out ahead in most fights, there’s also a limited number of you (one) and a whole lot more Things (up to 56) who have a nasty habit of spawning more of themselves. Don’t engage Things in hand-to-hand combat without reason or proper gear.

*Be a martyr, sometimes.* While avoiding being wounded and getting revived should be a priority, a wounded player can still be used to block out attacking Things and even fight them off. Since Things ignore a **Wounded** player they can crawl around and pick Things off with a pistol, or even light the way with a flashlight from relative safety.
Order of Play Reference

Player turn
1) Move and attack (any order)
   Movement: roll die to determine range (wounded players move 2)
   Attack, or other action: revive, medkit, ammo box grenade
2) Move or attack (whichever action hasn’t been taken yet)
3) Free action (wounded players skip this action)
   2 movement or additional attack action
4) Throw/drop items (optional)

After each player’s turn, Thing phase
1) Roll die to determine number of Things moved
2) Move Things closest to players
   Things move 2 spaces (3 after Package)
3) Things adjacent to players attack
   Roll die, “3” or better hits
   On “6” spawn additional Things
   New Things attack
4) If no players were injured, boundless Things
   Roll die, subtract 3 (before Package)
   Roll die, maximum result of 4 (after Package)
   Add the resulting number of Things
   New Things attack

Add 2 new tiles to the play area

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<table>
<thead>
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<td><strong>Range:</strong> number of squares away you may use this item.</td>
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<td><strong>Critical (if applicable):</strong> effects of rolling a “6” to hit with this weapon.</td>
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<td>Reviving: no roll, revive a wounded player to 1 health; usable when no Things are adjacent to either player.</td>
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<td><strong>Flashlight:</strong> provides light bonus in nearby squares, -1 rating, +1 penalty to Things in lit square.</td>
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<td><strong>Medkit:</strong> heals 1 health, range of 2; discard to restore all health on one player.</td>
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<td><strong>Ammo box:</strong> -1 rating bonus for firearms attacks made by players within 2 squares; discard to kill wounded Things/players in area.</td>
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<td><strong>Pistol:</strong> range 3, critical- extra attack.</td>
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<td><strong>Rifle:</strong> only attacks lit, range 8, critical- (“5” or “6”) kills a second Thing.</td>
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<td><strong>Shotgun:</strong> range 3, gains second attack if supplied with ammo range (2 from original Target).</td>
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<td><strong>Melee weapon:</strong> +1 penalty to Things attacking this player, critical- move 2 and gain a second attack.</td>
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**If Only it were Zombies**

...we were ready for aliens, or zombies, or even alien zombies. Even demons...But we didn't get zombies. Zombies follow predatory instincts, zombies are predictable. Zombies are limited by the amount of dead. Zombies don't walk through walls and they don't appear out of thin air like so damned magic trick...if only it were zombies.
If Only it were Zombies

A cooperative, tactical combat game
by Erik Storla
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**If Only it were Zombies**

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We were doomed and the Things took over. We don’t understand them and we don’t have the resources to pretend we can “win” anymore. But mankind is nothing if not persistent, and not even the apocalypse and ensuing downfall of civilization is going to make us lay down and die.

So grab your flashlights and rifles, load up on ammo and medical supplies, and set aside any presumptions you may have of coming back alive.

A cooperative, survival, tactical combat game for 1, 2, or 4 players.

- Ease of play, depth of tactics
- Place able map tiles for a different layout each time
- The Things, a relentless enemy that stalks through walls and appears from thin air
- Use rifles, pistols, and shotguns along with medkits and ammo boxes to fight off the Things
- Cooperative tactics like spotting enemies with flashlights and providing ammo to teammates are crucial to success
- Not Zombies
If Only it were Zombies