

# DISTEMPER

## SURVIVOR'S NOTEBOOK

It has been almost a year since the dog flu started. All Friends, Family, or acquaintances of David and Jenny Battersby, you have been waiting the pandemic out on their farm. Your efforts as part of a small group of survivors in pulling together and attempting to be self-sufficient has worked so far - you have all had enough to eat and, minor frustrations aside, no one has come to blows.

But one of the tractors has broken and David needs to find an arc welder if he is going to get it working again. There is a garage that he knows of that might have one and, as none of you have left the farm in nearly two months, you have all volunteered to go. A few of you take the truck and leave just after breakfast.

The absolute lack of activity on the drive reminds you how complete the devastation of the dog flu has been. You had agreed to stop at houses along the way to see if you could find anything useful but after just one house you collectively agree to keep moving and head to the garage. After a somber and silent 40 minutes' drive through a couple of small towns and down some country roads where you see absolutely no signs of life, the gas station that David mentioned lies ahead.



DAVID

### DAVID BATTERSBY

AGE: 62  
 WEIGHT: 193 LBS  
 HEIGHT: 5'9"  
 PROFESSION: FARMER  
 EQUIPMENT & WEAPONS:  
 FISTS 1D3+1 (100%)  
 SHOTGUN 161 3+1D6  
 TRUCK

DAVID IS:  
 SULLEN, PESSIMISTIC, SHREWD

DAVID'S COMPLICATION IS HIS LOSS AND HIS MOTIVATION IS STAY ALIVE

NOTES:

DAVID IS A THIRD-GENERATION FARMER AND, ALONG AND HIS WIFE JENNY, HAS SPENT DECADES WORKING THEIR FARM, CLOSE TO THE MARYLAND AND DELAWARE BORDER. WHEN THE PANDEMIC HIT, DAVID AND JENNY COULDN'T SAVE THEIR OWN CHILDREN (WHO WERE SCATTERED AROUND THE US) BUT THEY INVITED THOSE NEAR AND DEAR TO THEM TO FARM TO TRY AND RIDE OUT THE STORM. THEY HAVE BEEN THERE EVER SINCE.

### RAPID RANGE

REASON	2
ACUMEN	2
PHYSICALITY	1
INFLUENCE	0
DEXTERITY	0

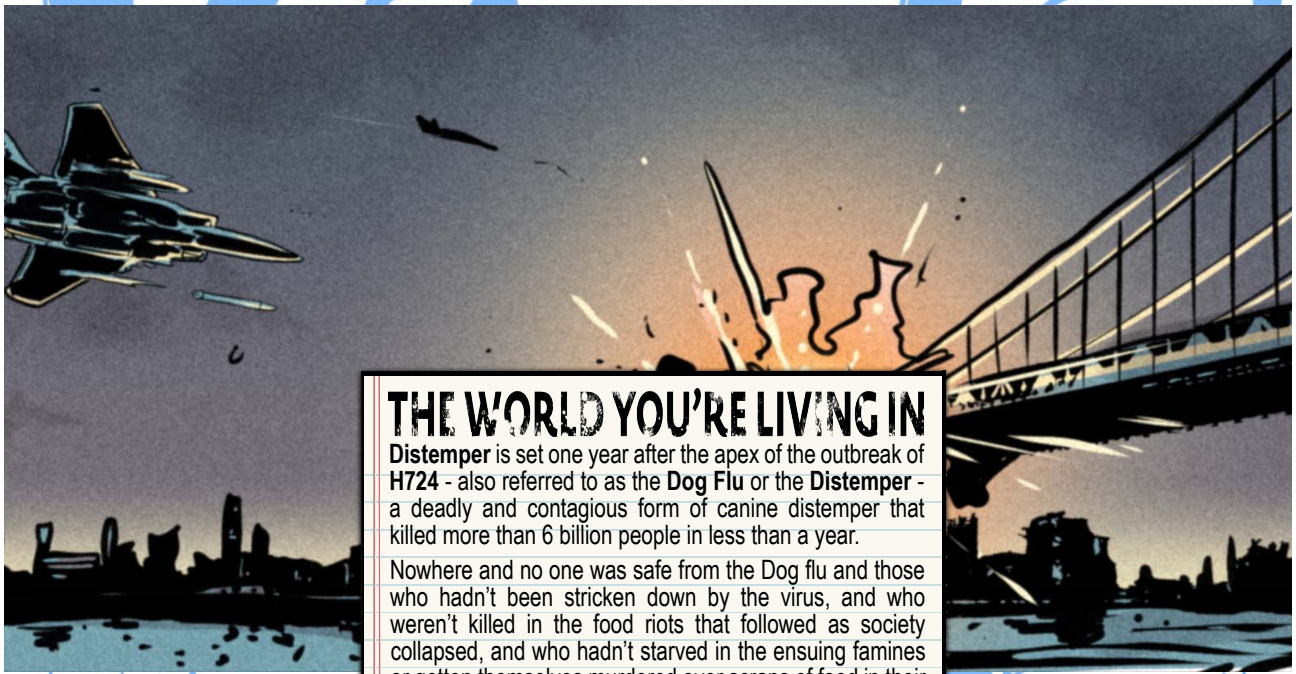
### SKILLS

ANIMAL HANDLING (D)	1 RANGED COMBAT (D)	1
BARTER (C)	1 SCAVENGING (A)	1
FARMING (R)	3 STEALTH (P)	1
FIRST AID (R)	1 SURVIVAL (A)	2
HUNTING (A)	3 VEHICLES* (D)	1

### SECONDARY STATS

WOUND POINTS	11
RESILIENCE POINTS	7
DM MELEE	1
DM RANGED	0
INITIATIVE	+2
ENCUMBRANCE	7
MORALITY	3
BREAKING POINT	7





## THE WORLD YOU'RE LIVING IN

**Distemper** is set one year after the apex of the outbreak of **H724** - also referred to as the **Dog Flu** or the **Distemper** - a deadly and contagious form of canine distemper that killed more than 6 billion people in less than a year.

Nowhere and no one was safe from the Dog flu and those who hadn't been stricken down by the virus, and who weren't killed in the food riots that followed as society collapsed, and who hadn't starved in the ensuing famines or gotten themselves murdered over scraps of food in their hands, are now faced with figuring out their ongoing survival.

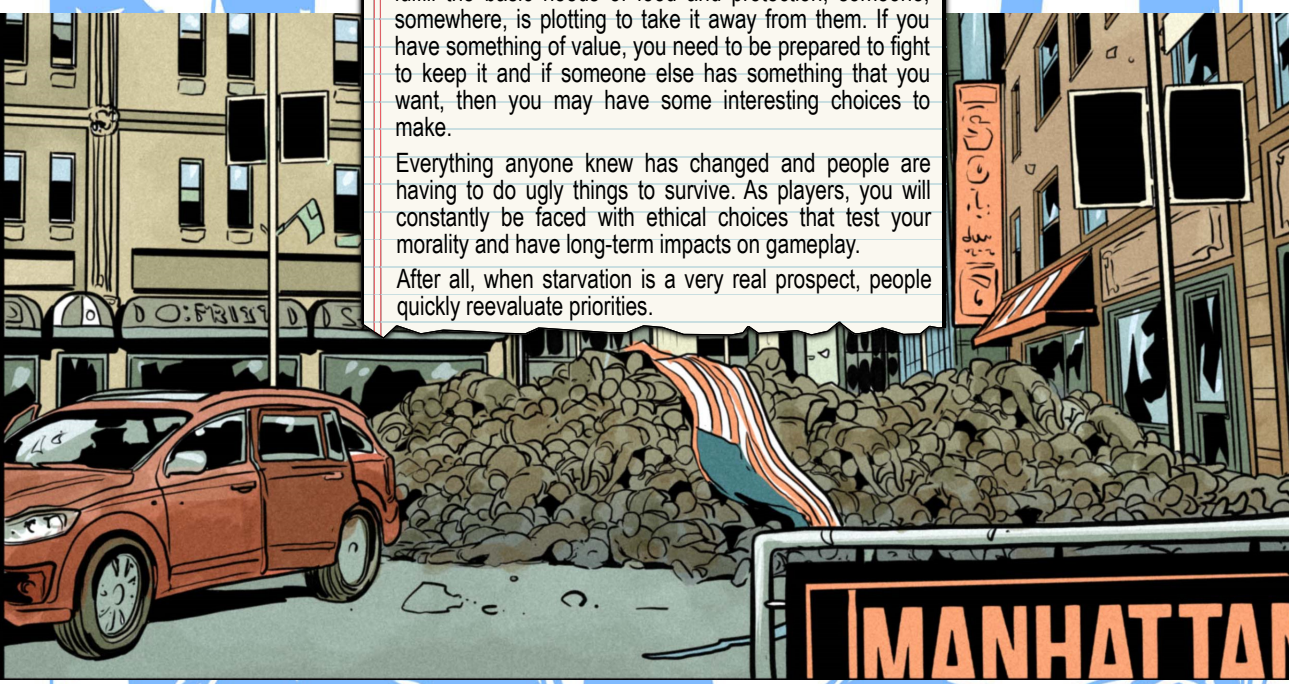
The fear of the virus is still very real and strong enough to get people with a runny nose killed without warning, but more immediate threats and priorities - like food, shelter, and safety - have taken precedence.

Some elements of society are attempting to knit themselves back together whilst others are pulling at the frayed edges. Many cities - those that aren't still burning, at least - have devolved into anarchic and chaotic hellholes, whilst others strive to shine as sanctuaries and beacons of hope - even if no one is really sure who they can trust any more.

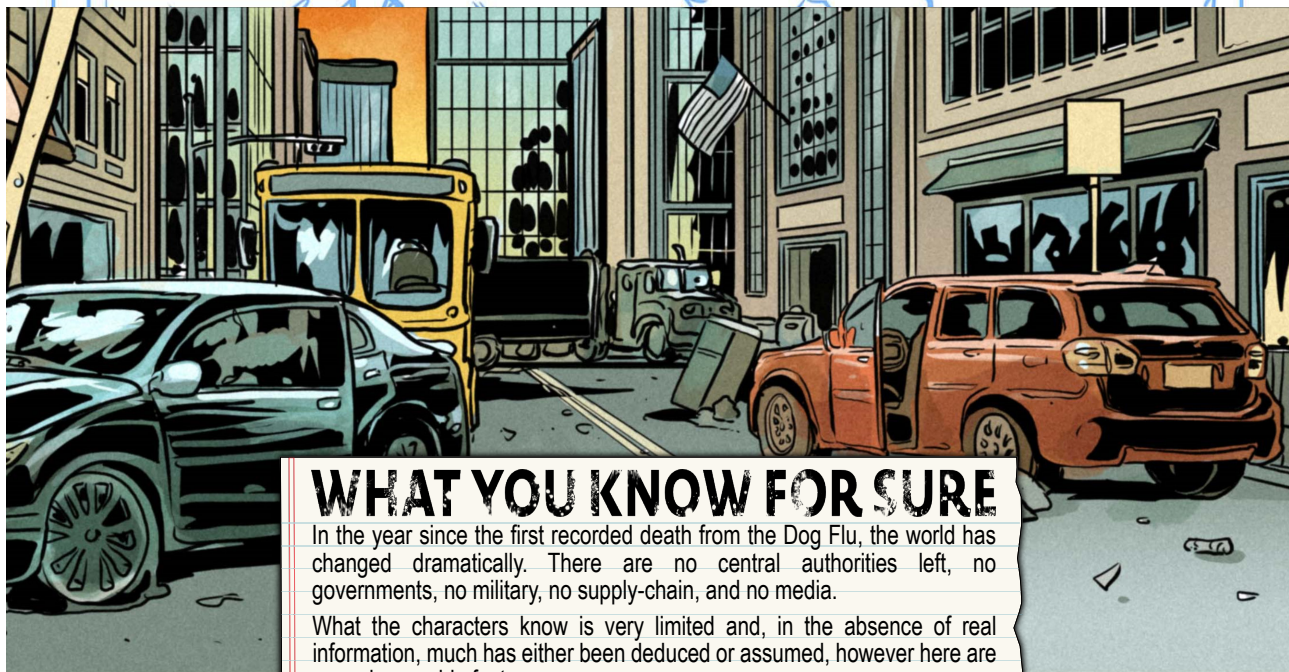
The Rule of Law has been replaced with the Rule of the Gun and for each instance of people working together to fulfill the basic needs of food and protection, someone, somewhere, is plotting to take it away from them. If you have something of value, you need to be prepared to fight to keep it and if someone else has something that you want, then you may have some interesting choices to make.

Everything anyone knew has changed and people are having to do ugly things to survive. As players, you will constantly be faced with ethical choices that test your morality and have long-term impacts on gameplay.

After all, when starvation is a very real prospect, people quickly reevaluate priorities.







## WHAT YOU KNOW FOR SURE

In the year since the first recorded death from the Dog Flu, the world has changed dramatically. There are no central authorities left, no governments, no military, no supply-chain, and no media.

What the characters know is very limited and, in the absence of real information, much has either been deduced or assumed, however here are some inarguable facts:

- The Dog Flu came out of nowhere. The first recorded death was in Chile on March 7th and from there it was like an unstoppable snowball of death.
- Every country on earth found themselves being suddenly and brutally eviscerated.
- It was initially transmitted to us by Man's Best Friend but mutated and developed multiple transmission mechanisms.
- The death rate continued to escalate exponentially as the virus continued to mutate.
- By the end of the summer when the media stopped broadcasting, the grim outlook was that up to 80% of humanity would likely be killed from The Distemper.
- As summer turned to fall, enough people had died that society essentially collapsed under the onslaught of this invisible enemy and ceased to function.
- With no new information about the state of the world or the virus, paranoia and fear run rampant, and word of mouth is unreliable.
- All forms of canines - wolves, coyotes, jackals, foxes, and dogs – still carry the virus and are considered deadly.
- Securing food, shelter and supplies is now of paramount importance to anyone left alive.
- How they go about doing that will depend on their level of desperation.





# RULES REFERENCE

## DICE CHECKS

All attribute or skill checks require a total score of 9 or above to be successful and take the format:

### 2d6 + Attribute Modifier (AMod)

Add their Reason, Acumen, Physicality, Influence or Dexterity AMod, for a range of -2 to +4

### + Skill (SMod)

Add relevant SMods from Skills for a range of -3 to +3

### + Conditional Modifier (CMod)

For any external influences or unexpected factors, ranging from -5 to +5, at the GM's discretion

## OUTCOMES

1-3	Dire Failure
4-8	Failure
9-13	Success
14+	Wild Success
1+1	Moment of Low Insight
6+6	Moment of High Insight

## MODIFIERS

Each **Dice Check** can have up to three possible Modifiers that are added to the final total.

**Attribute Modifiers (AMods):** All characters have 5 attributes (**Reason, Acumen, Physicality, Influence, & Dexterity**) ranging from 0 to 4. This number is the **Attribute Modifier**, or **AMod**, that is added to any check that uses that Attribute.

**Skill Modifiers (SMods):** Each character has a variety of skills, with a **Skill Modifier**, or **SMod**, ranging from 0 to +4, that is added to any check using that skill.

**Note:** Some skills require some degree of specialized training and attempting to use one without the training incurs a -3 **SMod**. These skills are marked with a \*.

**Conditional Modifiers (CMods):** Any dice roll can have a Conditional Modifier, or **CMod**, ranging from -5 to +5 which is added at the GM's discretion to reflect external factors that can influence the dice check.

## FILLING IN THE GAPS

Having the players Fill in the Gaps about what they are seeing or doing can help the GM ensure that the whole group are contributing to the narrative.

The GM may call upon players to provide details about what they are seeing or doing that flesh out the scene or actions for the rest of the group.

## MOMENTS OF INSIGHT

A roll of double one or double six (a 2 or 12) is either a **Moment of Low** or **High Insight** wherein the task went so flawlessly well or so disastrously awry that the character learned an important lesson about what not to do or gained a deep understand of how and why they were successful.

Regardless of any AMod, SMod or CMods being applied to the roll, a double one is always treated as a **Dire Failure** and a double six is always treated as a **Wild Success**.

As a result of this roll, they receive an **Insight Dice** that can be used to affect the outcome of future dice checks.

## INSIGHT DICE

**Insight Dice** allow players to affect dice rolls or other elements of gameplay in their favor. Each player starts the game with 2 **Insight Dice** and receives an additional **Insight Dice** each time they roll a **double one** or a **double six** and have a **Moment of Insight**.

Common uses for **Insight Dice** are:

- Adding an additional dice to the pool prior to making a check, for a 3d6 dice pool
- Used as a +3 Conditional Modifier
- Re-rolling one or both of the original dice
- 'Bending reality' to allowing a player to find an unexpected clue or suddenly have a missing piece of required equipment
- Instead of **Dying**, a character can surrender all of their **Insight Dice** in exchange for recovering 1 Wound Point and 1 Resilience Point for each dice surrendered. Players cannot choose how many dice to use in this method, this costs all of their **Insight Dice**

There is no limit to how many **Insight Dice** a player can have and once used, **Insight Dice** are surrendered back to the GM.

Although **Insight Dice** can be used by a player to perform an act that helps another player, they are non-transferable and cannot be given directly to another character.

## GROUP CHECKS

A group of players may elect to make a Group Check and pool their abilities so long as they are using the same Attribute or Skill.

The player with the highest individual Attribute or Skill makes a dice check, factoring in AMods and SMods from the group members, and adding a +1 CMod for each person contributing.

## OPPOSED CHECKS

If two characters are working against one another (during a chase, for example), an **Opposed Check** is used.

This starts with both characters making an initiative check to see who goes first.

The initiative winner then makes a dice check using the relevant attribute or skill and the other player makes a responding check.

However, unlike most dice checks in **Distemper**, an **Opposed Check** relies purely on one side beating the final score of the other.

**Moments of Insight** still apply, and a character who gets a **Moment of Low Insight** (a double one) will automatically lose (unless their opponent also gets a **Moment of Low Insight**) and anyone getting a **Moment of High Insight** will automatically win, unless their opponent gets the same dice roll, in which case both sides go back to **Initiative** rolls.

## SKILL LIST

Animal Handling (INF)  
Armorsmith\* (DEX)  
Athletics (PHY)  
Barter (ACU)  
Charm (INF)  
Deception (INF)  
Demolitions\* (PHY)  
Dodge (DEX)  
Driving (DEX)  
Entertainment (INF)  
Farming (RSN)  
First Aid (RSN)  
Gambling (ACU)  
General (RSN)  
Hunting (PHY)  
Inspiration (INF)  
Intimidation (PHY)  
Local (RSN)  
Lock-Picking\* (ACU)  
Melee Combat (PHY)  
Navigation (ACU)  
Perception (ACU)  
Pharmacology\* (RSN)  
Psychology\* (INF)  
Ranged Combat (DEX)  
Research (RSN)  
Scavenging (ACU)  
Sleight of Hand (DEX)  
Stealth (PHY)  
Streetwise (ACU)  
Surgery\* (RSN)  
Survival (ACU)  
Tactical Knowledge\* (RSN)  
Tinkerer (DEX)  
Unarmed Combat (PHY)  
Vehicle Repair\* (DEX)  
Weaponsmith\* (DEX)

## COMBAT ROUNDS

Combat Rounds last 6-10 seconds, and consist of 3 phases: Initiative, Actions, Resolution.

**1. Initiative:** At the beginning of each round, all participants make an Initiative check ( $2d6 + \text{Init Mod}$ ) to determine the order in which they act, going from the highest to the lowest score, which draws taking place simultaneously. Anyone who was neither attacked nor attacked someone else gets a +1 to their next Initiative roll.

**2. Actions:** Each combatant gets two Combat Actions per round and may take the same action twice or choose two different actions.

**3. Resolution:** Certain actions, weapons, or effects will be resolved in this phase after all characters have taken their actions and before the round is complete.

At the end of the Resolution phase, combat cycles to a new round and a fresh Initiative check.

## COMBAT ATTACKS

Attack rolls, like all other checks, requires a score of 9 or above to be successful.

Attack rolls take the format:

**2d6 + AMod**

Physicality for Melee & Unarmed, Dexterity for Ranged + SMod

Melee Combat, Ranged Combat, Unarmed Combat, or Demolitions\*

+ CMod

as determined by the GM

+ any Modifier for the specific weapon

- Target's Ranged or Melee Defensive Modifier

## PANIC

If a character is reduced to half their original Resilience Point total then they must make a Successful, *Inspiration*, *Psychology*\* or *Reason* check to retain their self control or they have **Panicked**.

Players should 2d6 and check against the table below for the effect:

### Roll Effect

- 2 **Catatonic:** Unable to move for 1d3 rounds
- 3 **Severe Anxiety:** Lose **Combat Actions** for 1d3 rounds
- 4 **Rattled:** -2 on next Initiative Roll
- 5 **Outburst:** Lashes out at someone close by
- 6 **Intimidated:** -3 CMod to attacks for 1d3 rounds
- 7 **Twitchy:** -2 CMod on all attacks for 1d3 rounds
- 8 **Loose Grip:** Whatever they are holding, they drop
- 9 **Frozen in Place:** Loses all actions for the next round
- 10 **Scream:** Spends the next round screaming
- 11 **Escape:** Disengages from combat
- 12 **Berserk:** Attacks the closest person

## INITIATIVE TRACKER

**Initiative is decided at the beginning of each combat round and sets the order in which participants in combat act, from highest to lowest.**

An **INITIATIVE CHECK** is:

2d6 + Dexterity AMod  
+ Acumen AMod  
+ Perception SMod

NAME	MOD	SCORE	ORDER
Marv	+4	_____	_____
David	+2	_____	_____
Carly	+4	_____	_____
Morgan	+4	_____	_____
Gus	+4	_____	_____
Nash	+5	_____	_____

A Form-fillable PDF version of this Initiative Tracker is available from [www.distemperverse.com/empty](http://www.distemperverse.com/empty)

## COMBAT ACTIONS

**AIM:** +2 CMod on the next attack against one target

**ATTACK:** Make a Combat Roll

**CHARGE:** Uses both actions but lets a character make 2 moves and end in an attack

**COORDINATE:** On a successful Perception or Tactical Knowledge\* check, this character can provide allies at Close range with a +2 CMod against a specific target

**COVER FIRE:** A Success inflicts a -2 CMod on their next action.

**DEFEND:** +2 to Defensive Modifiers

**DICE CHECK:** Make an Attribute or Skill check

**DISTRACT:** A Successful Intimidation, Tactical Knowledge\* or Perception check causes the target to lose their next action

**FIRE FROM COVER:** Uses both actions to come out of cover, fire, and return to cover

**GRAPPLING:** An Opposed check to pin a target in place

**INSPIRE:** A Successful Inspiration check gives a target at close range an additional Combat Action

**MOVE:** Change Range bands

**RAPID FIRE:** Can make two shots per action, but the first incurs a -1 CMod and the second a -3 CMod. If used for both actions, it incurs -2 and -4 CMods

**READY WEAPON:** Prepares a weapon for use or unjams a misfiring weapon.

**REPOSITION:** Can move during the Resolution phase

**SPRINT:** Can cover 3 times the usual amount of ground. Requires an Athletics check or they lose one of the Combat Actions in the next round

**SUBDUE:** Can attack and cause 50% of the usual Wound Point damage but 100% of Resilience Point damage

**TAKE COVER:** +2 Defensive Modifier against all incoming attacks during that round. on next attack

## GUT INSTINCTS

Characters can also see what their Gut Instinct about an NPC is by making a Perception, *Psychology*\*, *Streetwise*, or *Acumen* check.

If they are successful, the GM should give the player some insight as to what their take is. If they fail, the GM may mislead them.

## FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Characters meeting NPCs for the first time should see how they are being perceived by the NPC by making either an Influence, Charm, Deception, Inspiration, or Intimidation check and **Fill in the Gaps** as to the specifics of what they are doing.

If multiple characters encounter him at the same time, they should make a **Group First Impression** check.

## NEGOTIATIONS

Negotiations are broken into **Gambits & Retorts**.

A character or NPC states their offer or request by making an Influence, Barter, Charm, Deception, Entertainment, Inspiration, or Intimidation check, and **Filling In the Gaps**.

If the other side agrees to the request or demand, the **Negotiation** is over.

On a **Dire Failure**, the **Negotiation** immediately falls apart.

On a **Failure**, the other side gets a +1 CMod on their **Retort**.

On a **Success**, there is a -1 CMod to any **Retort**.

On a **Wild Success** there is a -3 CMod to any **Retort**.

Once the other side has heard the opening **Gambit** out, they can offer their **Retort** by making an Acumen, Barter, Perception or *Streetwise* check.

On a **Dire Failure** or **Failure**, there is no common ground but there is potential to have created an enormous amount of bad feeling.

On a **Success** or **Wild Success**, their counter is met favorably and a deal or agreement can be reached.

NPCs can attempt to **Negotiate** with characters and although the players always have agency over what they will accept or agree to, they will need to **Fill In The Gaps** about what they are thinking or saying if they decide not to hold to the terms of the **Negotiation**.





# CHARACTER CARD OVERVIEW

Characters in **Distemper** are the protagonists of the stories told between the group. They are a player's eyes, hands, and voice, and it is through this avatar that they can interact with the world around them.

On the following pages are a series of **Pregenerated Characters** (also referred to as **Pregens**) that are ready to be played immediately. For players unfamiliar with the game, the numbers and stats might be overwhelming, so they should look over each characters' background and pick one to play based on what they see in the **Who They Are and How To Play Them** sections of the character card.

The various attributes, statistics and skills that define how competent or capable a character is at certain tasks or activities will be explained during the course of **Empty**, but there is a brief overview is below to help orient a GM or player.

These character cards are a truncated version of the full character sheet designed to make playing this **Jumpstart** easier for a group. To see the full character sheet or to download additional copies of the character cards, visit [www.distemperversive.com/empty](http://www.distemperversive.com/empty)



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### RAPID RANGE

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### SKILLS

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BARTER (D)	1	SCAVENGING (A)	1
FARMING (R)	3	STEALTH (P)	1
FIRST AID (R)	1	SURVIVAL (A)	2
HUNTING (A)	3	VEHICLES* (D)	1

### SECONDARY STATS

WOUND POINTS	11
RESILIENCE POINTS	7
DM MELEE	1
DM RANGED	0
INITIATIVE	+2
ENCUMBRANCE	7
MORALITY	3
BREAKING POINT	7

## WHO THEY ARE & HOW TO PLAY THEM

This section provides basic details about who each character is. Although this information has little impact on game play, it helps bring a character to life.

Additionally, there is a brief background section that describes who they were before the Dog Flu and how they came to be here. This provides more context for the players when taking on the role of their character.

Each character has various characteristics that define who they are and why they act like they do to help a player voice these characters.

There are a few keywords that summarize their personality, as well as a **Complication** and **Motivation** that will drive their actions. **Complications** and **Motivations** are explained fully in the **Core Rule Book** (available at [distemperversive.com/core](http://distemperversive.com/core)) but for the purposes of this encounter, these elements should be taken at face value – someone with the **Motivation** of **Find Safety** will always put the idea of **Finding Safety** above all else, for example.