The Creature Comes for Us

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The Creature Comes for Us is designed as a multiplayer game for any number of people — we recommend two to five — but it also works fine as a solo game. It requires a standard deck of cards to play and encourages players to world build together using the most powerful tool available to you — your imagination. You'll also need two standard six-sided dice (d6).

You play as a group of people preparing to fight against a currently unknown threat. Play is divided into two halves. Part 1 is where you spend your turns learning about the creature (or creatures) that are coming for you, and finding resources and tactics to fight against it (or them). Part 2 is where you pool what you've gathered together and face your destiny — and face the horrors that await you.

This game is designed primarily to tell a story of a band of individuals who are fighting against some never-seen-before horror. You should also find it useful for world and character building, as you will determine answers to questions to find out more about the setting and the fighters you're playing as. A finished game can leave you with a well-developed world in which to set a post-apocalyptic game for another role-playing game (RPG), or with ruins and a story for a future adventuring party to explore.

The Creature Comes for Us takes about two hours to play in its entirety.

This was inspired by other card-based world-building games, such as The Quiet Year and The Junkyard, as well as a dream I had the night before I sat down to write this.

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Set Up

The game begins as follows. Introduce yourselves to your fellow players — out of character first of all. Be sure that everyone knows a name and pronouns to address you by when talking out of character.

Now decide on the bare bones of the world. Is your world based in an era from the past, an alternative present day or a possible distant future? If no one in the group has any strong preferences, roll 1d6. A 1 or 2 chooses the past, 3 or 4 chooses the present (more or less) and a 5 or 6 chooses the future. You should make sure you leave lots of room for creative differences between the real world and the world you create. These settings should be starting points only — don't feel confined to only using the real technologies and customs of the era you start with.

Next, determine the basics of the character you will play within that world. Give them a name and pronouns to refer to them. What species are they? How old are they? What are their hobbies? What do they do as a job? Are they used to fighting monsters or is this their first time being in danger? Give your fellow players some simple answers to these questions, but don't go too far into detail. You'll be able to expand on your character whilst playing the game.

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Part I

The main game is played by drawing cards from one standard deck. You may find it easiest to nominate one player to draw the cards, check what each card means, and to keep track of decisions made throughout Part 1. Alternatively, you could divide these tasks between the players. It is not necessary to have one player sit out as a gamemaster (GM). All players are encouraged to participate equally in the world building.

Play order is decided as follows. Whoever wants to go first can go first. If no one has any real preference or if more than one person wants to go first, then whoever rolls the highest number on 1d6 can go first.

Each turn has three sections: draw a card, resolve the questions for the card and note down the outcome. To resolve the questions for the card, simply read out questions and discuss them amongst yourselves. Imagine what the answers might be in the world you're creating together. A 'yes and' improv style is encouraged here. Different suggestions can be given by all participating players, but, ultimately, the person who drew the card will make the final decision on each of the questions posed by the card until it is resolved fully.

This discussion-and-decision process should be repeated for each question for a card, until all questions have been addressed. The order in which the questions are tackled does not matter.

When you have decided the outcome of a question, note it down. You will want to keep a written record of the ideas you come up with.

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This could be on separate pieces of paper, or you may wish to create a collaborative page or document. It is essential to keep track of the threats and resources you come up with, but I recommend also writing down the decisions that are made regarding the world and your characters. You may want to have one scribe in charge of noting the decisions or you may want to divide the writing up equally amongst yourselves. When writing down the threats and resources that are chosen, write in bullet points, with one for each card that you resolve.

When a card has been resolved, it should not be played again during the session. You may want to make a discard pile. If you do this, I recommend keeping your card discard pile for clubs separate, so that you can easily count how many you've gone through.

The four card suits are as follows:

Hearts — these are for questions about your characters.

Diamonds — these are for questions about your readiness to fight the encroaching horrors. Each diamond card will give you one resource.

Spades — these are for questions about the world around you.

Clubs — these are for questions about the monster or monsters that approach and the dangers they pose. Each club card will give you one threat.

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The cards are shuffled and then drawn until a total of eight club cards have been drawn. You may find that you have a lot more threats than resources or vice versa. This is just part of the luck element of the game and should not be balanced during play - although you should check that your cards have been properly shuffled if you're noticing an extremely unbalanced draw of cards.

When the eighth club card is drawn, resolve this card and then go to Part 2.

If desired, this is a great time for a refreshment break for the players.

The Cards

When you draw a card, use the following guide to find the corresponding questions.

This deck does not use jokers as standard, but you are welcome to invent some questions to use for joker cards and to put them into your own deck.

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Hearts

These questions are about the characters around the table. All the players should focus their input on suggestions for the character of the player who drew the card, but the other players may offer thoughts on their own characters in relation to the questions, so as to foster discussion and help the flow of ideas.

Ace: What is the one thing your character can do better than anyone else? Take one free resource as you describe their talent and how it has helped them in their life before.

2: Where did your character get their name? Who gave it to them? What does it mean?

3: Who does your character consider to be their family? Is it blood that ties them or something stronger?

4: Does your character owe any debts? What is owed and to whom? What is the cost of repayment?

5: What words come to mind to describe your character's clothing? What words come to mind to describe your character's face? To a perfect stranger, how do they appear?

6: What is your character's fondest childhood memory? Who was with them when they forged this memory? What place in your world feels most like home to them?

7: What is your character's greatest regret to date? What could they have done to prevent this?

8: How does your character make a living? What could be considered to be their career?

9: What would your character state is their greatest flaw? What would others say that it is?

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10: How does your character act differently with different groups in their life? When are they at their most authentic?

Jack: Is your character a natural leader or a natural follower? What would it take to push them to step up or stand down?

Queen: Who is the closest person to your character? Who would be the hardest for them to lose?

King: What value does your character hold above all others? What is their most important priority in life?

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Diamonds

These questions are about the tools and resources that your characters have at their disposal: their readiness to fight against the enemy. Each answer will leave you with one resource you can describe and note down. Ultimately, the phrasing of your answers should centre on a way that the players can fight back against the creature. These questions should be answered with the character of the player that drew the card in mind.

Ace: Your character gains a useful insight into the creature that approaches. Which of its threats do they learn about in advance? How can they prepare themselves against it?

2: What education does your character have at their disposal? What have they been trained to do?

3: What can your character find from their dwelling? What weapons can they bring or make from their home or neighbourhood?

4: What experts are there to be found in the world? Who can your character go to for help?

5: Strength can be found in numbers. What groups or factions can your character count on (or lead) in the fight against the creature?

6: What vulnerability of the creature can your character find? Is there a substance that could act against it as a poison?

7: Where can your character hide from the creature? Where can your character run to in order to buy themself time and regroup?

8: What can your character use to armour themself? What can be used to better withstand the creature's attacks?

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9: Where are the medics stationed? Who is trained to heal your character and how can your character gain their agreement to help?

10: Where does your character's morale come from? What keeps them fighting on when everything seems lost? What will your character think of to help them draw on their last reserves of strength?

Jack: What is the military of this world like? Will they agree to help your character fight the creature? What firepower or peacekeeping can they offer?

Queen: What is your character's secret weapon? Is it something your character or your world tries to keep hidden from outsiders? What can it do, and why and where has it been hidden?

King: What do legends tell us about the monster? Is there a story that can warn your character about its arrival or its tactics? Is there anything written in the world's mythos that warns about this creature or something similar from its stories?

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Spades

These questions are about the city, country and world that your story takes place in. The word 'world' in the subsequent questions can be replaced with anything more appropriate for your individual setting. You should have already decided on a rough time period to know if you're imagining a past era, an alternative modern day or a technology-filled future. These questions will help you to flesh out a lot of the rest. When answering these questions, try to think about their implications for both your characters and the rest of the population who live there.

Ace: The world has a natural resource that has helped defend it from predators — something like inhospitable weather, disease-carrying insects or natural disasters. What is it? Take one free resource for the world to help fight against the creature.

2: What does transportation look like in this world? How do people move around from place to place? How are goods and materials transported?

3: What is imported into your world? What is exported? What is there available in abundance, and what is scarce?

4: What do the people around here look like? Are they human or something else? Do they coexist peacefully or are wars common?

5: What does the judicial system look like? How are people punished? What are they punished for?

6: What virtues are usually praised? What qualities should an upstanding citizen have?

7: What stages of life do your citizens go through? How are they born or made? When are they considered responsible for themselves? How long do they live for?

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8: What are the buildings here made of? Where do people live and sleep? Is there enough adequate shelter for all?

9: What happens to the poor, the infirm and the elderly? Are they taken care of with no expectations? Must they contribute their fair share?

10: How much of the natural land still exists? Is the world industrialised or do the citizens live in the wilds?

Jack: What does worship look like in this world? Who are the figures or forces worshipped in any religions, and who is entrusted to write or spread these beliefs?

Queen: Who are some influential figures in this world? What are they remembered for? Are they famous or infamous?

King: On paper, who runs this world? Who are the legal rulers? How are successors decided upon?

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Clubs

These questions are about the enemy you are preparing to fight against. Each answer will describe some way in which the creature poses you potential harm or a tactic it can use to fight against you. These are called threats, and you should note down one for each card that you resolve. The game moves onto Part 2 when eight threats have been revealed. Ultimately, the phrasing of your answer should centre around how the creature can harm (or pose a threat to) your players.

Ace: Your characters prepare to fight the creature, but it's always one step ahead. It has found one of your resources and somehow destroyed it. How has it infiltrated, what has it chosen to destroy and how has it done this? In addition to noting down one threat, choose one of your resources and cross it out / remove it from play. You can no longer use this resource in Part 2. If you have no resources yet at this point in play, the creature will still infiltrate and pose a threat, but you do not lose any resources. Count yourself lucky that you have nothing for the creature to take.

2: What senses does the creature have? What will it use to sense you are there? How does the creature hunt and track? How has it found you? How will it follow you?

3: What is unique to this creature? What is something your players have never seen before on any monster in their world?

4: What world has the creature come from? What does it bring with it from its world when it comes for you?

5: What motivation does the creature have to come for you? What does it plan on doing with your world and its inhabitants?

6: Does the creature act alone or does it hunt in a pack? How many monsters do you have to fight against?

7: What weapons does the creature bring to fight you? Are they part of its body or something it has forged? How does it intend to harm you?

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8: How sentient is the creature? Can it understand you? Can it be reasoned with?

9: Does the creature want you to know it's coming? Does it benefit from your fear? Or does it try to arrive unnoticed?

10: What in your world most closely resembles the creature's home turf? What is its favourite terrain to fight on? Does it prefer to fight at night in the darkness or does it look for industrial areas where it can blend in?

Jack: Is the creature resilient to anything? Can its hide repel or shrug off any of your normal attacks?

Queen: How was the creature born or created? Can it reproduce? Where can it go for reinforcements?

King: Who has sent the creature? Or has it come of its own accord? Does it have something or someone assisting with its tactics and information?

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Part II

You should now have eight club cards drawn and eight threats noted down about the creature that comes for you.

In this part of the game, go through each threat one by one. For each threat, you should see if you have already come up with a resource that will help you combat this specific threat. Each resource can only be used once, and you should only use one resource per threat. You may have significantly more or fewer resources than threats when you start Part 2. If you do not have an appropriate resource available for a threat, you will still battle it but without the bonus that a resource provides.

For each threat, discuss how it makes itself known as the creature comes for you. How do your characters and the rest of your world react? How will they try to combat it? Roll 2d6. If you have an appropriate resource that you can use, add +2 to the outcome. Cross the resource out (or otherwise mark it as no longer available) after using it, as this resource cannot be used again.

For an outcome of 6 or lower, this battle is a resounding failure. Describe your futile efforts and any casualties you may have incurred.

For an outcome of 7—9, it's a close battle but not a success. You may not mark any victories, but you can award yourself +1 to use on the next threat from the small advantage you gain in this battle. Describe the clash, the thwarted hope of success, and what knowledge or advantage you gain as a result. This stacks with any bonus from using a resource for a maximum of +3.

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For an outcome of 10+, you can mark down a victory. Describe the win you have achieved in this battle, as fleeting as it may be.

You will need five or more total victories to win the war against the creature. Any fewer and, despite your brave efforts, the enemy will win.

Tally up your victories and survey the battlefield. Are your characters indeed victorious at the end? At what cost? What does defeat or success look like, and what does your city or your world look like when the dust settles — if it ever does?
If your characters make it through to the end, what do they look like now?

Celebrate or commiserate with your players.

Make sure to tell them what you particularly enjoyed in their storytelling. Relax and be glad that the creature does not come for us in this world.

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Glossary

Card: This refers to the standard set of playing cards (minus jokers) that are used to play this game. To find the meaning of the card you have drawn, look at the list in the rules. These can be physical cards or you can use a website or app that will allow you to draw the cards online, so remote play is totally possible. If you are playing remotely, you may wish to designate one person to draw the cards for all the players, but make sure to take it in turns still to reach a final decision for each card.

Character: This refers to the people you have created to fight the monster in the story you are telling with this game. For those new to role-playing, it may be easier to pick a couple of defining traits to build a character around; for example, some personality traits such as 'brash' or 'cowardly', and physical traits such as 'has wings' or 'is about two feet tall'. You could pick a known species from a favourite fantasy book, stick with a more familiar human, or make up a totally new species. Try to find ways that your character is different to the other players' characters so that you have lots of variety in your game.

Creature: When the word 'creature' is used, it doesn't necessarily just mean one physical creature. It refers to the monster or enemy that you're fighting against. Depending on your answers to the questions in Part 1, you may decide that you're fighting several monsters that are hunting as a pack, or some intangible force that infects your world's population with dread or disease. The word 'creature' is used for simplicity's sake. You may wish to name your creature at some point or to refer to it however feels organic throughout play. No question will ask you specifically to give a name to it.

Dice/d6: This refers to a standard six-sided die that is used in many board games. You can roll two dice (or just the one die twice) when required, or you can easily find an online alternative to facilitate remote play.

In character/Out of character: 'In character' means talking as if you were the character you've made for this game. Speak as they would speak, act as they would act. 'Out of character' means talking as yourself, the person playing this game.

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Note down: It is important to note down what you come up with in Part 1 so that you don't forget it for Part 2. This means writing it down in an easy-to-read format (we suggest bullet points on lined paper or writing in a shared online document). You may want to assign one person to be a scribe, or assign one person to write out the threats and someone else to write out the resources. Or you may want each person to take a turn writing during their turn to draw a card, so that their decisions are noted down exactly how they imagined them.

Player: The players are the real, human people at your table (or centaurs, if you are playing with centaurs). They are not really being hunted by some imagined horror, but are weaving the story together with their words. On the whole, they tend to be lovely, creative and wonderful individuals.

Resolving a card: This means answering all the questions on it in as much detail as you can or want to give. You cannot put the card down until all the players are satisfied that all the questions have been answered properly. You also need to note down any applicable resources or threats as a result of the card before you can put the card down.

Resource: This is a good thing! A resource is something you can use to fight the creature. When you answer a question that gives you a resource, note this down as something you have at your disposal to fight back. This could be a weapon, a tactic, a shelter, a morale boost or anything you can imagine! You should note down one resource per diamond card, or for any other card that tells you to.

Threat: This is a bad thing! A threat is something that the creature will use to fight you. When you answer a question that identifies a threat, note this down as something that the creature has at its disposal to fight you. This could be its claws and fangs, its tracking senses, its loyal henchmen, its alien powers or anything you can imagine! You should note down one threat per club card.

Victory: Victories don't mean you win the whole game. They are applicable to Part 2 only. When you pit your resources against the creature's threats, if your dice roll is successful (a 10+) you gain one victory. You need five or more out of a total possible ten victories to win the game altogether.

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'Yes and' Improv style: This is a principal mainly used in improvisational comedy which you can use as you discuss your answers to the cards.
When one player suggests an answer, the other players should accept what they've suggested ("yes") and then expand on that idea ("and"). However if a player makes you uncomfortable in any way with their suggestions, you should make this known and ask to come up with a different answer. This should be respected without the need for anyone to justify their discomfort.

World: The world refers to your setting in this game. It could be a whole planet or galaxy, or it could refer to just a small city or neighbourhood. It can be as similar or dissimilar to planet Earth as you like.

We recommend coming up with something new to flex your imagination muscles fully.

Tips for Play

For a shorter game, play to four club cards rather than eight. For a longer game, play to ten club cards. Eight club cards should normally give you a play time of around two hours, but due to the random nature of drawing from the deck, you should allow for one to three hours. This game is designed to be played in one sitting.

This game can take different tones depending on what the players want. For those searching for a more horror-filled tone, try to find more unsettling descriptions of the creature and what it can do. You could explore threats of both a physical and a psychological nature. For those seeking a more casual experience, try not to take the game too seriously and don't be afraid to answer the questions with something humorous.

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Perhaps your character's expert training is from their experience as a gardener or children's book writer. Trying to apply something seemingly useless to help you against a real threat can be a good source of absurd humour.

The 'yes and' style of improv can be really useful for keeping the ideas flowing and for everyone to feel included in the world building. But it's really important (especially with a group you don't know that well or haven't played games with before) to check in with your players and make sure everyone's still comfortable. Discuss boundaries at the beginning, and have a quick check in at the intermission between Part 1 and Part 2 to ensure everyone is still happy with how things are going. It's a good idea to debrief as well after you finish playing.

Allow for a space where your players can speak up if a topic is broached that they are not comfortable with; if this happens, your response as co-players should be to accept this and seek an alternative answer to a question instead.
You should never value your own creativity over your co-players' comfort.

It's also good to remember that is never just the responsibility of the person who is uncomfortable to speak up. It is the responsibility of everyone playing to pay attention to the body language of everyone at the table or to check in if you are concerned someone may be uncomfortable but nervous to speak up about it. You may want to use safety tools in your game. One example is the 'X card' (the original document written by John Stavropoulos is linked in the acknowledgements).

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This can be a literal card in reach on the table with an 'X' drawn on it, or during an online game it could be a matter of typing an 'X' into the chat, saying 'X-card' out loud, or signalling an X with their arms on a video feed. If at any time a player feels uncomfortable with content introduced by any player, they can indicate the X card to veto that particular type of content. They should let everyone know what sort of content they'd like to be vetoed and then all other players must respect this.

The content can then either be changed or glossed over. A short break can be taken if needed to check in and to recharge. Under no circumstances should the X card be ignored when used. There are lots of other safety tools you could look at to use in your game to make your group feel more comfortable - I have linked to a couple of resources in the acknowledgements section.

If you enjoy this game, you may wish to arrange with your group to play with one world over three sessions: one in a past era, one in the present and then one in a future setting.

How does your world develop over time?

It's perfectly fine to take this game and to invent some new questions for the cards if you find that the questions don't work for your group or if some get stale after a couple of plays.

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You do not need to ask for my permission to edit this game for personal use, but please do not resell or give away any edited or unedited version of this game. If you or someone you know would like a copy of the game but do not have the funds to purchase it, please take one of the community copies available on itch.io or reach out to me on Twitter (https://twitter.com/whiskeyyoodles).

The original game of The Creature Comes for Us has been created by and is owned by Orion Barker.

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https://twitter.com/uzbadyubi

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Other fantastic games that have helped to inspire this creation. If you liked this game, I strongly suggest that you check out the following:
The Junkyard by Matthew Guzdial
https://mguzdial.itch.io/the-junkyard

The Quiet Year by Avery Alder
https://buriedwithoutceremony.com/the-quiet-year

What is Here by Yubi
https://yubikun.itch.io/what-is-here

Links to safety tools mentioned in the 'tips for play' section:

The original X Card by John Stavropoulos
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1SBojsx34bWHZWbnNIVVuMjhDkrdFG01_hSC2BWPlI3A/edit

Other articles on safety tools:
https://www.gauntlet-rpg.com/tools-of-the-table.html

https://leavingmundania.com/2014/02/27/primer-safety-in-roleplaying-games/

https://gnomestew.com/safety-as-risk-management/

This game was created by myself, Orion Barker.
My page can be found at the following:
https://twitter.com/whiskeyyoodles