

England

Is

Dead

24-HOUR
RPG 2015

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This is England...

1642 – 1651 – The English Civil Wars. Political and religious differences split the country and lead to a series of armed conflicts. King Charles I is executed, Charles II flees to the continent. Thousands are killed in the struggles. As brother fights brother a sense of unease and mistrust spreads through the country, lasting long after the wars are over.

1660 – Supporters of the monarchy restore the King-in-exile to the throne. Charles' retribution is swift and thorough, including posthumous decapitations of his enemies. Meanwhile the brightest minds in the country form the Royal Society at Gresham College in London to promote scientific understanding.

1664 – A comet is seen in the sky over England, astrologists and soothsayers predict a coming disaster. A number of deaths from a suspicious sickness are recorded in the London dockyards.

1665 – In the filth-ridden cesspit that is London the bubonic plague begins, spreading especially fast during a warm Spring. It spreads quickly and cannot be cured, the infected expiring horribly in a matter of weeks. As more and more people die panic takes hold and there is mass rioting in the streets of the capital. In July Charles II flees London to Salisbury, soon all contact with the King and his court is lost. Many others escape the city, but this only carries the infection further around the country. Travelling merchants also spread the disease up north in flea infested cloth.

1666 – Most surviving settlements cut themselves off, allowing no access to outsiders. Parliament meets in London, but angry citizens riot, burning the Parliament building and starting fires that spread over the whole of the city. The Great Fire leave London a blackened wasteland. Government in England is completely gone, villages and towns that have survived are forced to rule themselves.

1667 – A cold year, poor for crops. As the year passes many self-quarantined settlements run short on food and other goods they would normally buy from their neighbours. Though outbreaks of the plague itself dwindle, many towns and villages are destroyed through starvation and infighting.

1668 – Now. Survivors begin to look beyond their homes to see what is left of England.

England Expects

“We can recover from this, I have no doubt. England shall never fulsome fall as long as one Englishman stands upon its shores. The clergy pontificate this is a punishment from God, that we have turned our back on Him and brought about His ire. The learned fellows of the Royal Society have their claims rooted in the “new science”. What do I think? I think it matters not. What matters now is restoration.

But Sir, I say to you that when we rebuild, when we recover, we must be careful. Many a good man has survived this trial, but many a sinful man has also. People must know that in this new England there will be no room for the shirker, for the betrayer, for the plotter. The fornicator shall be cast out, the scrounger ejected. England shall be rebuilt, and it will contain only men of honour.”

– Sir George Booth, Baron of Dunham Massey

England is Dead is a roleplaying game set in an alternate England of the late 17th Century. In this setting the bubonic plague wiped out 95% of the population, leaving isolated pockets of civilisation scattered around the country. The players will travel the desolate land, discovering what humanity remains, and ensuring it is of the standard that England expects.

Think of the setting as a dark English 17th Century post-apocalypse. The group should decide on a tone before they play. *England is Dead* can be played as a grim look at a fallen society, a perilous adventure, or a story of dark horror.

To play you need a Games Master (GM), some players, pencils & paper and a few D6 per player.

Character Creation

To begin, each player grabs some paper and makes their character. This is done as follows:

1. Choose a background (which determines the primary statistic).
2. Choose two secondary statistics.
3. Record starting honour & suffering.
4. Fill in details; name, appearance, equipment etc.

Statistics

There are four statistics. Each character has one statistic marked as primary (based on their background) and two secondary (of the player's choice).

- **Skirmishing** – the ability to fight
- **Resilience** – resistance to illness and exhaustion
- **Knowledge** – depth of learning
- **Quickness** – speed of body and mind
- **Command** – forcefulness of personality

The statistics have values. The primary statistic of a character is value 3. The secondary are of value 2, and the others are each value 1. Record these when making the character.



Background

Choose one of the following backgrounds:

Veteran Soldier

Whether civil war or foreign invasion, plenty of men have had experience upon the battlefield. Now England needs you again; For some people must be brought into, or removed from, the new society by force.

Primary statistic: Skirmishing

The Living

Did God save you from the plague, or was it your own tenacity? Either way you have come through the other side and though you may bear the scars you are a stronger person for it.

Primary statistic: Resilience

Fellow of the Royal Society

Only founded in 1660, the Royal Society brought together the cleverest Englishmen of the age. As one of those men that survived the plague you must use all your intelligence in rebuilding a new society.

Primary statistic: Knowledge

Ne'er-do-well

During the times of strife you fled your home and have been forced to rely on your wits to survive. You are not a bad man, but you have been forced into situations that you now try to atone for.

Primary statistic: Quickness

Landed Gentry

True, the power you once had is gone. Your kind no longer rule the land, but you know that in reforging England men of leadership shall be highly valued, and you must take your rightful position.

Primary statistic: Command

Honour

Players must also keep track of their character's honour. The starting honour for each character is **5**, though it may go above this.

Suffering

Characters start with **0** suffering. This may increase during play.

Other Details

Once they have worked out their career, statistics and honour a player can fill in other details. Each character needs a name and a brief description, and the player should work out a short amount of background for them. Detailed levels of equipment are not important to the game, but a player should work out some details of what their character wears and carries.

Playing the Game

Making tests

If a rule requires a character to make a test based on a statistic the player rolls a number of D6 equal to the value in that statistic. For each 6 rolled, the player takes another D6 and rolls that (continuing to take more dice if he rolls more 6's). Once the rolling is done, the player totals the values on the dice rolled.

The GM sets the difficulty of the test, based on how hard he judges it to be. If the total rolled is equal to or greater than the difficulty then the test succeeds.

Difficulty	Number Needed
Easy	4
Medium	7
Difficult	10
Incredible	13

Examples:

Easy – Overpowering a weakened man. Discerning which way is North to escape the forest. Secretly pocketing a small piece of food.

Medium – Dodging a thrown rock. Holding breath in a filth-choked river. Ordering a man to help you lift a broken cart.

Difficult – Preparing an antidote to a virulent poison. Forcing a person to put themselves in danger. Handling a diseased body.

Incredible – Fighting on whilst heavily outnumbered. Climbing to the top of a collapsing windmill. Going without sustenance for days.

Tests may also be taken opposed with others – NPCs or maybe other characters. This may be during a fight or if two people are trying to grab an object before the other, for example. In these cases both sides make the test. The highest value is the winner, the lowest counts as failing. On a draw, both sides count as failing.

Whenever a test is failed the character suffers one point of suffering (see below). The GM may rule that for particularly dangerous tests more suffering is taken.

Suffering & Recovery

Suffering is a measure of a character's injuries, infection, exhaustion or mental anguish. Characters have 0 starting suffering, but this increases during the game, either by failed tests or if a character is put in harm's way.

Between each scenario a character who has 1 or more

suffering reduces the amount by 1 point. If characters have time to rest in a safe location for at least a week they lose D6 suffering instead.

Effects of Suffering

When a character makes a test find all the dice that roll values equal to their level of suffering. These dice are not added to the usual total. *e.g. a character with 4 suffering rolls a 3 and a 4 for an easy test. They ignore the result of a 4, and the final total is only 3. A failure!*

Reaching 7 Suffering

A character who reaches 7 suffering has succumbed to their wounds, or the plague has taken them, or they have slipped into such a despair they are forever broken. Either way they cannot continue and are removed from the game, no longer able to help save England.

Honour

Honour holds a special place in *England is Dead*. The characters are held up to a high standard, their mission is to restore England to its honourable past.

Losing & Using Honour

Honour may drop in two ways. Firstly the character may lose it due to dishonourable acts. The GM decides when a character has done such a thing, think upon the seven deadly sins (see later) and when the character may be making a situation worse rather than better.

The GM should warn the player that what they are about to do would lose them honour, and give them a chance to reconsider their action. Normally only 1 point would be lost, but especially sinful acts may lose more.

Alternatively the character may intentionally lose honour in order to get a benefit. If a character fails a test they may narrate a dishonourable or sinful way in which they try and turn it into a success.

If the GM agrees this make sense, the player may re-roll the dice and use the new result. However for each natural 1 rolled on the dice, the character loses 1 point of honour.

Gaining Honour

Honour is gained as a reward for completing scenarios. The amount gained is up to the GM. But should be between 1 for an easily resolved act to 5 for unpicking a complicated situation.

Reaching 0 Honour

If a character reaches 0 honour word of their misdeeds has reached their superiors. Though they may finish the scenario they are attempting, afterwards they are cast out of the group (even if their total honour would increase).

Running the Game

Note: This section onwards is intended for the GM.

In *England is Dead* the characters are agents of an important patron, such as Sir George Booth. The nobleman seeks to restore England to its former glory, but it has become fractured and anarchic.

In a scenario the characters will travel to a settlement and judge the inhabitants. Can they be brought back into England's embrace?

As with traditional roleplaying games the GM comes up with the story. He may wish to test them with dangers on the road, but the meat of the game is when the characters reach a settlement and must deal with the inhabitants.

Sir George Booth

A veteran of the Civil Wars, Sir Booth predicted the coming disaster at the first signs of the plague outbreak. He returned to his home of Dunham Hall in Cheshire where he and his family along with servants and people from the local village lived in quarantine for two years.

When the dire situation in England became apparent, he became determined to restore it to glory and began recruiting wanderers to his cause. Using Dunham Hall as a base of operations he sends small groups out to find other survivors.

The man himself, now in his 40's, is still strong and bullish, though the past two years of confinement have lead him to occasionally lapse into bouts of melancholy. He values honour and pride above all else, though some whisper this is to make up for a shameful past.

The Land

Everywhere you look nature slowly retakes England, roots pushing up through roads, weeds choking untended fields. Occasional the character pass by abandoned roadside inns, or villages inhabited only be the dead.

As designed, there is nothing supernatural in the world, though the survivors are naturally superstitious. Many a settlement may have turned from God and towards witchcraft and devilry. As a GM feel free to add hints of the weird and strange at your whim. Is the supernatural real? That's up to you. The setting can certainly lend itself to dark horror.

Settlements

Where people survive, numbers tend to be low. Villages and towns once of hundreds of inhabitants may now just be dozens. Some may only have a handful of survivors. Some places are better off than others – those that have been able to sustain themselves, or are well organised

for scavenging. The variety between them can be huge.

In each settlement the characters visit, something is wrong. Some sin (or more than one!) has taken hold of the place during its isolation.

When coming up with what has happened in the settlement, think upon the traditional seven deadly sins for inspiration:

Greed
Envy
Gluttony
Pride
Sloth
Wrath
Lust

Come sup with one or more NPCs, and considering what one of the sins may have lead them to. Has the butcher hoarded the last of the town's food, hidden in a secret location? Does a nobleman, despite holding no official influence, slovenly laze around whilst others work for him? Some scenario ideas are presented at the end of these rules.

The other thing to decide is how much of a mystery this is. Characters may see what is wrong immediately, or they may need to investigate further. In general, plan out what is happening in the settlement, and not necessarily what happens to the characters. Let them interact with your setting, and see where the story goes.

NPCs

Sketch out the NPCs most important to the story with names, motivations etc.

Should you need some statistics the standard NPC has two statistics rated at 2, and the rest at 1. Particularly important NPCs may have one rated at 3.

NPCs cant take as much suffering as the heroes. A commoner can take only 2 suffering, more resilient types can take 3.



Influencing NPCs

Of course the characters don't have any actual authority, despite their patron. England is lawless. The characters will have to use a variety of their skills to unpick the situations, and to persuade the locals of the worth of restoring England.

But the situations the characters find themselves in will often be dangerous. Dealing with angry locals who seek to obfuscate their intentions or stubbornly refuse to listen to reason. Violence is common, as are the many hazards of dealing with the state England finds itself in. For anything perilous, the GM can call for tests.

Calling for Tests

Tests should be called for when a character wishes to do something difficult or risky. Remember that failure always causes 1 suffering, so tests should not be done for every little thing.

Unless a character has jumped into a situation without any idea of its danger, tell the players upfront what the difficulty will be for tests so that they may judge whether the characters wish to proceed.

If you are unsure where risk might come from consider not asking the players to roll. Instead look at the statistics of the character involved. If the primary statistic is involved, assume the character will automatically succeed at anything you consider easy or average difficulty. If a secondary statistic is involved assume they automatically succeed at anything easy.

Call for **Skirmishing** tests if the characters get into a fight. These are often opposed by an enemy, though for speed of play you may set multiple enemies to have a set difficulty (see *combat* below). Success may inflict suffering if that was the intent. Failure usually results in wounds being taken.

Call for **Resilience** tests where a character is pushing their body to the limit and putting themselves in danger. Examples include grabbing something from a fire or digging through a pile of diseased corpses. Failure usually results in injury or illness.

Call for **Knowledge** tests when a character is attempting to use their learning usefully. There is no need to test to recall simple facts. The effects of failure depend on the danger of the situation, or could result in mental anguish as the character struggles to remember.

Call for **Quickness** tests when dealing with fast reactions, often to avoid or defy danger. Fleeing a collapsing building or snatching a dagger from an armed man may require these tests. Failure means the danger has been taken rather than avoided.

Call for **Command** tests when a character attempts to force an NPC to do their will, or persuade them to their cause. This is generally for short term effects. Failure could cause a violent reaction, or a fear that the character is not as important as they see themselves.

Combat

Violent conflict is a common fact of life in these dark times, and is bound to crop up in many scenarios. We abstract this into a series of tests. Players should narrate what their character is doing as normal. For a one-on-one fight play it out as a series of opposed tests. The loser of each takes suffering as usual.

In a larger group situation have each player narrate how their character gets involved and then assign each of them difficulties depending on the risk they are in. Failures result in suffering as usual. Successes inflict suffering to their opponents. You may assign this to different NPCs, or group it together, depending on the characters' actions.

In either case remember that only the truly desperate will fight on if they are close to death. Between each roll or group of rolls give either side the chance to relent or surrender, if the other side will let them.

Inflicting Suffering

Note that suffering does not only need to come from failed tests. If the characters do something that would obviously put themselves in unavoidable harm feel free to inflict suffering upon them.

The Judgement

Eventually the characters will probably get to the bottom of the sin that has taken hold of the settlement. Can they solve the problem, and restore the honour of the inhabitants? This depends on their actions. At the final step they must make a judgement – are these people worthy of being brought into the new England?

Improvement & Further Travels

The end of a scenario is not necessarily the end of the characters. Though they may have suffered, they will surely have learned something from their deeds.

Improvement Marks

At the end of each scenario the GM awards each character 1, 2 or 3 improvement marks. 1 for a simply solved situation, 3 if the resolution was particularly complex. Each character in a group should receive the same number of marks.

Each mark can then be assigned to a different statistic, as long as the player can justify why they think their

character learnt something about that statistic during the scenario. Don't be too demanding here, it could just be that the character suffered a failure during the scenario but will learn for next time, or has witnessed how another character acts.

The marks awarded in one scenario must be applied to different statistics, though they last between games. So a character might have multiple marks against a statistic if they have been through multiple scenarios.

During the game characters may use marks to help them succeed. Each mark on a statistic allows a re-roll of one dice for a test of that statistic (note that only one dice is re-rolled per mark, not all of them). Each mark may only be used once per scenario, though they are not used up permanently – used marks are returned between scenarios.

Honour, Suffering

See the honour and suffering rules for gaining honour and lowering suffering between adventures. Remember that if a character reached 0 honour at any point, they are no longer welcome in the new England and are banished.

Onwards!

It will take more than one village to restore the country to glory. Whether reporting back to their patron or not, the characters carry onwards to find the next settlement and see if it can be bought into the new England.



Scenario Ideas

Whilst many liberties have been taken with actual history, doing some research into life in the 17th Century can give a wealth of plot ideas and period detail.

Finding old maps of England can be useful for names of villages and landmarks. Local folklore and mythology can also be a good source of ideas. Here are a few to get you started...

Don't Eat the Meat

The village of Bierly Hill is suspiciously well stocked with food. A suspicious fellow would assume the worst about the meat he is served. Only one man seems to know where it comes from, and he has his reasons not to tell.

The King is Dead

Charles II tried to escape the plague to a manor in Salisbury. He was never heard from again. The characters must find the lost court and see if anyone survives. What they find there is a dark pantomime of the monarchy, is it beyond saving?

La Peste

While England has withered and died, what of the rest of the world? What of its closest enemies? In the coastal hamlet of Southwell hides a Frenchman, but can he be found, and what news does he have of the continent?

The Faithful City

Worcester, site of the last battle of the Civil War. Now the plague survivors are split into two factions, one believes their support of the King was a great sin, the other that it was their last pure act. The characters arrive to find the wars raging all over again.

Hunting Padfoot

In Chapelthorpe, the devil is said to haunt the surrounding lands in the form of a monstrous black dog. Can the characters prove to the locals there is nothing to fear, or does something really hunt through the fields?

Folk Hero

In Nottinghamshire there is a gang of outlaws living in the forests, but no villagers will give up their location, claiming the ruffians are lead by a great champion. The character must track deep into the woods to confront the leader - is he hero or villain?

London Bound

The ultimate destination for many a wandering character will be the capital city itself. When last seen it was a burned out waste, but in the years since the Great Fire many have returned and practice new ways of life amongst the ruins. Holding the Capital could be the key to restoring England.



*This RPG was written in 24 hours. I have no idea if it works, but comments are always welcome. It was based on the randomised themes of The Dead, Honour and The 16th/17th Century.
All art is in the public domain.*