It Lurks!

game of horror and deception for six to ten players

On a remote outpost, a science team have unearthed a nightmarish corpse. This morning a routine test showed cellular activity. Unfortunately, the creature now seems to have disappeared entirely…

Overview

The game consists of a limited number of rounds, each representing several hours on the outpost. One player is assigned the role of **Storyteller** (the Storyteller) and the other players assume the roles of human characters. At the start of the game, one human player becomes the **Lurker –** an alien being that can assimilate other lifeforms, taking on their appearance and manner. The goal of the Lurker is to assimilate all the humans on the outpost. Once the humans become aware of this threat, they must escape before there are no real humans left.

Winning the game

To win, the humans must complete a set number of Tasks (see setup), achieved by adding **success cards** to a Task, equal to its difficulty. Humans work collaboratively whilst trying to deduce who among them is not really human.

The Lurkers, on the other hand, win by assimilating the last remaining human or putting them into isolation. Since they appear human, Lurkers can sabotage Tasks, interact with human players and buy themselves more time to complete their Task.

The Setup

Before starting the game, assign one player to be the Storyteller. The remaining players start the game as humans. Set the **Tasks Remaining 'til Rescue** track to the following value:
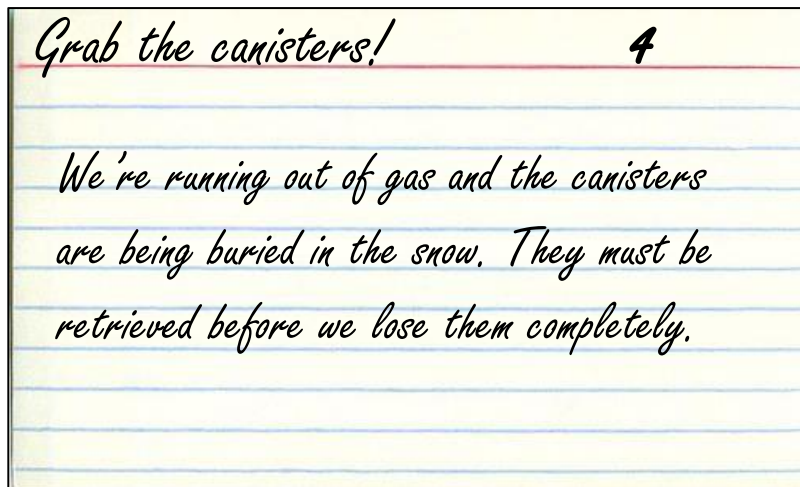
- **Four humans:** 9 Tasks
- **Five humans:** 10 Tasks
- **Six humans:** 12 Tasks
- **Seven humans:** 14 Tasks
- **Eight humans:** 15 Tasks
- **Nine humans:** 16 Tasks

The Storyteller now draws a number of action cards equal to the number of humans multiplied by four (number of humans x 4) and swaps one of them for an **assimilate card**. The Storyteller shuffles these cards and deals four to each player. The player who is dealt the assimilate card starts the game as a Lurker and should keep this fact secret.

Action cards (custom art version and standard playing cards version):

Task cards:

> *Grab the canisters!*   **4**
>
> *We're running out of gas and the canisters are being buried in the snow. They must be retrieved before we lose them completely.*

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Storytelling

The Storyteller now populates the board with Task cards, placing them on a location of their choice. The Storyteller can either select the Tasks to be played from the Task box or can draw randomly. In either case, the Storyteller continues to add Tasks until the total of all Task difficulty values on the board equals or exceeds the number of players multiplied by two. Using the Task descriptions (and their own imagination) the Storyteller will weave a story of growing horror and suspicion. See *Storyteller tips* at the end of this manual.

Gameplay

Every round follows the following pattern:

1. **Briefing:** Players a dealt new cards.
2. **Assignments:** Players decide which Task they will be attempting this round.
3. **Work:** Players commit 2 or 3 action cards to their location.
4. **Debrief:** the Storyteller narrates what happens for each Task.
5. **Isolation:** Players may vote to isolate someone.

6. **Assimilation:** Players put on blindfolds and Lurkers indicate their victims.

There is no limit to the number of rounds and players continue until one of the following happens (at which point the game ends immediately):

- Players complete the last Task (as indicated on the Tasks Remaining 'til Rescue track), or,
- The Lurkers isolate or assimilate the last human player.

Breakdown of round phases

Phase 1: *Briefing.*
- (Ignore on first round): The Storyteller shuffles **Action Cards** from completed **Tasks** back into the deck and randomly deals cards to players to bring their hands up to four cards. In circumstances where a human has been assimilated the previous round, that human will be given an assimilate card in place of one of their random cards. It is recommended that dealing happens with players' eyes closed to make this easier.
- The Storyteller then adds Task Tiles to the table and states the number of success cards required to complete the Tasks (Task Difficulty). They also recap Task status for Tasks that have not yet been completed.
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Phase 2: *Assignments*
Players discuss how to distribute themselves around the available Tasks. Isolated players may look through a Task Tile action card pile while this is happening. Players may abstractly state to what extent they can contribute to a Task but are not allowed to use specific quantities (imagine that you are speaking as the character, who would not know that they could commit three of the four cards required to e.g. fix an engine). Examples might include: "I can help a bit," "Given that I started the Task last time I know I can complete it this time" and "I can contribute a fair amount". Players may also choose to roleplay this: "I'm very tired so don't think I can do much". When the Storyteller feels this has gone on long enough, they must call for movement. All players must simultaneously move their coloured token to the location where they will be working on a Task.

Phase 3: *Work*
Players commit action cards to the Task Tile at their location. Players must play either 2 or 3 cards. The active Lurker (a Lurker who has an assimilate card in hand) can play the assimilate card during a Task to assimilate another player at their location. NB: Assimilate cards count as failure cards when the Storyteller counts up progress during Debrief.

Phase 4: *Debrief*
The Storyteller looks at each Task pile in turn and narrates what happens. They count the number of success cards in the pile and compare this with the Task Difficulty. The Storyteller must state one of these three outcomes:

- No progress (0 success cards in the pile).
- The Task has been partially completed (not enough success cards yet).
- The Task has been completed successfully (success cards = difficulty).

The Storyteller is then free to narrate the way the Task is resolved so long as they do not give away any information about the cards in the pile. The players are free to discuss this situation and make accusations.

Phase 5: *Isolation*

If a player wishes another to be isolated, they can call for a vote. <u>It is not mandatory to isolate a player in this phase</u>. If a second player supports the vote, players must attempt isolation: Each player may contribute one card (or no cards) and cards must be collected simultaneously. The Storyteller looks through the pile in secret. If it contains success cards equal to *half the number of players rounded up*, the selected player must place their coloured token in the isolation area. Assimilate cards count as failures and are returned to the player that played them in the next deal, in place of an Action Card. The isolated player may no longer draw cards or contribute to Tasks. However, during the Assignments phase, they may take the pile from <u>one</u> Task Tile and look through it in their hidden area, returning it by the time the Work phase begins.

Phase 6: *Assimilation*

The Storyteller puts blindfolds on all players. They then say, "If you assimilated someone in the current round please take your blindfold off and indicate them now with your mouse." The Storyteller makes a note of the player(s) indicated so that they can give them an assimilate card in the next round.

Further Mechanics

Cards: Players have four action cards which they contribute to Tasks. These cards are either success or failure cards, with the deck weighted slightly in favour of success cards. The active Lurker will also have an assimilate card which is played as if it is an action card. Different Tasks will require a different number of actions to complete (repairing a radio, for example, may take four actions and can therefore be performed be two or three players in one round).

Special: On the next **Briefing** phase after the **Work** phase in which have were selected for assimilation, players will be dealt an assimilate card as one of their action cards (NB: this is not an additional card but takes the place of a success or failure card. If a Lurker unwittingly assimilates a player who is already a Lurker or plays their card in a situation where there is not another player in their location (including during an isolation vote), they should get their assimilate card back in the next **Briefing** phase.

Working on Tasks: Each location has a range of Tasks that can be performed there, each with an associated number of successful Actions required to complete (Example: In the radio room one might *Send a Distress Signal* (5 successes) or *Charge walkie talkies* (3 successes)). Players do not need to successfully complete Tasks and may return on subsequent rounds to continue working on them. Action Cards submitted to Tasks are kept in a pile on the relevant Task Tile until the Task has been completed, at which point they are shuffled back into the action card deck. Work on Tasks is cumulative – cards are not removed from incomplete or partially completed Tasks between rounds.

Assimilation: To assimilate another player, a Lurker must submit their assimilate card instead of a success or failure card when attempting to perform an action. For the purposes of counting, this card is considered to be a failure card. An assimilation is

always possible but the subtlety with which it is performed depends on the number of human observers – if humans at the location outnumber Lurkers then the storyteller indicates assimilation has taken place (by, for example, narrating that some ripped up and bloody clothes have been found). On the **Briefing** phase, the assimilated player is dealt an assimilate card as usual.

Isolation: Isolated players may not participate in Tasks, nor are they dealt any further cards. They may, however, look at the pile of one incomplete or partially completed Task per round and can participate in all discussions, sharing their theories and making the case for their release. The isolation tent only has space for one player at a time so isolating a new player means releasing the current prisoner. The group can decide to release an isolated player by majority vote [*Design note: This mechanic is untested and so other options for release from isolation may be better – feel free to judge based on your experience*]. An isolated player may never have private one-on-one conversations with anyone except the Storyteller.

Additional Things: For more than 8 players, the Storyteller may randomly add an additional *assimilation card* to the set of player hands in round 5. [*Design note: This is currently untested*].

Storytelling

The Storyteller is encouraged to develop a story which is reactive to the players. Tasks are designed to follow narratively from one to another. Below is an example of how the Storyteller can fill in the gaps to link Tasks together between rounds and introduce new narrative elements:

- **Round 1:** *Repair radio Task* (diff 4), *Refuel generator Task* (diff 4), *Move supplies Task* (diff 3). "This morning you excavated a strange corpse from the ice. At lunch, the science officer runs into the canteen and declares that the monster is still showing cellular activity. You run to the lab but the creature is gone… Soon after, bloody clothes are found in one of the toilets... It is suggested that you check-in with the neighbouring outpost and ask for support, but the radio is mysteriously broken. The generator is well overdue for refueling and will not last long. Additionally, there is a storm coming and supplies must be moved inside to the canteen if you are to last through it."
- **Round 2:** The radio has been repaired (*Repair radio*: complete) and supplies moved (*Move supplies*: complete), but the *Refuel generator* Task is only partially completed. Two new Tasks are chosen by the Storyteller: *Take shifts* (diff 5) and *Repair vehicle* (diff 4). As the generator was being refueled, the team noticed the lights on in the garage. The snowmobiles have been mysteriously disabled – that should be looked into and they must be repaired in case help can't be reached. The radio is up and running but getting a message out and listening for a reply may take hours in this weather. Additionally, if the generator isn't fueled soon we're going to have to start burning chairs to stay warm.
- **Round 3:** *Refuel generator:* partial completion; *Take shifts*: partial completion; *Repair vehicle*: completed. The generator is still not up and running. Suspicious. The team working on it claim that it has enough fuel now but can't agree why its not working. The snowmobiles have been repaired, but nothing came through on the radio. Perhaps the signal isn't strong enough? Many of you are restless and angling for a more thorough investigation into what's

going on. A new primary Task is added and a secondary Task: *Realign radio tower* (diff 5) and *Scour the camp* (diff 4).

The Storyteller here has plenty of flexibility to construct their own narrative using the Task cards, pushing the growing sense that someone is sabotaging the efforts of the players (cued by the progress of the Tasks). The Storyteller can also respond directly to the discussion of the players – if they are very keen to investigate where the creature has gone, or what it is, Tasks may be assigned to the lab, leading eventually to the secondary Task of developing a blood test. The Storyteller [*at this stage in the design process*] must use their judgement in selecting the number and difficulty of Tasks, though as a rough baseline it is advised that (number of Tasks available in a round) circulates around (number of players/2) rounded up. Further testing is required to codify this system.