

TANGO TANGO 82

GM Game Guide

(seriously, for GMs only)

Welcome to TANGO TANGO 82!

Based on the 1982 movie, *John Carpenter's "The Thing"*, this game puts between 8 and 10 players into the Antarctic winter of 1982, and (at least) one of them will become a shape-shifting alien that imitates anything it has had the chance to assimilate. The Thing is trying to survive, by hiding inside an imitation of others and assimilating more creatures, while the humans are trying to identify the Thing and kill it.

This game lives or dies on players getting stuck in and driving on without frequent GM prompts or pointers – and on the GM making changes to the plan on the fly to make the game hang together. As GM it's in your power to make this game whatever you want of it. It's a game of paranoia, of players talking to you and each other in secret, it's about plans and plots, cunning and deviousness.

A note of caution:

This game is for GMs who are comfortable "*winging it*", "*flying by the seat of their pants*", or otherwise "*making it up as you go!*" If you prefer a lot of rules, and direct guidance for every situation, maybe this isn't the scenario for you. Likewise, if your players are happier being led along the rails, and aren't big on using their initiative to drive the game, then maybe this isn't the scenario for them.

Dave's key bit of advice:

*If there isn't an obvious rule or it will take you ages to find the right rule, **make a ruling anyway, using your experience and knowledge of the game, and keep the game moving.***

The scenario could go in any of a million directions. Or it might stall on the starting line. It's your job as GM to get it – and keep it – flying. Chances are you'll have to do very little once you've got the setting sorted and the story started – the players will give it a life of its own.

I've had a great time running this game – and I'm sure you will too! *Enjoy!*

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E	CONTINGENCY PLANNING	<i>Tips and pointers to help keep the game going should it get stuck.</i>
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A: Scenario Timeline

The scenario begins at the start of winter in 1982. It takes place at the US Science Institute Research Outpost designated “*Tango Tango 82*” (TT82). The games as presented follows this timeline:

- At a Swedish research base some 60 miles from TT82 the Swedish crew find and thaw out the Thing. It ravages them and assimilates some. At the end only two are still alive, SVENSSON and MÖRK (pronounced “MERK”), and they are chasing the last surviving Huskies, both of which they think are Things;
- Meanwhile, on TT82 the players are settling in for the winter, getting on with business as usual. The weather is closing in and communications with McMurdo Base (their support base 1000 miles away) are patchy at best – but McMurdo is too far away to help even if you let the players make radio contact [**Scene 1 in the scenario – at this point the players don’t know who will become a Thing**];
- Back to the Swedes: unknown to MÖRK, SVENSSON is also a Thing, but before SVENSSON can do anything about it they arrive at the US National Science Institute ‘Tango Tango 82’, and a mechanical fault crashes the helicopter, knocking MÖRK senseless and killing SVENSSON as well as one of the dogs [**Scene 2 in the scenario**];
- As GM, we anticipate that the players will get MÖRK to the infirmary to save his life, recover the dead SVENSSON and put his body somewhere, maybe leave the dead Huskie, but care for the Huskie that survived [**still Scene 2**];
- [**Here comes Scene 3...**] Overnight someone is infected, by one of the existing Things (that is, the surviving dog, the remains of SVENSSON and the remains of the dead dog (both of whom may *look* dead but there’s still Thing cellular activity in them – they need to be incinerated to be killed off completely)). One of the Things also pushes their luck, and there’s an incident when one is found during an assimilation, to show the players the predicament they are in [**Scene 4**];
- From here on in it’s up to the players (both Thing and human) to move things on (no pun intended...): the Thing needs to stay hidden and assimilate others to help them survive; the humans need to stay alive and find out who is the Thing...

B: Running the Game

There are a number of steps the GM should take to get this scenario flying. These steps will help you set up the following key things that will make the game work:

- One player is The Thing;
 - Everyone knows what's going on (but not who is the Thing);
 - None of the players have died.
- 1- Allocate the pre-generated characters to the players randomly. If you only have 9 players take out the character BRADSHAW. If you only have 8 players take out BRADSHAW and MÖRK (I don't recommend playing with fewer than 8 players, but you could get away with 7 at a push – in this case take out SANDERS as well). *NB: the pre-gens have been made as an homage to the movie, hence no female characters – feel free to change any of the characters to women.*
 - 2- Get the players to briefly introduce themselves to one another;
 - 3- Play **Scene 1 & Scene 2**, as per the **“GM SCENARIO GAME AID”** (see the PDF **“TT82GameAid”**);
 - 4- Randomly - and secretly - decide which player is infected. Then take each player out of the room one at a time *for exactly 90 seconds each*. Tell them if they are, or are not, the Thing (please note: if MÖRK is being played as a character he survives the crash and comes around on the morning of Day 2, and knows what's going on (but he's also susceptible to being made the Thing while unconscious – hence can be the player Thing at the start of the game - this is not an issue if he is an NPC, as he will die from his injuries as a human (but has a pocket book that can be translated to give the players the same information));
 - 5- When you tell the PC Thing he is the Thing you need to inform him quickly what this means (see **Being The Thing** below);
 - 6- Play **Scene 4**. This can be the remains of SVENSSON trying to assimilate one of the two cats, or the Huskie trying to assimilate the dogs, or even either of them trying to assimilate MÖRK if MÖRK is an NPC. Whatever happens the NPC Thing is caught in the act, and the players see for themselves what faces them. But the players should be able to destroy the Thing in this scene without loss of player lives;
 - 7- **Scene 5**, the game's afoot and the players are in charge! But there will be other events added to the game. The life of Station TT82 is still heavily influenced by outside variables. As GM, you should roll on the Random Events table (see the PDF **“TT82 Randoms”**) each day to determine:
 - What the weather is like;
 - The daytime temperature (remembering the night time temperature is 20°C less than day time);
 - And any technical issues that crop up (over and above those that the players might make happen!).

***NB:** if these rolls are not adding the right drama and tension to the game roll them again, or choose the result you want! These variables are here to add colour, drama and little events to the game that force players to do stuff.*

C: Notes on the Rules

For this game I have mixed the rules from Mutant: Year Zero (MYZ) and Coriolis (COR), and taken what I love from them to make a “rules-light” approach. I have shamelessly changed things to meet what I want, and have recorded here what those changes are.

1: **ATTRIBUTES & DAMAGE:** I’m using the standard attributes from MYZ & COR, but for damage I’m using COR, so we have *Damage* (STR & AGI added together) and *Stress* (WITS & EMP added together), and for recovering damage I’m using MYZ, so *Damage* is recovered with Food and *Stress* is recovered with Sleep.

2: **FOOD, SLEEP & THE HOT AND COLD: You Gotta Eat, Sleep and Stay Warm:**

Using the Mutant Year Zero rules, characters need to eat and sleep to maintain their health. Also, they need to stay warm. Each of these elements may make players weaker, paranoid or vulnerable, and these should all drive some interesting role-playing.

I’m using MYZ rules for most of these, and I expect they may all play a big part in a TT82 scenario. So:

- **FOOD:** you need 1 ration per day (over any needed to restore Damage) or you are *Starving* (p92, MYZ) – you cannot restore Damage;
- **WATER:** you must drink 1 ration per day or you are *Dehydrated* (p92 MYZ), and cannot restore either Damage or Stress;
- **SLEEPLESS:** you need to sleep at least 4 hours in every 24. If you don’t you suffer as per the MYZ rules on p93, but for Confusion or WITS replace with Stress;
- **HYPOTHERMIC:** same rules as MYZ (p93) apply;
- **FIRE:** COR Fire rules apply (p97);
- **BOOZE:** I’m using the MYZ Booze rules, but one drink gives +1 point restored to both Damage and Stress with no negative. A second drink gives another +1 to both Damage and Stress, but at a -1 dice penalty for 12 hours, and this is cumulative for a third, fourth or fifth drink;
- Other rules are not being applied in this game.

3: **SKILLS:** I’m using a mix of MYZ, COR and my own made up skills for the game (including some Advanced skills as seen in COR (listed in red on the character sheets). I’ve added or amended the following:

- **HANDYMAN** (which covers any low tech maintenance task);
- **SNEAK** (covering Infiltration and including sneaky skills like lock-picking);

- DEXTERITY (that covers MYZ Move, but does not allow a total disengagement from an incident like Move does);
- DRIVE (to drive tractors and snowmobiles);
- SHOOT (instead of COR Ranged Combat);
- FIGHT (instead of COR Melee Combat);
- SCAVENGER (which gives the players a chance to find any item they want, and can justify being on the base somewhere, if it doesn't appear on the equipment lists – with a modifier depending on how likely / unlikely the GM feels it would be for that item to be on the base).

4: **DICE MECHANICS:** I'm using MYZ dice, the MYZ gear bonus system and the MYZ dice push mechanic (there's no praying going on here that works!).

5: **DAMAGE & TURNS:** I'm using MYZ turn rules (1 action & manoeuvre, or 2 manoeuvres), and Damage and Crits as per COR.

6: **MUTATIONS ETC:** Obviously, there are no mutations so no MP or anything like that.

7: **TALENTS:** I've grabbed different Talents from both MYZ and COR, and added some of my own. I've listed them here and where I've drawn them from, or what their effect is if I've changed them or made them up:

- | | | |
|--------|---------------------|---|
| i) | COOL HEAD - | applies to DEXTERITY skill, not MOVE; |
| ii) | WORKHORSE - | as per MYZ but +2 dice for rolls relating to the station; |
| iii) | THERAPIST - | applies to Stress, not Doubt; |
| iv) | COWARD - | applies to DEXTERITY skill, not MOVE; |
| v) | COMBAT VET - | as per MYZ; |
| vi) | WEAPON SPECIALIST - | as per MYZ; |
| vii) | HARD HITTER - | as per MYZ; |
| viii) | MOTORHEAD - | as per MYZ; |
| ix) | LIGHT EATER - | as per MYZ; |
| x) | FLY WEIGHT - | as per MYZ; |
| xi) | GEARHEAD - | works like my COR Tweaked GEARHEAD talent; |
| xii) | INGENIOUS - | as per INVENTOR but for science experiments; |
| xiii) | GADGETEER - | as per MYZ but counts for anything unfamiliar; |
| xiv) | NEVER SURRENDER - | applies to Damage rather than Strength; |
| xv) | FAST DRAW - | as per MYZ; |
| xvi) | GOOD FOOTWORK - | as per MYZ; |
| xvii) | FIGHTING DOGS - | your dogs might fight for you; |
| xviii) | MANS BEST FRIEND - | regain Stress without sleep if resting with your dogs; |
| xix) | SLEEPLESS - | go 48 hours awake before penalties apply |

xx) STOIC -

+1 dice to ENDURE and COMPREHEND rolls

8: It's A Terrifying World:

Finally, the things (and the Things) that the PCs are going to see will assault their minds, their intellect and their heart. Seeing a Thing transform, or a friend die, will batter them emotionally. To reflect this, we have the following rules:

When a PC sees something weird or horrifying they must make an OPPOSED COMPREHEND skill roll not to react badly. The number rolled against depends on the horror of the experience. For each point of difference the PC takes 1 point of Stress Damage:

- Seeing the Thing transform: 8 dice;
- Seeing The Thing's remains for the first time: 4 dice;
- Someone dies in front of them: 5 dice;
- See a dead body: 3 dice;
- See a dead dog: 2 dice.

D: Being The Thing

For a player being the Thing, the following applies:

- As far as they know **they are indistinguishable** from the human they are imitating;
- In their human imitation **they have the same stats as the human they are imitating**;
- But they can **transform** at any time they like, and this turns them into their Thing form. But it takes time. For 5 turns after starting to transform their Thing stats are all halved, including HP and MP. At the end of 5 turns their stats increase to the full stats, but HP and Stress damage taken in those 5 transforming turns still apply – the Thing doesn't heal them back up after those 5 turns;
- In Thing form they have an armour rating, but this does not apply in their human imitation form. This AP does not represent hard armour that stops the blow, but does represent the amorphous nature of the Thing and damage to a part of it doesn't hurt it in the way it would hurt a human;
- **To successfully assimilate another player** all they need to do is be alone with them, actually put their arms around the actual person (in real life!) and say (quietly, if necessary), *"mwuahahaha!"*. This real life action counts as a successful attack and assimilation, and there is no defence for the attacked player. The assimilated player is no longer the human they had been playing (that human is dead) but is now a new Thing imitating that person...
- In game **it takes 5 minutes to assimilate another creature**, and during that time the Thing is highly vulnerable. Whoever is playing the Thing will have to take this into account, to ensure they are not interrupted mid-assimilation...
- Furthermore, when a human is assimilated **their clothes and any effects they have are shredded** – the process makes quite a mess! The Thing player should deal with this debris from the attack, or it's left lying about for others to find (and don't forget, all clothing and personal possessions are labelled with the owner's name in this place).

Testing: how do the humans identify the Thing?

There is no hard and fast way for the humans to test and detect the Thing. In the movie, Doc Copper wanted to do a "blood serum" test – mix a person's blood with uncontaminated blood and see what happens. In the end MacReady heated blood to see if Thing blood would defend itself.

Players are likely to think of these ideas, especially if they have seen the movie. As a GM you need to decide whether you want a particular test to work at that moment in the game. Don't worry too much about making a test fail, but be sympathetic to innovative and imaginative ideas the players come up with – in the end you want them to be able to detect the Things, or at the very least, the players who are the Things need to be worried that any such test will work and reveal them.

E: Contingency Plans

There are two key points in the game where you may – or will – want to have some contingency plans, or work out how events pan out to make the story hang together.

1: First, in Scene 3 you need to work out who has been infected to be the first Thing, and how they were infected. There are options. At this point there will be three sources of the Thing infection:

- One of the Swedish Huskies survives the opening scene, and is a Thing;
- The other Swedish Huskie is killed in the crash, but the Thing cells that make it up are still alive, and it can transform and sneak off to infect the player who becomes the first Thing;
- The same applies to SVENSSON – his human form is dead but he is a Thing, and hence he can transform and infect the first player.

2: Next, in Scene 4 you need to establish the “*reveal*”, when one of the original Things comes into the open and is detected and defeated. There are two obvious options:

- The alive Husky tries to assimilate the real dogs, or one of the station’s cats;
- One of the “dead” Things tries to assimilate one of the cats, or MÖRK, if MÖRK is an NPC;
- The same applies to SVENSSON – his human form is dead but he is a Thing, and hence he can transform and infect the first player.

3: Finally, there is a risk that the game might struggle to get going, or keep momentum once up and running: namely, the human players detect and kill the player Thing very quickly. In this eventuality you have a few options:

- infect another player as a Thing (the players are unlikely to think they’ve won at that point anyway – do whatever you can to get the paranoid juices flowing!). How do you infect him or her? You could have any of the remaining Thing “remains” infect them, or have one of the station cats infect them;
- for the player who was the Thing but is now dead early in the game, you could make them an infected cat or dog for the remainder of the game, and keep them involved;
- another means to avoid or reduce this risk would be to make **two** players Things from the start. But this might weigh the odds too far in the favour of the Things;
- this also brings up the possibility of starting the game with **no one** as the Thing, but this might fall a bit flat! Maybe an idea to try to run after you played with a Thing first!

NB: unless the “original” Things (i.e., the Huskies and SVENSSON) are needed to infect a new player to keep the game moving, they take no other action in the game – their presence is just a threat to add to the fear and paranoia, and you should expect the players to incinerate them.

F: Game Master Aids

The following GM aids are included for this game (PDFs are in the PDF list on the main blog):

1: GM SCENARIO GAME AID <i>"TT82GameAid"</i>	This sets out specific information for the opening scenes of the game, as well as sunrise and sunset times and space for notes through the scenario
2: GM SCENARIO STATS <i>"TT82GMStats"</i>	Lists of relevant stats for likely weapons the players may choose to use, the Huskies and The Thing
3: RANDOM EVENTS TABLES <i>"TT82Randoms"</i>	D66 tables for random weather, temperature and technical incidents
4: TT82 STORAGE INVENTORIES <i>"TT82Storage"</i>	Storage lists of equipment and items that players may want to use – to be handed out to the players.
5: TT82 STATION SIGN <i>"TT82Sign"</i>	A station sign listing the crew.

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The Coriolis Effect podcast