

# GEIGER COUNTER (PARTICLE DECAY REMIX)

v2016.4.12

## 1. THE PREMISE

You are on a journey to somewhere extremely dangerous. You may have some hint of the danger, but have no idea that it will destroy most of you.

Come up with a premise together, such as: “We are a group of space bounty hunters dropping off a wanted criminal at a maximum security prison built into an asteroid.”

Use the table below to help brainstorm premises:

SPONSOR	DESTINATION	MISSION
1. Corporate	1. Ruins	1. Deliver
2. Science	2. Ship	2. Find
3. Military	3. Station	3. Rescue
4. Team member	4. Settlement	4. Fix
5. Religious	5. Wilderness	5. Vacation
6. Mercenary	6. Facility	6. Destroy

Try to find a premise that everyone excited about.

## 2. THE PROTAGONISTS

There will be eight to ten characters in the game, only one or two of which are likely to survive. Emphasize that the characters are not heroes, at least not yet. They’re the petty, self-centered assholes that populate movies where most everyone gets killed, so we don’t feel bad when they die. Only by surviving and growing as people do they become characters that don’t “deserve” their terrible fate.

In a three player game, deal three character cards to each player. In a four or five player game, deal two.

Fill out the blank spaces on the card in discussion with the other players and adjust names as needed. For example, Threnody could be “Rebecca Threnody,” “Threnody Singh,” or the cyborg “Thren-0D-X2.”

Note that the Deception is something that is only true if it is triggered by events in play, but you should use it to inform your portrayal of the character, so that—if it turns out to be true—it’s not completely unexpected or unbelievable.

## 3. THE TRAILER

Take turns describing super short (5 sec, 1 breath) images from a hypothetical trailer. These things may or may not happen in the actual game, but it helps set the tone and get everyone thinking.

## 4. THE MAP

Choose a player with decent map-drawing skills to be the cartographer. They will sketch out some obvious locations (the entrance or landing zone,

base camp, the bridge and engine room of a ship, etc.) to start but leave space to draw in additional material later.

When map-making, give an idea of how the locations connect, almost treating them as spaces in a board game.

## 5. TURNS & SCENES

The organizer takes the first turn and then play proceeds around the group.

### ON YOUR TURN

1. Choose a character to focus on in this scene, one that’s not been the focus for a while. As long as there’s no menace player, avoid having your own characters be active in the scene so you can focus on playing the menace and don’t have to attack yourself.
2. Once past the prologue, ask the player to move their character on the map, having the cartographer draw a new location if necessary, and ask any other nearby (their call) player if they’d like to move onto or away from there.
3. Play out a scene with the characters now in that location. As long as there’s no menace player, you focus on playing the menace; everyone drives towards answering one of the questions on the menace track.
4. It is your job to keep the scene as short and punchy as possible. After a few moments, end it, have the menace attack, or show the danger.
5. Check off any questions that have been answered. If the conditions are met for advancing on the menace track, do so. Read aloud the text and the questions you’re trying to answer next.

In short, it’s your job to: pick a focus character, describe what the menace does, and end the scene or attack when you feel it’s right. The responsibility for the rest of narration is shared.

## 6. DICE

During the game you will be building two die pools: the Survival Dice and the Menace Dice.

The Menace Dice pool starts with one in the prologue and grows with each advance. Put a pawn or marker on the menace track.

When any of the characters die, unless they died because of betrayal, add a die to the Survival Dice.

If they died sacrificing themselves to save others, remove a die from the Menace Dice. (The decision to sacrifice themselves must be made before dice are rolled.)

## 7. WHEN THE MENACE ATTACKS

Describe the attack. Decide if a character at that location will sacrifice themselves to save the others, or betray the others to save themselves, or if they all face the menace together. Describe it.

Roll the Menace Dice vs. Survival Dice and compare the two highest dice (the menace wins all ties).

If the Menace Dice win, one of the characters involved dies. In the case of a sacrifice it's them. In the case of a betrayal it's not them. Add dice to the Survival Dice pool as described above.

If the Survival Dice win, it was a close thing but nobody dies. Narrate how the characters involved got away or beat back the menace for now.

## 8. TAKING OVER THE MENACE

If you are the first to lose both your characters, you become the menace player and own the menace from then on. You will describe what the menace does and when it attacks no matter whose turn it is.

When this happens, take a short break. While you're paused, imagine a consistent explanation for what you've seen so far. Find the simplest, most obvious explanation you can think of. Don't try to be clever, invent plot twists or big reveals.

If a Deception hasn't been triggered yet, look over the remaining characters' Deceptions and find the one that best fits your idea of the menace. Keep them alive until they're discovered. You may even want to pass notes to everyone, all of which are blank except the one that names the traitor.

From here on out, other players may start making their own characters focus characters on their turn. You're playing the menace so they don't have to.

When other players lose both their characters, deputize them by taking them aside and telling them what you've decided about the menace so far, so you can play the menace together, consistently.

## 9. PRETTY FUCKED

Once and only once when someone dies you may instead, as a group, decide they are just 'pretty fucked.' This happens:

- Decide if they are captured, infected, possessed, needing serious medical attention, etc.
- They can still be rescued and escape with the others; they can still roleplay.
- Unless they are bodily picked up and carried by the other characters, the menace player gets to decide where they are and where they go or are taken.
- Menace will wait at least until next advance before attacking that character again.

## OPTIONAL RULE: MENACE TRAITS

Certain advances on the menace track call for choosing a trait from one of the pairs below, slowly narrowing down what the menace is (choose trait based on what has been revealed so far):

- [solo] or [horde]
- [fleshy] or [ethereal]
- [enigmatic] or [unambiguous]
- [savage] or [calculating]
- [ancient] or [newly born]
- [created] or [natural]
- [murderous] or [indifferent]
- [consuming] or [producing]

If you become the menace player, look at the menace traits already established and imagine what answers you want for the rest.

## INSPIRATION

Alien  
Aliens  
Annihilation (novel)  
The Blair Witch Project  
Cloverfield  
Dawn of the Dead  
Deliverance  
The Descent  
Dog Soldiers  
Evil Dead  
Evil Dead II  
Europa Report  
Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>  
Pitch Black  
Predator  
The Thing

## CREDITS

Geiger Counter by J. Walton  
Remixed by Jamie Fristrom

You never forget your first. Geiger Counter is the game that showed me GM-less roleplaying games can work, and a game I keep coming back to. This is me coming back to it again. :)

## 1. PROLOGUE

We are en route and now it is business as usual. We are headed towards isolation.

### MENACE DOES NOT SHOW ITSELF

Menace Dice start at one.

Drive towards answering this question each scene:  
*What's the focus character's deal?*

ONCE EVERY CHARACTER HAS BEEN IN A SCENE, ADVANCE

## 4. THE CRUX

We can no longer deny that we're being hunted, but despite everything, we're still trying to complete our mission.

### MENACE MAKES PROBING ASSAULTS

+1 Menace Dice.  
Optional: choose a menace trait.

Drive towards answering these questions:  
 *How have we been sabotaged?*  
 *What do we still need to do to complete the mission?*  
 *How does the focus character cope with death?* [-1 Menace Dice]  
 *What evidence of the menace is worse than we've already seen?*

ONCE THREE QUESTIONS HAVE BEEN ANSWERED, ADVANCE

## 7. THE ESCAPE

There seems to be a real possibility of getting away without destroying the menace. But there's not enough room for all of us.

### MENACE HOLDS OFF ON ATTACKS

+1 Menace Dice.  
Optional: choose a menace trait

Drive towards answering these questions:  
 *What can't the focus character let go of?*  
 *What human connection do we make as we near the end?* [-1 Menace Dice]  
 *What price must be paid in blood before escape is possible?*  
 *What do we do once we think we're safe?*

ONCE THREE QUESTIONS HAVE BEEN ANSWERED, ADVANCE

## 2. THRESHOLD

We stand at the edge of the abyss and can turn away...only we won't. We become isolated.

### MENACE INVESTIGATES, BIDES ITS TIME

+1 Menace Dice.

Drive towards answering these questions:  
 *Why can't we go back the way we came?*  
 *What's the first sign something is amiss?*  
 *Why does someone go off by themselves?*  
 *What is our first, brief, unclear view of the menace?*

ONCE THREE QUESTIONS HAVE BEEN ANSWERED, ADVANCE

## 5. DARK SECRETS

Prior knowledge. Involvement. A traitor among us.

### MENACE ATTACKS CONFIDENTLY

+1 Menace Dice.  
Optional: choose a menace trait.

Drive towards answering these questions:  
 *Who has been deceiving us?* [Trigger their Deception (or make a new one up if desired.) Menace will not attack them for now.]  
 *What was the real purpose of our mission?*  
 *Why is the focus character still trying to complete the mission?*  
 *What evidence of the menace is worse than we've already seen?*

ONCE THREE QUESTIONS HAVE BEEN ANSWERED, ADVANCE

## 8. FINALITY

Either we didn't try to leave after all, didn't make it out, or the menace came with us.

### MENACE ATTACKS ONE LAST TIME

+1 Menace Dice.  
Optional: choose one of the menace traits and change it to its opposite or add the opposing trait as well, showing that the menace is taking on a new form

The menace attacks a final time at the end of this scene. If the survivors lose the roll, they all die or are clearly going to die. If the menace loses the roll, it is finally defeated.

ADVANCE

## 3. THE MUNDANE

Everything is as we would expect it to be, though potentially still dangerous; there are problems that aren't the menace.

### MENACE TAKES OUT THE VULNERABLE, ALONE

+1 Menace Dice.  
Optional: choose a menace trait.

Drive towards answering these questions:  
 *What's a mundane trouble that will complicate matters?*  
 *Why does the focus character have to go off by themselves?*  
 *What do we argue about?*  
 *What does the focus character think the menace is?*

ONCE THREE QUESTIONS HAVE BEEN ANSWERED, ADVANCE

## 6. DEEP CORE

We're entering the belly of the beast and meeting the menace head-on in its lair, its chapel, its sanctum.

### MENACE ATTACKS ALMOST EVERY SCENE

+1 Menace Dice.  
Optional: choose a menace trait. Menace may attack traitor from here on out.

Drive towards answering these questions:  
 *How do we strike back?*  
 *What is the menace, really?*  
 *What will soon destroy everything?*  
 *How has the focus character gotten over their personal failing?* [-1 Menace Dice]

ONCE THREE QUESTIONS HAVE BEEN ANSWERED, ADVANCE

## 9. EPILOGUE

It's all over.

...  
...

If there is anyone left, play an ensemble scene which tries to answer the question:  
*How do we go on now that it's over?*  
Otherwise, menace player may narrate a scene which tries to answer the question:  
*How does the danger of the menace grow?*

ROLL CREDITS

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>ALICIA</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">NAME YOUR ROLE ON THE TEAM</p> <p style="text-align: center;">PERSONAL FAILINGS</p> <p style="text-align: center;">DECEPTION (only if triggered): Is infected by the Menace and will soon become something like it or something far worse</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>CHOI</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">NAME YOUR ROLE ON THE TEAM</p> <p style="text-align: center;">PERSONAL FAILINGS</p> <p style="text-align: center;">DECEPTION (only if triggered): Has nihilistic or religious sympathies for the menace and its apparent goals, desires to see them to fruition</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>GHEZO</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">NAME YOUR ROLE ON THE TEAM</p> <p style="text-align: center;">PERSONAL FAILINGS</p> <p style="text-align: center;">DECEPTION (only if triggered): Desires to cultivate or strengthen the menace because the experiment hasn't run its full course yet</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>JACKSON</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">NAME YOUR ROLE ON THE TEAM</p> <p style="text-align: center;">PERSONAL FAILINGS</p> <p style="text-align: center;">DECEPTION (only if triggered): Knows that team members may panic or become compromised and has hypnotic commands or drugs to influence them</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>KANADA</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">NAME YOUR ROLE ON THE TEAM</p> <p style="text-align: center;">PERSONAL FAILINGS</p> <p style="text-align: center;">DECEPTION (only if triggered): Must bring back samples of the menace for study and/or weaponization by their secret backers</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>MATIS</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">NAME YOUR ROLE ON THE TEAM</p> <p style="text-align: center;">PERSONAL FAILINGS</p> <p style="text-align: center;">DECEPTION (only if triggered): Is mentally, sexually, emotionally, or physically enthralled by the menace and desires to join with it</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>ROTHCHILDE</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">NAME YOUR ROLE ON THE TEAM</p> <p style="text-align: center;">PERSONAL FAILINGS</p> <p style="text-align: center;">DECEPTION (only if triggered): Will now attempt to abandon or betray everyone in the interest of self-preservation or wealth</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>SING</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">NAME YOUR ROLE ON THE TEAM</p> <p style="text-align: center;">PERSONAL FAILINGS</p> <p style="text-align: center;">DECEPTION (only if triggered): Was a member of a previous team that already encountered the menace and will sacrifice anyone to destroy it</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>THRENODY</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">NAME YOUR ROLE ON THE TEAM</p> <p style="text-align: center;">PERSONAL FAILINGS</p> <p style="text-align: center;">DECEPTION (only if triggered): Totally loses it and does the worst possible thing imaginable, putting everyone at greater risk</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>YASENKO</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">NAME YOUR ROLE ON THE TEAM</p> <p style="text-align: center;">PERSONAL FAILINGS</p> <p style="text-align: center;">DECEPTION (only if triggered): Wants to get back at another member of the team and will put them in harm's way</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>ZEPHYR</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">NAME YOUR ROLE ON THE TEAM</p> <p style="text-align: center;">PERSONAL FAILINGS</p> <p style="text-align: center;">DECEPTION (only if triggered): Is a spy, plant, or robot and will now attempt to destroy all evidence of the menace and everyone who knows</p>	