

# **RUNNING ON EMPTY:**

## *Tales from the Road*

Ten Candles in the **Running on Empty** Setting by Jamie Lindemann

*This requires a copy of **Ten Candles** by Stephen Dewey*

*When roadies gather, they swap stories to pass along information, wow the populace, and scare the young 'uns. These exaggerated road tales are often gruesome and never feature survivors. There's a kernel of truth to all of them but following up with questions like "If no one survived, how did you hear about it?" will either get you a knowing wink or a beer bottle whipped at your head.*

*This collection will prompt stories in this vein: grim tales of desperate survival out in the Dark. Only mad men and children would accept every story as the gospel truth, but it is true that strange things happen out on the road. Draw that line for yourself after you've spent some time outside Citadel walls.*

This project is a standalone approach to **Running on Empty**, the upcoming post-apocalyptic setting from Nerdhaus Games about roadies, teams of thrill-seeking couriers, explorers, or general adventurers who brave the endless Dark of the remains of North America, threading the highways and interstates between the walled Citadels, the stagnating bastions of survival in which humanity has sought refuge ever since things came tumbling down.

This game serves as both a primer for a **Running on Empty** campaign of your own, or as a quick break in the middle of the campaign to explore the road less traveled or provide some color in your adventures. What happens in the future when your campaign crew comes upon the remains of the wrecked paver from *Men at Work*, or the ruined remains of Fiddler's March? Do they trust their own memories of their own adventure, or do they learn that not every tale can be trusted on the road?



# THE RULES

Follow **Ten Candles** rules, but amend as follows:

## REPLACE 'HOW THIS CAME TO BE' (P. 53) WITH:

Three generations ago, the world ended in smoke and darkness: A star fell and blotted out the sky. The mountains split and the ground shook. The rain fell as ash and soot for weeks, and fire scoured the earth. People turned on each other and society gave way to chaos for a time. Since then, we built walls around our survivors and fought to keep the lights on. Madness and death pace outside the walls and the world will never be the same.

Darting between these islands of light, different sorts of folk ply their trade: couriers, pavers, militias, slavers, and --yes-- even cannibals. The road is the great equalizer, the only place where the rules are clear: Survive. Go fast, ride hard, and make it there in as many pieces as you left. When you're 200 miles from anywhere, all you have is what you brought with you and what you can wrench from the jaws of defeat.

But the threats remain. Some are mundane: slipping a piston, running out of gas, blocked roadway. Some are physical: dangerous mutants, armed cannibals, beasts twisted beyond recognition. And others are impossible: ghosts of the highways, a psychotic psychic force, or your darkest dreams made manifest. The road is a wild place, and anything can happen out there in the Dark. If you have what it takes, screaming down the blacktop in the middle of the eternal night redlining a ride older than your entire crew on scavenged gas and borrowed time, then saddle up and put the pedal to the metal. Civilization is going nowhere fast, and you're Running on Empty.

## VEHICLES

- During **Step One: Write Traits** (p. 21), the two players to the GM's left write a benefit for their crew's vehicle (mechanical, spiritual, or other). The two players to the GM's right create a drawback. Shuffle the stack and keep two. They get laid side-by-side, face up, during **Step Three: Create Concepts** (p.26), available as traits to be used by any player in a conflict. Set the other two aside.
  - Should you switch to a different primary vehicle over the course of the session, discard the old traits and reveal a random one that was set aside earlier. Burn the last one. Any additional vehicles you find won't have traits. Luck does run out, after all.
- If you need inspiration, check the **Vehicle Quirks** section below, or simply draw two cards from a standard poker deck to establish your car's traits. The second vehicle you find will draw one trait. No other cars will have traits.

# MODULES

## DEAD END

The package was small; it fit easily in the trunk and y'all were already headed out of town. By all accounts it shoulda been a milk run, easiest tank of gas you ever earned. That was a couple hundred miles ago and all of a sudden your navigator is telling you the map doesn't match the bullet-riddled road signs and the compass is doing that lazy twirl it always does when you're the bad kind of lost.

Bad gets worse when your pal pipes up in the back seat about a bad feeling and something they keep seeing in the mirrors. A quarter tank of gas and the nearest Citadel that you know about is the wrong way behind you means that the milk run has just become a race against something on your tail.

**Areas of Note:** Your car, the wrong highway, the empty gas station, the skeletal forest

**Goal:** To fuel up and get back to civilization

## ROAD CLOSED

Fiddler's March wasn't much of an outpost, just a couple of tin shacks, a bank of sunlights, and some farmland, but it was home. When the water wheel broke a week or so back, Dugger and the rest said it was an easy fix and they headed down the road for supplies. No word since and the diesel is running low in the genny, so folks had to choose: head to the next town over and leave their mountain refuge, or hole up and wait for the mechanics to get back.

You and yours are the last residents of the March and the sputtering of the generator tells you what you need to know: you're out of time and no one's coming back. It's up to you to sort this mess out or head down the mountain before the town "Goes Dark." Those sunlights are keeping something at bay...

**Areas of Note:** The empty town, the water wheel, the open road, the mountain pass

**Goal:** fix the water wheel or get out of Fiddler's March

## MEN AT WORK

A paver convoy is a sight to be seen: a massive crawler covers a few lanes of blacktop, pushing wrecks to the side while grinding the pavement flat behind it, with supply vans providing meals and ammo with a carrier hauling any vehicle that might still run to pay off the journey. The crew has been at it for a couple weeks, with at least another week before you're safe at the next stop. That's why it's a problem that the supply meetup got missed and no one is answering the radio.

Between the wealth of vehicles and the noise of the grinder, pavers always attract attention out in the Dark. Has whatever's been following you gotten to the supply convoy coming out to meet you? And how long can you keep this cranky thing going before those precious worklights flicker out and the pistons fall silent?

**Areas of Note:** The paver & convoy, the lonely road, a shattered overpass, the supply delivery

**Goal:** to keep the crawler running or to find your way to the nearest Citadel

## NO ENTRY

Times were tough back home, but you heard there was work in Mile High. You said your goodbyes, scratched up enough cash to buy a car, and planned your route through what used to be Colorado. Everything was accounted for, even this month's password at the gate... Or so you thought. "Reliable ride," he'd said. "Make the trip in it myself if I thought my family was up for it."

The engine has been steaming pretty bad for the last hour and you know you checked everything before you left. Signs say Mile High is just over the next mountain, but you know she's not going to make it that far. You've heard gatekeepers won't come help no matter what fuss you kick up, so it's up to you to get the rest of the way to your new home. And something in the rusty reef of defenses around the city has got them firing up sirens...

**Areas of Note:** Your malfunctioning car, four miles of blacktop, the tangled defenses around the Citadel, a passing car

**Goal:** to make it the rest of the way to Mile High

# VEHICLE QUIRKS

	CLUBS	DIAMONDS	HEARTS	SPADES
	Model	History	Performance	Weird
2	Solar	Bent Frame	Busted	Christine
3	Import	Notorious	Four Banger	Check the Back Seat!
4	Fragile	Clunker	Brick	Bad Past
5	Top Heavy	Beater	Wide Turns	Numb
6	Cramped	King of Jacks	Gas-Guzzler	Monster Car
7	Atrocious Paintjob	No Windows	Cold Start	Mean
8	Unpopular	Damn Spot!	Touchy	Empathic
9	Spoiler	Bitchin' Plates	Dee Luxe	Theme Song
10	Keyless Entry	Previous Owner	Reliable	Emotionally Needy
J	Rock Solid	Armed & Dangerous	Smooth Ride	Bobble Head
Q	Mr. Fusion	Spacious	Stress Tested	Miracle Ride
K	Road Warrior	Well-Stocked	Nimble	White Noise
A	Classic	One of a Kind	Hemi	Love Bug
<b>Joker:</b> Draw another card and re-draw any one card in your hand. You must keep this new card.				

## ALPHABETICAL QUIRKS

**Armed & Dangerous-** (History) The previous owner did a beautiful job mounting a weapon into this vehicle. It sports a pintle-mounted weapon with a full load of ammunition.

**Atrocious Paintjob-** (Model) Who knows what possessed the dealer to order a lavender sparkle Hummer, or a puce-and-magenta striped Beetle. You're unlikely to be taken seriously by anyone who sees you with this car or knows you own it.

**Bad Past-** (Weird) This car was the site of something truly unspeakable. Anyone who tries to sleep in the vehicle will likely lose sleep due to the restless nightmares inflicted on the occupants. Minor frustrations like hunger, thirst, or cold are harder to bear while exhausted.

**Beater-** (History) This vehicle has been rode hard and put away wet, figuratively speaking. Poor maintenance makes it unlikely that it will survive extended travel without serious upkeep.

**Bent Frame-** (History) Accidents happen to good people (and cars). This one has suffered such serious damage that it permanently has poor alignment and can take less damage than another vehicle of its type before going down for the count.

**Bitchin' Plates-** (History) This vehicle has wicked vanity plates. It doesn't change a whole lot, but *damn* are they cool.

**Brick-** (Performance) This vehicle struggles to maneuver.

**Busted-** (Performance) This vehicle runs perfectly well, except for the occasional breakdown.

**Check the Back Seat!**- (Weird) Something about this car invites close calls, whether it's minions in the trunk, psychos on the undercarriage, or simply a hook left in the passenger door handle. This car draws bad situations to it, so expect to turn on the headlights to a clump of monsters in any situation where Murphy's Law might apply.

**Christine-** (Weird) This car has memories of its violent history and a mind of its own, making it unsuitable for most owners. Generally, these vehicles are mean-spirited and delight in making others suffer, even wrecking themselves when necessary.

**Classic-** (Model) These are well regarded machines and afford their drivers a bit of status. Since enough of them were made, it is also generally easier to source replacement parts for them.

**Clunker-** (History) Exhaust is thicker than normal and it idles roughly. It's both easier to trail and vibrates badly when idle.

**Cold Start-** (Performance) The vehicle struggles to turn over when it's cold. Unfortunately, these days it's always cold.

**Cramped-** (Model) The vehicle simply has a small interior; powerfully built individuals may struggle to fit and there isn't a lot of room for cargo.

**Damn Spot!**- (History) The interior and trunk are filled with stains which are impossible to remove. No amount of scrubbing will fix it, and any attempt to re-upholster the car will either reveal something noxious or result in disaster.

**Dee Luxe-** (Performance) All your dials work. Gas meter, pedometer, odometer, altimeter... Whatever the hell those doodads do, they do it. Not like any of them matter much except for the one that tells how fast you're going.

**Emotionally Needy-** (Weird) Some cars hate to be left alone. If the group abandons it for more than a few hours, it will be sulky for the first hour or so of continued driving. However, if affection and attention is lavished upon it, the likelihood of finding a good stop or town along the way is higher.

**Empathic-** (Weird) This vehicle responds to your moods. It shifts volume and station on the radio, subtly changes the tone of the muffler or engine, and even seems to be slightly different colors under certain light.

**Four Banger-** (Performance) This vehicle has no "oomph". Shaking pursuers (or in extreme cases, getting uphill) will be difficult.

**Fragile-** (Model) When fiberglass bodies and aluminum frames came into vogue, the rolling tank was a thing of the past. Made of such light material, this vehicle is less resistant to injury.

**Gas-Guzzler-** (Performance) This vehicle consumes fuel at a high rate or has a small tank; either way, it consume fuel at an alarming rate.

**Hemi-** (Performance) This vehicle just has more power than comparable models.

**Import-** (Model) Due to this vehicle's foreign origin, spare parts are difficult to locate or costly to find.

**Keyless Entry-** (Model) This vehicle can be activated or unlocked without the use of keys.

**King of Jacks-** (History) Either this car has been stolen a lot of times, or the previous owner simply did not believe in using keys. The steering column and locks of this car have been cracked, jacked, and 'wired so many times that all further attempts to do so are significantly easier.

**Love Bug-** (Weird) This vehicle goes out of its way to be useful. It is always right where you need it to be (never too far from your chosen exit, if reasonable) and always seems to have parts or gear in the trunk that you never expected to find in it (extra fuel can, spare weapon, enough tools/parts to get moving again).

**Mean-** (Weird) This vehicle is simply ornery: windows close on fingers, brakes slip unexpectedly, and it guns its engines at children. It occasionally exhibits its own will while occupied.

**Miracle Ride-** (Weird) This vehicle has survived some tough spots and will likely do so again, damn the odds.

**Monster Car-** (Weird) This vehicle apparently comes right off the movie lot with a maniac detection widget. This vehicle simply will not start if hostile forces are nearby.

**Mr. Fusion-** (Model) This vehicle practically runs on Crisco. Regardless of what you put in it (kerosene, alcohol, etc.), it will run. It takes a little bit of re-jiggering if it has been converted to run on something truly unusual.

**Nimble-** (Performance) This car is bred for the open road and takes turns and tight quarters with ease.

**Notorious-** (History) Bonny and Clyde had their big gangster sedan, the Duke Boys had the General Lee, and you've inherited someone else's well-remembered vehicle. Until you dispose of it (or convince the interested parties that it's a case of mistaken identity), you run the risk of being mistaken for someone else in this thing.

**No Windows-** (History) Read 'em and weep. It is what it says. Dust, rain, mosquitoes, and other road dangers will find it easy to get through your permanently unsecured vehicle.

**Numb-** (Weird) For some reason, this car's soul is empty. Nothing seems to be wrong with it, except a detached sense of loss within. Occupants with psychic inclination will find it hard to use their weird abilities in or near this vehicle.

**One of a Kind-** (History) This vehicle has been extensively rebuilt to some forgotten specifications. However, no one left a manual and the original mechanic ain't talking. It's almost impossible to repair, but immediately draw three more cards and take your favorite two.

**Pimped Out-** (History) Flashy paint scheme, custom interior, spinning rims... This vehicle has been tailored to someone with lavish taste. Some modifications that might be present include TV screens, jumping hydraulics, neon undercar lights, etc. Strictly speaking, these vehicles do little but impress, but in the right circumstances, any of these modifications might come in handy.

**Previous Owner-** (History) This vehicle has already had some changes built in. Elaborate on what unusual system the previous owner installed.

**Reliable-** (Performance) Will keep running no matter what, as long as it is physically there.

Running is defined here as "moving at any speed under its own power."

**Road Warrior-** (Model) Between a wide wheel base and tight suspension, these heavy-framed beauties take a licking and keep on trucking. They are almost impossible to flip or run off the road.

**Rock Solid-** (Model) This steel-framed monster shrugs off injuries that would total lesser cars.

**Smooth Ride-** (Performance) This vehicle has deluxe suspension and never jars its passengers. Those inclined to motion sickness should be advised to pick a seat near the window.

**Solar Powered-** (Model) You got screwed. Loot it for parts, because it ain't going *nowheres*. If you draw this Quirk during initial vehicle creation, you may discard it and draw again. I mean, who's stupid enough to keep one of these things?

**Spacious-** (History) Someone before you pulled out some seats and moved some interior supports around. This vehicle has additional passenger capacity compared to other vehicles of its size.

**Spoiler-** (Model) Some people think it looks awesome; others think you are just fooling yourself. Either way, it doesn't change a damn thing for your vehicle.

**Stress Tested-** (Performance) A particularly resilient suite of additions, including roll bars, shocks, etc. prevent this vehicle from coming out in too bad a shape. Damage simply has less effect on this specialized machine.

**Theme Song-** (Weird) Whether it's a course of furious banjo strumming or bad-ass rockin' tunes, your group's theme song blares whenever this baby gets going. It does wonders for nerve and morale.

**Top Heavy-** (Model) This vehicle responds badly to loss of control. Whenever you lose control of the vehicle, there is a significant chance it will go ass over tea kettle.

**Touchy-** (Performance) While the vehicle has nothing *wrong* with it, per se, it has a small number of defects: it shakes at 75 mph or more, the automatic seatbelts won't unroll, the AC cuts off when headlights are on, etc. If repaired, new problems will inevitably crop up again.

**Unpopular-** (Model) While it's not exactly a drawback, there's a good reason you got a hold of one of these: No one was ever too keen on this particular make. Car aficionados will never let you live it down, but otherwise she's a solid ride.

**Well-Stocked-** (History) This vehicle is loaded with supplies and gear. These items are found in the trunk, seats, glove box, etc. Why'd they leave them? Are they coming back for them? That's now your problem.

**White Noise-** (Weird) Whenever in an area subject to supernatural influence, this vehicle always lets you know, by starting its wipers, playing static or voices on the radio, or repeatedly dimming its headlights when facing something unnatural.

**Wide Turns-** (Performance) This vehicle's wheelbase is so enormous that tight turns are almost impossible. Give yourself plenty of room to maneuver.

**Author's Note:** I've been working on and off with **Running on Empty** for years, inspired by my nights of driving back and forth across the Midwest in the middle of the night, occasionally blinded by the headlights of a passing vehicle and reminded just how alone you are on those vast stretches of blacktop between islands of light. My love of weird fiction and post-apocalypse eventually produced this world, and *Tales from the Road* is the first playable entry in this setting.

After all this time it has been such a pleasure to finally meet some of the inhabitants of this desperate world on the brink of survival and get to witness their struggles, their demise, and the fierce, brilliant hope in between. Of course, this being **Ten Candles** we know better about their making it out alive but there's something noble in trying against the odds. That's what survival is all about, and this dark little corner of the future is ultimately about hope.

-Jamie Lindemann, February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2019