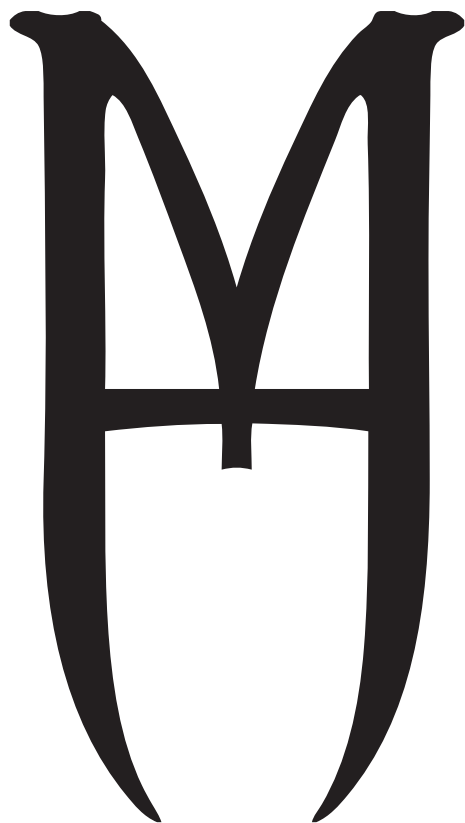




Monsterhearts

A story game about the messy lives of teenage monsters.



Most teenagers get to grow up without encountering anything scarier than gang violence, drug overdoses and chlamydia. They think that's the worst that the world has to offer them, and they have the luxury of laughing.

You don't have the luxury of laughing. You know the world has hideous, horrible things hiding in the shadows. You know because you're one of them. There's wickedness that dwells within your chest, darkness that courses through your veins.

Most teenagers will never know that things like you exist, the secret monsterhearts.



Dedicated to...

Carl Rigney, my Ghoul

Kaleigh Barton, my Fae
Sanuel Stevenson, my Chosen
Jamie Fristrom and Steve Hickey, my Queens
Vincent Baker, Dark Power to my Infernal
John Harper, my Vampire
Joel Shempert, my Mortal
Kelsey Savage, my Ghost
Tim Markholm, rip, my Werewolf
Jackson Tegu, my Witch
Amy Fox, my Hollow

Daniel Wood, my Editor

Legalities & Credits

2

Writing and layout by Joe Mcdaldno.
I made this. Please don't steal it.

Titles in Yataghan, by Daniel Midgley.
Body in Fontin and Fontin Sans, by exljbris.

Cover photo by Konradbak, via Dreamstime.
Interior art by Joe Mcdaldno, based on stock photos from
Dreamstime and Shutterstock.

For more visit
www.buriedwithoutceremony.com/monsterhearts/



Buried Without Ceremony



**POWERED BY THE
APOCALYPSE**
apocalypse-world.com





Within Monsterhearts

4	<i>What This Is</i>
7	Chapter One: Creating Characters
16	Chapter Two: Playing the Game
45	Chapter Three: The Skins
100	Chapter Four: Being MC
128	Chapter Five: Teaching & Running the Game
138	Chapter Six: Real Monsters
145	Chapter Seven: Utterly Malleable
150	<i>The Long Example</i>
156	<i>Mediography</i>
158	<i>Index</i>





What This Is

This is a story game. To play, we invent characters and roleplay as them. We say things, and the rules of the game respond to some of those things - changing where the story is going. The rules are there to keep the story feral - no matter how gorgeous and perfect we imagine our characters to be, they are never given the luxury of domesticating their fate. They are always in the lurch, which means they are always interesting. The rules are there to make sure that it isn't my story, and it isn't your story. Instead, it's something between us, raw and alive.

Specifically, it's a story game about supernatural romance and teenage desperation. Vampires, werewolves, witches: they dream and suffer among us. It's unclear whether they can live among normal people, and whether their wicked hearts can be redeemed. When you play *Monsterhearts*, you become one of these teenage monsters. You explore their secrets and fears. You bring them to life.

4

You play because the characters are sexy and broken. You play because teen sexuality is awkward and magnetic, which means it makes for brilliant stories. You play because despite themselves, despite the world they live in, despite their fangs and their bartered souls and their boiling cauldrons, these aren't just monsters. They're burgeoning adults, trying to meet their needs. They're who we used to be - who we still are sometimes. You play to get lost, and to remember.

And let's be honest. You play because you have a guilty attraction to supernatural beasts and harlequin love stories, but you harbour the secret presumption that you could write them way better yourself. Good. This is your opportunity to prove it.

This game is unabashed about its subject matter: it's a teen sex horror story. It revels in codependency and untenable promises. If that sounds compelling to you,



then this document will provide you with guidelines to explore these themes and play around in this creative space. The game's rules map out territory that you'll explore and build upon.

Where This Came From

Monsterhearts is based off of another story game, called **Apocalypse World**. **Apocalypse World** was written by D. Vincent Baker. He's a tremendously good writer, and there are passages throughout **Apocalypse World** that explain Monsterhearts with poignance and punch. With his permission I share those passages, alongside my own interpretations and guidelines. Here is how he describes the basic activity of the game:

5

NOTES FROM THE APOCALYPSE

You probably know this already: roleplaying is a conversation. You and the other players go back and forth, talking about these fictional characters in their fictional circumstances doing whatever it is that they do. Like any conversation, you take turns, but it's not like taking turns, right? Sometimes you talk over each other, interrupt, build on each other's ideas, monopolize. All fine.

All these rules do is mediate the conversation. They kick in when someone says some particular things, and they impose constraints on what everyone should say after. Makes sense, right?



In Order To Play

In order to play, you're going to need players. This game has a Master of Ceremonies (MC), to whom much of this text is addressed. In addition to the MC, you'll need 2-4 more players.

The game is played in sessions lasting from 3-4 hours. Maybe you'll only play a single session of the game, and that's excellent. Maybe you'll want to keep returning to the story for a number of sessions, every week or two.

There are a number of supplies that need to be gathered, before the group can play Monsterhearts for the first time. The MC is often the person who gathers these supplies together, but it's fine to delegate to anyone with a printer and some time to spare. The supplies needed are as follows:

Dice

The group needs some standard, six-sided dice. Two is the minimum number required, but 4-6 is ideal, as it makes it possible for everyone to have a pair sitting within easy reach.

Pencils

The game requires some pencils for note-taking, and occasionally for map drawing. One pencil for each player is ideal. Pencils are definitely preferable to pens, as some things will need to be rewritten and erased frequently.

The Skins

There are a number of Skins. Each Skin is a booklet (a letter-sized page, folded in half) containing a different type of character that can be played by one of the players. Print out one copy of each of the Skins.

Other Booklets

There's a Reference Booklet for the players, an MC Booklet for the MC, and a Menace Booklet for the MC.

All of the print-outs required are located at www.buriedwithoutceremony.com/monsterhearts/



Chapter One

Creating Characters





Choosing a Skin

When you play this game, you pretend that you are a messed-up teenage heartbreaker who's secretly a monster. Or maybe your character isn't quite a teenager anymore - maybe they're twenty three. Maybe your character is a vampire and you're actually two hundred and seventy years old, but you're posing as a teenager. That's all fine. What's important is that your character is caught in the midst of a volatile transition, just like a teenager is. (For more on playing non-teenage characters, see "After Graduation" on page 127.)

Everyone except the MC creates a character at the start of the game, by choosing a Skin and following the instructions listed in it. Skins are templates for the kinds of characters you can play, and each revolves around a different monster trope: The Mortal, The Vampire, The Witch, The Werewolf, The Ghoul, The Infernal, The Chosen, The Queen, and The Ghost.

Each Skin has a picture and some descriptive text: these give players a taste of what the Skin is all about. To familiarize yourselves with all of the Skins, pass them out amongst the players, then take turns reading the descriptive text aloud. Read it in a melodramatic, over-the-top voice. This step is important! Reading these Skins aloud will serve as an icebreaker for the group, helping them to move beyond their bashful, adult uncertainty and into the world of teen monster melodrama. Afterwards, put all the Skins back in the center and have all the players choose one. There's no need to worry about the Skin's rules and moves while choosing, if you don't want to: just choose the Skin that speaks to you, based on whatever criteria you like.

The instructions listed in the Skin walk the player through creating a character. These characters are the most important characters in the game. They're called Player Characters (PCs), because they are the avatars of the players around the table.





The MC doesn't create a PC, though. Instead, the MC plays all the other characters that surface as the game unfolds - the parents and peers and antagonists that populate the world. These characters don't have all the recorded details that PCs do, like stats and moves. While everyone else is choosing a Skin and creating their characters, the MC is leading that process (as detailed on Page 130). When everyone's done creating their characters, play begins.

If two people in the group are interested in playing the same Skin, there are a couple of ways to handle that. The first is that the MC can ask both players what interests them about that particular Skin. As there is some overlap between the themes and strengths of each Skin, it's possible to suggest other Skins that would address those same interests. Should neither of the players settle upon a different Skin, it's fine to allow two players to play the same Skin, provided there are two copies available (or a nearby photocopier.)

Name, Look, & Origin

9

Once you've selected a Skin, there are a number of decisions to make. Together, these decisions help you create an interesting character.

The first decision is your Name. There's a unique list of names for each Skin. If you don't like any of them, then right below that, there are some guidelines for making your own. Just remember that in teen monster dramas, characters always have symbolically-appropriate names.

The next decision is your Look. Choose one item from each of the lists. The first describes your appearance at a glance. The second describes your eyes, which is a vital detail in teen monster dramas. Unlike the Names list, there's no option here to create your own Look. Pick the most compelling option from each list.





The final decision is your Origin. Each Skin comes with a list of 3-5 possible origins for your character. Monsters have origins that explain where they came from or how they became monsters. Humans have origins that explain how they got their power or arrived at their current social standing. Choose one of the Origins for your character.

Stats

Each character has four stats: Hot, Cold, Volatile, Dark.

Hot means fucking gorgeous, alluring, exciting, smokin', someone you can't stop thinking about, magnetic.

Cold means stone-cold, calculating, collected, unwavering, frigid, able to be cruel and merciless, able to keep their wits about them, obstinate.

Volatile means impulsive, wild, feral, quick-tempered, quick to fight or flight, aggressive, unpredictable, a basket-case, sudden.

Dark means weird, mysterious, sinister, dabbling in the occult, comfortable in darkness, able to liaise with otherworldly forces, powerful.

When creating a character, you're told what stats to start with. Two are rated at 1, and two are rated at -1. Add +1 to any one of these numbers before writing them down in the stat boxes.

Glance at the basic moves listed next to the stat boxes; these are things every character can do, and they are each based on a particular statistic. For example, you'll see that Hot is tied to "Turn someone on." Your stats tell you which moves your character will excel at, and which they'll struggle with.





Picking Moves

Each character has access to the same list of basic moves: turn someone on, manipulate an NPC, shut someone down, hold steady, lash out physically, run away, and gaze into the abyss.

In addition to these basic moves, each Skin has access to a list of Skin moves. These moves are unique to your Skin, and they open up new opportunities for you. These are your special powers, supernatural weaknesses, and monstrous obsessions.

Each Skin has slightly different rules for which of these moves you start with. Follow the instructions for your Skin.

Most of these Skin moves are tied to stats in the same way that basic moves are. While choosing your moves, it's a good idea to pay attention to which stat the move depends on.

Some moves don't relate to a stat at all, they just describe something unusual but straightforward that your character can do. For example, The Ghost has a move called *Dissipate*. Its description is simply "You can walk through walls."

Fill in the bubbles to track which moves you have chosen.

Some Skins have additional decisions to make at this point - The Witch needs to choose Hexes, The Ghoul needs to pick a Hunger, and The Infernal needs to select Bargains.

You'll notice there's a section marked "Other Moves" on each Skin booklet. During play, you'll have the opportunity to take moves from other Skins. When you do so, this is where you can write down the move's full text.





Sex Moves & Darkest Selves

Each character has a Sex Move and a Darkest Self, both of which are located on the back of the Skin booklet. There are no decisions to be made in these sections prior to play, but players should read and incorporate them into their emerging ideas about their characters.

Your Backstory

Once the characters are completed, it's time to introduce them to the rest of the players, and establish the backstories that connect these characters.

First, go around the table, and have each player describe their character briefly. Take between half a minute and two minutes each, and mention their name, their look, their origin, their personality, and their family life. Feel free to ask other players questions about what they describe, to make sure you understand what their character is like.

Once the characters have been introduced, it's time to complete the Your Backstory section of each Skin. The backstories serve to connect the characters in interesting ways, and to give people Strings to start play with.

If The Mortal is in play, then the player to the left of The Mortal should go first, with backstories being established clockwise. This way The Mortal will be the last to establish their backstory. If The Mortal isn't in play, it doesn't matter who goes first, and anyone can volunteer.

When it's your turn to establish your backstory, read out the text in the Your Backstory section of your Skin and assign Strings as per the instructions. If Your Backstory says "Someone once saved your life. Give them 1 String on you," you should discuss with that person how they saved your life. Don't go into exhaustive detail, but do take the time to sketch in some details of your shared history.





Cassidy is a Werewolf, and the backstory for Werewolves is: "You lack subtlety. Give a String to everyone. You've spent weeks watching someone from a distance. Their scent and mannerisms are unmistakable to you now. Take 2 Strings on them." So the other two PCs (Robin the Mortal, and Vanessa the Witch) each write down "Cassidy - 1" on their character sheets. Cassidy's player then decides that Cassidy has been following Vanessa around, observing her. "Me? Why have you been following me around?" asks Vanessa's player. "I think that at first it was because I found you going through my stuff, like you mentioned earlier. So it was a territorial instinct. But I quickly started to develop other feelings for you." Vanessa's player nods, and adds, "I think that I've probably noticed you lurking around, but I like the attention."

*Robin establishes his backstory last. The Mortal backstory is: "The Mortal always declares their backstory last. Declare one person to be your lover. Give them three Strings on you. Take one String on them." It's decided that Robin is madly in love with Cassidy. "So, Cassidy, are those feelings mutual?" Cassidy's player thinks about it for a second, then says, "Absolutely not. Cassidy barely knows who Robin is, and he's definitely not her type." Robin still writes down Cassidy's name as his **true love**. Cassidy records "Robin - 3" on her sheet, and Robin records "Cassidy - 1" on his sheet. "Yeah, I've totally got sketches that I've drawn of you in my history notebook, Cassidy."*

Once this process is complete, go around the table again to choose highlighted stats. Each player in turn asks, "Who has the most Strings on me?" That information will not be located on their sheet, but rather everyone else's. For each character, the player with the most Strings on that character chooses one of their stats to highlight. The MC chooses a second. Highlighting a stat means that the character earns experience whenever that stat is used, which will help them grow and gain new skills over the course of the game. Consequently, you should highlight the stat that you want to see this character use





the most - the one that will create the most compelling situations, or show off the things about the character you find most interesting.

It's Robin's turn to have stats highlighted. "Who's got the most Strings on me?" Robin's player asks. Cassidy does, and so her player gets to choose which stat to highlight first. "I want his Hot highlighted. I'm hoping we see lots of Robin trying to woo his 'true love', despite the fact that Cassidy is, like, totally not interested in him." A second stat needs to be highlighted by the MC, who says, "And I'd like to see Robin's mean streak, so I'm going to highlight his Cold." Robin's player fills in the bubble next to his Hot and Cold stats, to denote that they are both highlighted.

What You Start With

14

Both before and during play, lots of questions will surface about your character: do they have parents? Are they rich or poor? Do they have a car? Do they have a drug stash?

Answer these questions however you want to. It's fine to say that you live with wealthy parents and have a brand new sports car, and that next year you're basically guaranteed a spot at Harvard. It's also fine to say that you live in a trailer home with an abusive step-dad who robs liquor stores in order to pay the bills.

If it's plausible that your character would carry a gun to school, then that's fine. If it's plausible that they'd have wads of cash to throw around on frivolous things, that's fine.

Be cautious, though, about the choice to have your parents also be monsters - it's a decision with sweeping impact on how your character processes their difference and isolation.





Objectives

Unlike some story games, *Monsterhearts* doesn't have an endgame or an explicit goal to shoot for. You are left to determine what it is that your character wants, and pursue that in any way that makes sense to you.

Since the default setting is a high school, there are a few goals that nearly everyone is going to have: saving face, gaining friends and social security, figuring out who their enemies are, getting social leverage on others, dumping their pain on other people.

If you aren't sure who your character is, start with those things and build outward from there. Soon, you'll likely find yourself embroiled in situations that demand action, and your objectives will emerge from that.

Play to find out what happens, what's important, and what it is you really want.





Chapter Two

Playing the Game

Playing the Game

16

Chapter Two





Framing Scenes

Play is divided into scenes, the same way a movie or TV show is. The MC and the players make decisions about what's important enough to show on screen, when the scene should end, and what the group should skip to next.

When play begins, the MC is going to ask lots of questions, and the answers to those questions are going to act as springboards for scenes. The MC is going to frame the first scenes, but it's possible that players will frame future scenes as well.

The process of starting a new scene is called scene framing. Often, it's a very simple process. After one scene ends, the MC can turn to a player and say something like, "So, Amylen, while those two are fighting in the change room, where are you?" The player who is playing Amylen can respond, then, with action taking place in a new scene: "Yeah, I've ditched out of my next class, and am walking around the mall. I think I plan to steal something - maybe a handbag." The MC can respond by fleshing out the scene a bit more, describing the crowds and the mall itself. Or, the MC can ask questions about those topics, and Amylen's player can fill in those details. Or, another player can suggest that they're there too, and jump in with their character.

The MC has authority over scene framing. This means that the MC is the one who ultimately decides where the next scene starts and what is happening. However, the MC is invited to share that authority and responsibility whenever doing so makes sense. If it's clear to the MC what the next moment of action or brooding gloom will be, they can dive into that scene without any consultation. If it isn't clear, they can ask questions in order to give others an opportunity to introduce interesting situations.





Talking & Moves

When you play this game, you roleplay. It's simple: you just say what you do, and your character does what you say. It's like a conversation, in that you take turns, but it's not really like taking turns. You can speak as a narrator would, or speak as your character, or speak as a member of the audience. Most people slip in and out of these different ways of talking, organically and sometimes without even noticing.

Sometimes, you'll say something that falls under the purview of a move. Moves are rules for doing particular things, and they'll often involve rolling dice once they kick in. There are basic moves that everyone has, and there are also special moves that only certain characters get. The principle with moves is easy: *when you do it, do it*. When you narrate your character doing something described by one of the moves, you follow the rules. Similarly, if you want the rules to kick in, you should describe your character taking appropriate action. Either way, you will end up with rules and story, side by side. The two are inseparable.

*Vanessa's player is describing Vanessa leaving for school. The MC jumps in to say, "As you're leaving, your mom moves to stand in front of the door, a big cheesy smile on her face. She reminds you that her new exhibit is opening at the museum today, and you promised to be there for the ribbon-cutting celebration." Vanessa's player makes a disgusted grimace, letting us know what Vanessa thinks about her mother's enthusiasm. "I can't. Something important came up." The MC says, "This is obviously important to your mom, and you're flat out disregarding it. It sounds like you're **shutting someone down**, right?" If Vanessa's player wanted to, she could change her narration to avoid triggering that move. But instead she nods and says, "Yeah, this is definitely me shutting her down." They both look at the move to find out what happens next.*





Rolling Dice

Most of the moves ask you to roll with something. This means that you roll two dice and add their sum to the value of that thing. If you have a Hot 3, and you're asked to roll with hot, then you roll two dice and add them to that 3. If you rolled a 2 and a 4, your final score would be 9.

A 10 or higher is good. A 7-9 is a conflicted result. You may be asked to make some hard choices and pay some prices, but you will probably still get what you want out of the deal. A 6 or less is a failure, and in addition it hands the MC a golden opportunity to take some actions of her own.

No matter what, the highest bonus you can have on any given roll (counting both stat and forward) is 5.

The MC doesn't roll dice like everyone else. Instead, part of the MC's job is setting up situations that will demand that the other players make moves and roll dice.

In addition to moves, characters can gain Strings on one another. Strings represent emotional power over other people, and they can be spent for a number of different mechanical effects. When you spend a String, you should also explain how you're exercising this emotional power. Just like with moves, the Strings mechanic is tied into the fiction. Using Strings is explained in greater depth after the basic moves, on page 25.





Basic Moves

What follows is the rules and further descriptions for each of the basic moves: *turn someone on*, *manipulate an NPC*, *shut someone down*, *hold steady*, *lash out physically*, *run away*, and *gaze into the abyss*.

Turn Someone On

When you **turn someone on**, roll with hot. On a 10 up, take a String against them. • On a 7-9, they choose one: give themselves to you, promise something they think you want, give you a String against them.

When you use this move, you have the opportunity to step outside of your character role, and speak like an author would. Describe your character's pouty lips, how the sweat rolls off their strong brow, and how they look silhouetted against the pale moon. Unlike other basic moves, this one can be triggered without a specific action being taken. If the player describes how arousing the scene is, without their PC actually doing anything other than standing around and looking sexy, the move can still be triggered.

This move implies something about sexuality, and particularly teenage sexuality. We don't get to decide what turns us on. When you make a move to *turn someone on* (with a character action or with scene description), the other player doesn't get to exclaim, "Wait, my character is straight! There's no way that'd turn them on." That's a decision that we as players can't make for our characters. The dice are going to be the ultimate referees of what is and isn't sexy for these characters. Their own sexuality will confuse them and surprise them; it'll show up in unexpected places and unlikely situations. Regardless of the results of the roll, however, each player still gets to decide how their character reacts. Being turned on by someone doesn't imply or demand a particular reaction.





Manipulate an NPC

When you **manipulate an NPC**, roll with hot. On a 10 up, they'll do what you want if you give them a bribe, a threat, or a motive. • On a 7-9, the MC will tell you what it'll take to get the NPC to do what you want. Do it and they will. This move only applies to non-player characters (NPCs), meaning characters that the MC controls. It requires you to actually want something from the NPC, rather than just wanting to cow them or manipulate their emotions (see when you *shut someone down* for that). If you want to manipulate PCs, you can do so by spending Strings that you have on them.

Shut Someone Down

When you shut someone down, roll with cold. On a 10 up, choose one: give them a Condition; they lose a String against you; if they held no Strings on you, gain a String on them. • On a 7-9, choose one: you each give a Condition to one another; you each lose a String on one another.

The 10 up result for this move gives you the opportunity to expose a character's weakness, reduce the power they hold over you, or gain power over them. In the 7-9 results, you end up going down with them. Your harsh words hurt and defame them, but also expose your true character in an ugly way.

*Vanessa's been cornered by a couple school bullies. They're harassing her and the group's leader is demanding she hand over her backpack. Vanessa stands tall, looks him straight in the eye, and says, "Why, did your mommy forget to pack you a lunch of your own?" Vanessa's player rolls to **shut someone down**, and gets a result of 11. Her retort succeeds in giving her the upper-hand and putting the bully in his place. His friends laugh at him, and he looks foolish. She chooses "give them a Condition" from the list, and labels the bully **humiliated**.*





*If she'd rolled a 7-9, both of these characters would have ended up vulnerable in some way. The bully's friends might still laugh at him, but they'd also be whispering that he should teach this girl a lesson. Vanessa's player might have chosen the "you each give a Condition to one another" option from the list – labelling the bully **humiliated** but gaining the Condition **dead meat** in exchange.*

Hold Steady

When you **hold steady**, in a scary or tense situation, roll with cold. On a 10 up, you keep your cool, and choose one: ask the MC a question about the situation; remove a Condition; carry 1 forward during this scene. • On a 7-9, choose: you keep your cool; pick an option from the 10 up list but also gain the Condition *terrified*.

Rather than being triggered by specific character actions, this move tends to be triggered by outside forces that the character must react to. Sometimes, the character will walk knowingly into a dangerous situation (by intervening in a gang fight, or charging into a burning building to save their lover), and the MC can call on them to hold steady.

When someone chooses to "ask the MC a question about the situation," the MC should answer truthfully and fully. The question asked could involve assessing risks ("What's the biggest threat in the room?"), or uncovering true motivations ("Why did Deirdre come here tonight?"), or developing a better picture of the situation ("Are there any other people in the house right now?").





Lash Out Physically

When you **lash out physically**, roll with volatile. On a 10 up, you deal them harm and choose one: the harm is great (add 1); you gain 1 String on them; they need to *hold steady* before they can retaliate (during this scene). • On a 7-9, you harm them but choose 1: they gain 1 String on you; they can deal 1 harm to you for free, if they want to; you become your Darkest Self.

This move only applies when you attempt to actually physically hurt someone. If you push someone up against a locker and threaten them, consider the possibility that you're actually *shutting them down* rather than *lashing out physically*.

Violence can reveal a lot about a person's true character, which is why both the 10 up and 7-9 results will sometimes involve an exchange of Strings.

23

Run Away

When you **run away**, roll with volatile. On a 10 up, you get away, and end up in a safe place. On a 7-9, you get away, but choose one: you cause a big scene; you run directly into something worse; the scariest person there gets a String on you.

In response to a scary or tense situation, characters will tend to do one of two things: *hold steady* or *run away*. If the MC determines that a character would have to *hold steady* in order to keep their cool within a scene, it's perfectly valid for a PC to instead decide to bolt for the exit.

Running away isn't always straightforward. Let's say that your character is trying to escape from someone. They want to keep you within the scene, even if force is required to do so. In such a situation, it's up to MC discretion whether or not you can roll to *run away*. Instead, the MC





might judge that the other party can attempt to *lash out physically* before you have a chance to *run away*, thus holding you captive.

Gaze Into The Abyss

When you **gaze into the abyss**, roll with dark. On a successful roll, it answers your questions and shows you visions. On a 10 up, choose two: the visions are lucid and detailed; the visions show you what you must do, and you carry 1 forward to doing it; the visions cure you, removing a Condition. • On a 7-9, choose one: the visions are confusing and alarming; the visions are lucid and detailed but they leave you with the Condition *drained*.

When someone says that they're gazing into the abyss, the most important question to ask is, "Cool, but what does that mean? What do you actually do?" The answer might be different with each character, and each application of the move, but an understanding of what's actually going on in the scene is vital.

Gazing into the abyss could involve entering a trance, or getting high and slipping into a dark consciousness. It could involve blacking out, or communing with demonic voices out in the woods. The details are always going to be character-specific. The MC should always be listening for a PC to do something brooding and introspective, so that they can spring forth with the question, "So, does that mean you're *gazing into the abyss*?"





Strings

Strings are the emotional hold that you have over people. They are earned through a number of moves: *turn someone on*, *shut someone down*, *lash out physically*, and various Skin moves. There is a place on your Skin booklet to keep track of the Strings you have on other people.

When someone gains a String on you, it means that in some way they've gained emotional power over you. You don't need to define what that emotional power looks like right away; Strings can remain abstract until they're actually spent. You also don't need to respond to someone gaining a String with any specific response. For example, if someone gains a String on you by turning you on, you don't have to suddenly throw yourself at them. Just play out how your character would naturally respond, having just realized that this other person has some sort of emotional hold over them. This could be as simple as narrating that your character blushes and turns to leave, or that they seem suddenly nervous and apprehensive.

25

You can spend a String on another PC to:

- ☞ Add 1 to your roll against them (choose after rolling).
- ☞ Subtract 1 from their roll against you (choose after rolling).
- ☞ Offer them an experience point to do what you want.
- ☞ Force them to *hold steady* in order to carry out a certain action.
- ☞ Add an extra harm to whatever harm you're dealing them.
- ☞ Place a Condition on them.



**You can spend a String on an NPC to:**

- ~ Add 1 to your roll against them (choose after rolling).
- ~ Add 3 to your *manipulate an NPC* roll against them (choose after rolling).
- ~ Cause them to falter, hesitate, or freeze up momentarily.
- ~ Add an extra harm to whatever harm you're dealing them.
- ~ Place a Condition on them.

Whenever you spend a String, there needs to be something in the fiction to explain the mechanical effect. Remember: to do it, do it. If you're subtracting 1 from their next move against you, what's causing that effect? Do you utter some snide remark that throws them off balance? Or if you're offering experience for them to do your bidding, what thing in the fiction accounts for that experience point? Do you promise to tell them a juicy secret in return for their obedience?

Robin's been in love with Cassidy for a long time, and has decided that tonight's the perfect night to show up at her house and profess his love. But when he gets to her front door, he hears something disturbing coming from the other side. It sounds like a mixture between a howl and a throaty wheezing. Robin's player calls out, pretending to be yelling, "Cassidy? Are you alright?" Cassidy's player responds, halfway between a mock-yell and a snarl, "Don't come in here! You need to... arhh! go away!" She's halfway through a werewolf transition, wincing in pain on the other side of her front door.

The MC turns to Robin's player and asks, "So Robin, do you walk away like she's telling you to, or do you rush in to find out what's happening to her?" Robin's player narrates that Robin opens the door, intent on coming to the rescue of his would-be love. Cassidy's player interjects, "So, Cassidy's laying on the floor, twisted up in pain. When you start to open the door, she's going to scream out in fear, and tell you to go away. I'm spending a String! If you plan to enter her house and see her in this state, you're going to have to hold steady first."





Cassidy's player scratches out one of the Strings that she held on Robin.

Robin can choose to turn and leave, or to hold steady in an attempt to enter the house. Grabbing the dice, Robin's player declares that Robin is going to take a deep breath and try to drum up the courage to enter. He rolls a total of 8. Looking over the list of options, Robin's player decides to pick an option from the 10 up list and gain the Condition terrified. The option from the 10 up list that Robin's player chooses is "ask the MC a question about the situation," but he decides to wait a few seconds before asking anything. Robin walks into the house, and sees Cassidy halfway through a grotesque transformation. That's when Robin's player asks the MC, "What can I do to help her?" The MC thinks about it for a minute and responds, "The only thing you can do is lock her up somewhere safe, where she can't hurt anybody. I bet the stairs to the basement are just around the corner."

NPCs can also gain Strings on PCs. That's covered on page 117.





Conditions & Forward

Characters can gain Conditions over the course of play. If you take advantage of a Condition that someone has, while making a move against them, add 1 to your roll. In order to take advantage of a Condition mechanically, though, you need to take advantage of the Condition fictionally as well. This is an extension of the “to do it, do it” principle.

If a character already has a specific Condition (like *drained*), they can’t gain that Condition again. Instead, they just remain *drained*.

When a player is told to give a Condition to a character, and no specific Condition is listed, they get to make up what that Condition is. It can be anything: *wounded, ashamed, drenched in pig’s blood, disoriented, fag, terrified, marked as prey, slut, or untrusted*. It’s best if a Condition doesn’t dictate a specific emotion for the character, and instead dictates a physical circumstance or a public perception. There is some flexibility to this guideline, however, and whatever Condition fits best should be applied.

A Condition goes away when the character suffering it takes appropriate action to alleviate it. What constitutes “appropriate action” is going to vary and isn’t always going to be clear. When the MC (and player, for a PC) thinks that the Condition has been alleviated, it is crossed out. Some moves, such as *hold steady*, may also allow you to remove a Condition.

Forward is a +1 bonus that you add to your next applicable roll. Sometimes this bonus can be used on any roll (“carry 1 forward on your next roll”), but sometimes it’s specific to a certain situation (“carry 1 forward to confronting this situation”). Sometimes, Forward has a time limit attached to it, after which point it disappears (“carry 1 forward this scene”). Forward bonuses can only apply to a single roll, which uses up the advantage they represent.





Robin (a Mortal PC) has been in a foul mood all day. Maybe it's because he missed the bus. Maybe it's because he just found out that the girl of his dreams, Cassidy, is actually a bloodthirsty Werewolf. Either way, he's in no mood for Vanessa's snarky tone when she corners him in the hallway and asks, "Well, did you finally do your half of our history project, last night?"

Robin snaps back, "No, Vanessa, because I actually have a social life to attend to." The MC pipes up, asking, "So, you're **shutting someone down**?" Robin's player nods, and rolls a pair of dice: a 5 and a 5. Added to Robin's Cold stat of 0, that's a 10. On a 10 up, one of Robin's options is: give them a Condition. He settles upon **outcast**, because his retort attacked Vanessa's lack of a social life.

Later, Cassidy and Vanessa are fighting in the locker room while a group of onlookers gather around them. Cassidy's player says, "Alright, I grab Vanessa's hair, and try to swing her head into the locker." This is **lashing out physically**, and she picks up the dice. "Can I tag her **outcast** Condition for a bonus?" The MC says, "Well, I'm not sure how you're taking advantage of it." Cassidy's player thinks about it for a second, and responds, "Right. I'm going to grab her by the hair, and force her to look at the crowd that's gathered around us. No one's intervening, are they? So I bash her head into that locker while they watch." It's still **lashing out physically**, but now Cassidy's taking advantage of the Condition, by parading Vanessa past a group of people who won't intervene. She rolls: a 3 and a 4, plus her Volatile stat of 2, and plus the 1 from tagging outcast. That 10 is going to leave Vanessa pretty roughed up.





Harm & Death

When characters get physically hurt, they take harm. If they rack up too much harm, they can die.

PCs die when they take their 4th harm. Other characters (the ones controlled by the MC) can take whatever amount of harm seems appropriate. Maybe the MC's dorky class wimp gets hospitalized at 2 harm, or even killed if it makes sense. Maybe the MC's werewolf biker tough guy doesn't die until he's got 5 harm on him.

When a PC takes their 4th harm, they immediately die. Or, if they'd prefer not to die, they can mitigate death in one of two ways: become their Darkest Self, or lose all Strings they have on all other characters. They can choose each of these options once per session. In each case, it clears their harm track up, but they gain the condition *drained* if they didn't have it already. If someone is already their Darkest Self, they can't choose to become their Darkest Self in order to avoid death.

When you do harm to someone, if you're using your bare fists or a glass bottle or you're kicking at their groin, it's 1 harm. If you shove them down a small flight of stairs, or throw a chair at them, or ram their truck off the road but it doesn't flip, it's 1 harm.

1 harm is the kind of stuff that people gossip about in the change room.

If you have giant fucking claws, or you get a solid hit to the temple with an aluminum bat, it's 2 harm. If you set fire to their house and they barely escape, maybe having to body-check a smoldering door in the process, it's 2 harm.

2 harm is enough to require medical treatment. It'll have the cops at your door, if it's reported.



If it's worse than all that, and it'd have to be pretty bad, it's 3 harm.

Harm can be amplified in several ways: certain Skin moves add 1 harm, you can spend a String to add 1 harm, and if you roll a 10 up when you *lash out physically* you can choose to make the harm great (which adds 1 harm).

Harm never heals on its own. There are however a few ways to heal harm, other than driving your character to the brink of death:

- ☞ Once per session, when you have time to rest and tend to your wounds, you may heal 1 harm.
- ☞ If someone else attends to your wounds, delicately and intimately - and perhaps with erotic subtext - you may heal an additional 1 harm.





Darkest Self

Certain instances in the game will demand that a character become their Darkest Self. When you become your Darkest Self, there's a script to follow. That script is described on your Skin sheet. Play that script as hard as you can. This is the moment where you are supposed to lose sight of your humanity, whatever amount you had in the first place. It's the point at which you forsake the world. You'll be able to escape your Darkest Self eventually. Until that point, revel in the darkness.

When at your Darkest Self, your priorities as a player should shift. Aim to do damage, to live up to a certain dark vision for the character, and to set up some awful precedents.

The MC's job when you are your Darkest Self is to be real about the fiction, and not pull any punches. If the werewolf becomes its Darkest Self a block from the supermarket, then of course there are going to be innocent bystanders waiting around to get mauled. We're talking about a monster at its most monstrous here, and it's the MC's job to showcase that and not give any easy outs.

That said, it's not the MC's job to line up a series of tragedies, nor to make things artificially "edgy." Be real to the fiction, don't pull any punches, and have fun in the darkness.

After getting beaten up in the locker room, Vanessa (a Witch PC) goes home fuming mad. She's got a lock of Cassidy's hair in her pocket, and immediately she sets to work on a hex. Specifically, she's going to cast a Binding hex on Cassidy, to prevent her from lashing out at anyone, again.





Vanessa gets an 8 on her Hex-Casting move (rolling a 2 and a 4, plus a Dark stat of 2). That means it works, but she has to pick a negative consequence from a list. She picks: trigger your Darkest Self. The Witch's Darkest Self is all about hexing anyone who slights them.

At dinner that night, Vanessa's mom makes a comment about the low cut of her shirt. Looking at the Darkest Self description, Vanessa's player decides that she responds by screaming at her mother in tongues. "What hex are you choosing?" the MC asks. "Wither," Vanessa's player responds. "I'm hoping her tongue falls out." Vanessa rolls, and gets an 11. Just like it says in the Witch's Darkest Self, the hex does a lot more than Vanessa had originally meant to - her mother swallows, and a moment later is choking. She coughs up teeth, and blood, and her whole tongue. The MC describes how her tongue writhes about for a while on her plate, flopping its way across her mashed potatoes.

Every Darkest Self has an escape clause. For The Witch, it's: "To escape your Darkest Self, you must offer peace to the one you have hurt the most." Vanessa's player decides that Vanessa isn't ready to offer peace to anyone just yet, and so she remains her Darkest Self. If her mother calls the cops, then Vanessa will greet them as her Darkest Self. If she gets cornered by Cassidy in the school parking lot the next day, she'll respond to that situation as her Darkest Self. Vanessa's player can decide to have Vanessa work toward escaping her Darkest Self whenever she wants, but she decides that she'd rather have some fun with it first.





Advancement

Experience allows characters to become more powerful over time, gaining access to new moves, increasing stats, or expanding their influence over the world. Characters can gain experience in a number of ways over the course of play. Two of each PC's stats are highlighted, and whenever those stats are rolled, the player marks experience. Certain Skin-specific moves will provide other opportunities for PCs to gain experience. Finally, someone can spend a String to offer a tempting deal to another PC: do something in exchange for an experience point.

Experience is marked on the character sheet by filling in dots. Whenever a character reaches 5 experience, they are able to buy an advancement. The advancement options are listed on the character sheet.

A character cannot have more than 5 experience at a time - they must buy an advancement in order to erase their dots and begin gathering more experience.

34

The Singleton Rule

You may only earn experience from each highlighted stat and each move once per scene. Similarly, you may only earn a String from any one move once per scene.





Gangs

Most Skins have the option to join or belong to a gang, as an advancement option. The Mortal doesn't have this opportunity. The Queen starts out with a gang.

For example, the Vampire has:

- You belong to a **Vampire Coterie**.

Every gang makes demands on its members. These demands have a tendency to push the PCs out of their comfort zones and into the territory of hard decisions. When you join the gang, it's good to have an idea of what those demands are going to be like, in a general sense: "They want me to hunt and feed with them, every few nights."

Every gang also has something that will trigger it into blind action. When that trigger occurs, they will pursue retaliation or dedicated response whether you want them to or not. (You can always roll to *manipulate an NPC* to prevent them from retaliating, though.) When you join the gang, it's good to have an idea of what those demands are going to be like, in a general sense: "They strike back whenever they feel that our kind is being marginalized."

Finally, a gang can be *manipulated* into helping you. When they help you with any task, add 1 to your rolls. When they join you in any act of violence, inflict an additional 1 harm. Note that when they act of their own accord (in response to a trigger, or as part of their demands), the impact they have on the story will often vary - sometimes they'll have the power to outright kill people, and so on. But when they act on your behalf, following your lead, add 1 to your rolls and to your harm.





Seasons

If you're playing for a single session, you'll find that conflicts escalate and get messy, and that some characters will have lots of crossover. But chances are that things won't feel "finished," in that neatly-packaged-up sense of the word. That's fine! A single-session game should be about experiencing the PCs' life, exploring their world, and following through on a couple of messy conflicts.

In a multi-session game, you'll find that small goals will sometimes gain momentum and evolve into major plot arcs. Maybe the MC unveils a villain who challenges the PCs and pits them against one another. Maybe the PCs naturally turn to infighting and it leads to rooftop knife-fights and racy affairs and dead bodies.

While that constantly unfurling action and unpredictable momentum is very fun, it can get tiring to follow it on without rest, *ad nauseum*. For that reason, *Monsterhearts* has seasons - like the seasons in a television show. Momentum builds across sessions, conflicts evolve in unexpected directions, and everything builds towards a series of climactic moments. And then, the dust begins to settle. That's where the season ends.

Seasons work like this: after someone buys their 5th advance, the Season Advances are unlocked, and there's one more session left after this one before the season ends.

Season Advances can be bought just like regular advances. In each Season, each character can only take one Season Advance. Once they've been unlocked, every character has access to them, regardless of whether or not they've earned their 5th advance yet.



Season Advances are a big deal. They allow a character to rewrite their nature, to become a different kind of monster, or to grow up. They allow a player to change characters altogether, or to take on a second character.

Unlocking the Season Advances also signals to everyone that the current chapter of the story is coming to an end. You've got the current session, and one session after that, to bring things to their climax and resolution. Anything that isn't resolved at the end of next session is left hanging in mid-air.

At the end of the Season, take a break and play something new! If you decide to return to the game and do another Season, skip forward in time. Set it at the start of the next school year, or months later, or after some other logical gap in time. This "reset" allows you to build up that same momentum all over again.

Season Advances

The Season Advances are:

- ☞ Change your character's Skin.
- ☞ Rewrite your Sex Move.
- ☞ Rewrite your Darkest Self.
- ☞ Retire your character and start a new one.
- ☞ Gain 2 of the Growing Up moves.

**Change your character's Skin.**

When you change your character's Skin, they become a totally different type of monster. Perhaps they were a Mortal before, but were bitten and become a Vampire. Perhaps they were once Fae, but have died and come back as a Ghost. Perhaps they were a Ghost, but were given a new body and are now a Ghoul.

Vincent summarizes best how to handle this shift in character type:

NOTES FROM THE APOCALYPSE

The idea is that the character:

- ≈ *Keeps everything belonging to her intrinsic self. Her stats, including [Strings], her moves, her improvements, all for sure. Many other things, too.*
- ≈ *Leaves behind everything belonging to her old life. [...]*
- ≈ *Gets everything belonging to her new life. Her new moves, as she chooses them; her new gear and other new crap.*

Rewrite your Sex Move.**Rewrite your Darkest Self.**

Both of these advances are ultimately subject to collaboration with the MC. Tell the MC your idea for a new Sex Move or Darkest Self. The MC will help you make sure it fits the template, and that it's balanced in terms of power level.

A new Sex Move or Darkest Self reveals something about your character's true nature; it demonstrates a shift in their outlook, anxieties and pleasures.



Retire your character and start a new one.

This advance let you start a new character from scratch. Retire your original character to a place of safety and acceptance, removing them from the picture. Then, create a new character to replace them. Be sure to follow all the usual steps for your new character, including setting up their Backstory and initial Strings.

Gain 2 of the Growing Up moves.

There are four Growing Up moves, detailed below. These are powerful moves that let you navigate or even put a stop to all the teenage bullshit going on around you. Each Growing Up move allows characters to transcend a different kind of dysfunctional behavior pattern, getting closer to a place of being able to really take care of themselves and those around them. When you choose this Season Advance, pick two of these moves. In a future Season, you could take this advance again in order to gain the remaining two.

If you've got Growing Up moves on your sheet, it may be unclear sometimes whether to use one of these moves or the basic moves - if you're putting someone in their place, is that *shutting someone down* or is it *calling people on their shit*? In these circumstances, the MC should ask questions to figure out which one applies. Often, it can be clarifying to look at the possible outcomes of each, and ask: which matches up with the momentum of the story better?

The four Growing Up moves are: *make someone feel beautiful*, *call people on their shit*, *intervene against an act of violence*, and *share your pain*.





Make Others Feel Beautiful

When you **make others feel beautiful**, roll with hot. On a 10 up, choose two:

- ☞ they carry 1 forward;
- ☞ they remove a Condition;
- ☞ they mark experience;
- ☞ you carry 1 forward.

On a 7-9, you can offer them an experience point to do what you want.

Instead of sexuality and charisma being tools for gaining power over people, this move allows you to use them as tools for supporting others and helping them grow. You can use it to make people feel good about themselves and accepted for who they are. Without this move, these kinds of gestures can only ever be conditional and partial. When you *make others feel beautiful*, however, a 10 up helps them see the parts of themselves that are powerful and true. This move can break the pattern of mind games and conditional acceptance.

Call People On Their Shit

When you **call people on their shit**, roll with cold. On a 10 up, choose one:

- ☞ they lose a String against someone else;
- ☞ they freeze up, break down, or bail.

On a 7-9, choose one, and they give you a Condition.

This move allows you to take a stand against bullying and abuse. While other moves (*shutting someone down*, *lashing out physically*) might otherwise take effect when you take such a stand, *calling people on their shit* gives you the tools to take power away from the abuser or the bully. You can cause them to lose emotional hold over someone, or you can cause them to freeze up and be unable to continue with whatever it was they were doing. This move can force PCs to freeze up as well as NPCs. When you force someone to lose a String using this move, you get to choose who they lose a String on. The only stipulation is that you can't choose yourself. This move can break the pattern of bullying and domination.



Intervene Against an Act of Violence

When you **intervene against an act of violence**, roll with volatile. On a 10 up, choose one:

- ☞ they take -2 to their roll (NPCs either act at a Disadvantage or fail entirely);
- ☞ deal harm to them;
- ☞ give them a Condition.

On a 7-9, they choose

- ☞ take -2 to their roll (NPCs either act at a Disadvantage or fail entirely);
- ☞ target you with the violence instead.

This move allows you to defend others. When someone is attacking another, you can intervene and either impede that action or deal out eye-for-an-eye justice to the assailant. Doing so can help you to protect the weak and potentially even save a life. This move can break the pattern of violence and fear.

Share Your Pain

41

When you **share your pain**, roll with dark. On a 10 up, choose two. On a 7-9, choose one:

- ☞ remove a Condition (from yourself or someone who listened);
- ☞ carry 1 forward toward helping yourself;
- ☞ those who listened carry 1 forward toward helping you.

This move allows you to reach out to others and ask for support. It allows you to articulate your needs and connect with a community of people capable of meeting them. When you choose your options from this list, you can choose to heal yourself and others (from Conditions), support yourself, or enable others to support you. If you roll 10 up, it's fine to select the "remove a Condition" option twice, each time removing a different Condition. This move can break the pattern of isolation and confusion.





Queer Content

This isn't really a game about monsters. It's a game about the confusion that arises when your body and your social world start changing without your permission.

Your story will be more interesting and real if it includes queer content. It's another dimension of isolation and anxiety to explore through your characters. It's another way to keep the story feral, by breaking down our own expectations concerning "normal" (i.e. heterosexual) relationships and desires. It's also another way to introduce messy, unrequited love interests into the picture.

When someone decides to roll to turn you on, you don't get to block that move by insisting that you're straight (or any other convenient excuse that you've got up your sleeves.) The dice decide whether this sexy person's sexy behavior gains them a String on you. What you are in complete control of, however, is your reaction to what they do. If Lukas rolls to *turn on* Jackson, and succeeds, then we know that Jackson has been turned on by another guy, at least this once. It doesn't replace what was previously true about Jackson, necessarily, but it does add a new dimension to the character. Maybe Jackson's still straight, maybe his relationship with his girlfriend is still as stable as it's ever been, but we also know about these other feelings he's experienced. And given that *Monsterhearts* is a game about messy, sexy melodrama, chances are it'll push Jackson into new and uncomfortable territory.





When I suggest that you introduce queer content, here are some examples of what I mean:

- ☞ Be willing to be surprised about who your character turns out to be and what turns them on.
- ☞ If you're a vampire, ask yourself: does feeding on boys feel the same as feeding on girls? Do your feeding preferences line up with your sexual preferences? In what ways is vampiric feeding a sexual thing?
- ☞ If you're a mortal, take a couple as your *true love*.
- ☞ Explore what it means to be betrayed by your body, whether it's becoming a flesh-eating monster that stalks the night, or being trans and experiencing the wrong puberty, or both.
- ☞ If you're the MC, introduce queer characters, and make them fundamentally different from one another. Let their sexuality and gender be incidental in some cases, and let it be the chaotic thing that drives the story forward in others.

Use the game to explore and challenge your own ideas about gender, sexuality, relationships, what's normal and what's monstrous.





Staying Feral

Every moment of the game leads into the next. When you narrate something, others respond. Moves get triggered. Dice get rolled, and those rolls create new situations to react to. The fiction and the mechanics interact with one another to create an emergent story, one that has its own momentum and energy.

The interactions that you have with the other players and with the mechanics create a story that couldn't have existed in your head alone. It's something feral.

You might have a strong impulse to domesticate the story. Either as the MC or the player, you might have an awesome plan for exactly what could happen next, and where the story could go. In your head, it's spectacular. All you'd need to do is dictate what the other players should do, ignore the dice once or twice, and force your idea into existence. In short: to take control of things.

The game loses its magic when any one player attempts to take control of the future of the story. It becomes small enough to fit inside one person's head. The other players turn into audience members instead of participants. Nobody's experience is enriched when one person turns the collective story into their own private story.

So avoid this impulse. Let the story's messy, chaotic momentum guide it forward. In any given moment, focus on reacting to the other players and to the mechanics. Allow others to foil your plans, or improve upon them. Trust that good story will emerge from the wilderness.



Chapter Three

The Skins





The List

Below are the summaries of each Skin included in Monsterhearts. In the future, additional Skins may be released to supplement this list. Each summary contains a handful of words that capture the essence of the Skin, a brief description of what their focus is, and then the high & low stats of each.

The Chosen

Powerful, vengeful, conflicted, masochistic. The Chosen is a monster slayer who finds themselves drawn to the darkness.

High stats: Hot, Volatile. Low stats: Cold, Dark.

The Fae

Alluring, exotic, fickle, vengeful. The Fae is all about extracting promises, and delivering faerie vengeance when those promises are broken.

High stats: Hot, Dark. Low stats: Cold, Volatile.

The Ghost

Tormented, insecure, intuitive, fickle. The ghost is all about channeling past trauma, seeing people's true selves, and having spooky powers.

High stats: Cold, Dark. Low stats: Hot, Volatile.

The Ghoul

Cold, unwavering, hungry. The ghoul died, and came back with dulled emotions and a hunger for human flesh. The ghoul benefits from being disaffected and malicious.

High stats: Cold, Volatile. Low stats: Hot, Dark.

The Infernal

Powerful, desperate, addicted. The infernal has a demonic sugar daddy - someone who gets them things they want. At a price.

High stats: Volatile, Dark. Low stats: Hot, Cold.





The Mortal

Vulnerable, codependent, magnetic, beautiful. The mortal is all about benefiting from codependency, and racking up experience.

High stats: Hot, Dark. Low stats: Cold, Volatile.

The Queen

Commanding, irresistible, bitchy, sexy. The queen is all about turning cliques and popularity into weapons.

High stats: Hot, Cold. Low stats: Volatile, Dark.

The Vampire

Icy, manipulative, pretty, hypnotic. The vampire is all about emotional entrenchment and emotional dominance.

High stats: Hot, Cold. Low stats: Volatile, Dark.

The Werewolf

Passionate, violent, muscular, fickle. The werewolf is all about using physical violence and transformation to get what it wants.

High stats: Hot, Volatile. Low stats: Cold, Dark.

The Witch

Manipulative, secretive, judgemental, brooding. The witch is all about casting silent judgement, and powerful hexes, from the safety of her own bedroom.

High stats: Cold, Dark. Low stats: Hot, Volatile.





The Chosen

The world needs you. It needs someone brave enough to walk blindly into the darkness, and to shine a light for all the lost souls out there. They need a champion. They can't do it alone.

There's just that one nagging worry, the one that rears its head at the worst possible moments: what if you're not good enough?





Names

Ajani, Ariel, Caleb, Dominic, Gabriel, Jackson, Morgan, Raidah, Susie, Victoria

A common name, a strong-sounding name, a name implying victory, a name implying tribulation

Look

strong, stubborn, average, bitter, outcast, anxious

unwavering eyes, disquieting eyes, radiant eyes, wounded eyes, blue eyes

Origin

destined, marked by trauma, marked by the supernatural, soul survivor, doing what's necessary

49

Stats

Hot 1, Cold -1, Volatile 1, Dark -1





Chosen Moves

Choose two:

○ Mercy

When you decide to spare someone you have reason to kill, take a String on them.

○ Growing Pains

When you fail to protect your friends, mark experience.

○ Final Showdown

Spend 4 Strings you have on an NPC to kill them. They are irrevocably dead. They can spend any Strings they have against you to deal you harm, 1-for-1, on the way out.

○ Come Prepared

You have an outlandishly large armory, complete with ancient artifacts. Just in case the need arises.

○ To The Books

When the chips are down, and the sinister villain seems unbeatable, you can turn to your friends for research help. Roll with the number of people assisting you. On a 10 up, choose two. On a 7-9, choose one:

- 🌀 ask the MC a question (MC must answer truthfully);
- 🌀 your enemy gains the Condition secret weakness;
- 🌀 gain a String on your enemy;
- 🌀 carry 1 forward.

○ Take the Blow

When you leap into the way and take the blow instead of someone else, roll with Volatile. On a 10 up, you take the harm instead of them, but reduce it by 1. • On a 7-9, you take the harm instead of them.

○ Light the Way

Whenever your friends follow through on your commands or your lead, they add 1 to their roll. (If your friends are NPCs, they instead act at an Advantage.)





Your Backstory

You have two friends who you can rely on for monster-slaying support. Take a String on each.

There's someone who knows that you're the Chosen one, and wants you dead. The MC gives them a name and two Strings on you.

Advancement

- Take another Chosen move.
- Take another Chosen move.
- Take a move from another Skin.
- Take a move from another Skin.
- You have **Unholy Allies**.
- Add 1 to Hot (max 3).
- Add 1 to Cold (max 3).
- Add 1 to Volatile (max 3).
- Add 1 to Dark (max 3).

51

Sex Move

When you have sex, heal all of your wounds, and cure all of your Conditions. If they disgust you, give them a String. If you disgust yourself, give them a String.

Darkest Self

None of your friends can help. They're not strong like you are. You need to chase down the biggest threat imaginable, immediately and alone. Any challenges or dangers that you encounter must be faced head on, even if they might kill you. You escape your Darkest Self when someone comes to your rescue or you wake up in the hospital, whichever comes first.





Playing The Chosen

Powerful, vengeful, conflicted, masochistic. The Chosen is a monster slayer who finds themselves drawn to the darkness.

Introducing The Chosen into a game shifts the attention towards fighting a big bad villain, someone external to the PCs. While The Chosen still creates inter-PC turmoil, this shift can have a big impact on the tone of the game.

For *Mercy* to qualify, there must be at least the implied possibility that you were going to kill them. This could include uttering and then retracting a death threat in the lunchroom.

If you take *Final Showdown*, it signals to the MC that you want to see doomsday monsters and powerful underworld foes. Similarly, when you name a monster during “your backstory,” use the opportunity to create a character that you’re interested in exploring (and confronting) with your character.



The Fae

At the edges of this world, just beyond the veil, there are colours that few mortals even dream of. Beauty enough to shatter any heart. The Fae live and breathe at the edges of this world. They keep a dusting of that magic tucked behind their ears, just in case.

And the Fae are willing to share. They're nothing if not generous, asking for only one thing in return. A promise. Keep it, and the true beauty of the world will be revealed. Break it, and feel the wrath of faery vengeance.





Names

Anders, Aurora, Crow, Gail, Harmony, Iris, Lilith, Ping, Selene, Sienna, Walthus

A name taken from nature, a new age name, a soft-sounding name, a mystical name

Look

dainty, girlish, gaunt, mysterious, disheveled

quick eyes, lyrical eyes, mesmerizing eyes, laughing eyes, piercing eyes

Origin

fae born, fae blooded, adopted, touched with the gift, stole the gift

Stats

Hot 1, Cold -1, Volatile -1, Dark 1

Fae Moves

You get this one, and choose one more:

● Faery Contract

If someone breaks a promise or contract made to you, take a String on them. When spending a String to even out the score and get justice on a broken promise, add these options:

- ~ they fuck up something simple at a crucial moment;
- ~ add 2 to your roll on an act of vengeance;
- ~ they suffer 1 harm, whether the cause is obvious or not.





○ The Constant Bargain

When someone asks you to do something important for them, and you do it, roll with hot. On a 10 up, they lose a String on you, and you gain one on them. • On a 7-9, choose one or the other. • On a miss, you've shown that they can walk all over you, and they take a String on you.

○ The Wild Hunt

When you draw upon your most feral manner, echoing the lithe movements of a cat or the voracity of a wolf, add 1 to your roll to *turn someone on*.

○ Beyond The Veil

When you attempt to commune with the Faery King, *gaze into the abyss*. On a 10 up, add this option to the list: find a hidden String against someone. • On a 7-9, add this option to the list: the visions are clear, but the Faery King demands a favor of you.

○ Lure

Whenever someone makes a promise to you, they mark experience. Whenever someone breaks a promise to you and you seek vengeance, mark experience.

○ Guide

If you spend a String on someone willing, you can bring them across the veil, into the faery court. The spell doesn't last long, though, before you're both returned to the mundane world.

○ Unashamed

You can give someone a String on you to add 3 to your attempt to *turn them on*.





Your Backstory

You wear your heart on your sleeve. Give everyone one String.

You've captured someone's fancy. Gain 2 Strings on them.

Advancement

- Take another Fae move.
- Take another Fae move.
- Take a move from another Skin.
- Take a move from another Skin.
- You belong to a **Jury of Fae**.
- Add 1 to Hot (max 3).
- Add 1 to Cold (max 3).
- Add 1 to Volatile (max 3).
- Add 1 to Dark (max 3).

56

Sex Move

When you lie naked with another, you can ask them for a promise. If they refuse, take 2 Strings on them.

Darkest Self

Everything you say is a promise. Everything you hear is a promise. If a promise is broken, justice must be wrought in blood. To escape your Darkest Self, you must in some way re-balance the scales of justice.





Playing The Fae

Alluring, exotic, fickle, vengeful. The Fae is all about extracting promises, and wielding faerie vengeance when those promises are broken.

The Fae are hot and hard to resist. They use those attributes to get promises from people, and those promises hold cosmic power. Their low Cold and Volatile stats make it hard to shut others down or keep them at bay. Instead, they excel at getting close to people.

Faery Contract gives mechanical weight to broken promises. You gain Strings and new powers. Those new String-spending options are assumed to be magical in some way. You can cause them to “fuck up something simple at a crucial moment” just by sitting on the bleachers and wishing that they would. Your will seems to manifest itself in the world.

57

Write down any promises you receive. There’s no move that allows you to force a promise out of someone, but clever roleplaying and mechanical incentives can help you here.

Beyond The Veil introduces the idea of a Faery King. Choosing this move prompts a number of questions: what is faery society like? What forces do you owe fealty to?

Your Darkest Self has a very ambiguous “escape clause.” What is required to re-balance the scales of justice will be entirely situational. You and the MC should both be in agreement that things have been set right, before you can escape yourself.





The Ghost

Ghosty ghost. You're dead.

The Skins

58

Chapter Three





Name

Alastor, Avira, Catherine, Daniel, Kara, Lenora, Orville, Rufus, Spencer, Tien

An antiquated name, a mournful name, a stuffy-sounding name, a name from the old country

Look

Forlorn, meek, distant, stuffy, out of place, brooding

Hollow eyes, dull eyes, unnerving eyes, piercing eyes, pained eyes

Origin

Murdered in cold blood, murdered in hot passion, left to die, tragic accident, a confused death

59

Stats

Hot -1, Cold 1, Volatile -1, Dark 1





Ghost Moves

You get this one, and choose one more:

● Unresolved Trauma

Whenever you project the blame and trauma of your death onto your current situation, roll with dark. On a 10 up, give two people the *blamed* condition. On a 7-9, give up to two people the *blamed* condition, but for each, choose one:

- ☞ You gain the *delusional* condition,
- ☞ You can't speak during this scene,
- ☞ You suffer one harm,
- ☞ You start re-enacting the scene of your death.

○ Creep

When you secretly witness someone in their most intimate moments, perhaps showering or sleeping, gain a String on them.

○ Vengeful

Whenever you *lash out physically* at someone with the *blamed* condition, roll using Dark. Add 1 extra harm to whatever harm you deal.

○ Forgive and Forget

Whenever you accept that someone isn't responsible for your pain and suffering, and absolve them of their *blamed* condition, mark experience.

○ Hungry Ghost

You find sustenance in sadness. When others dump their emotional problems on you, roll with dark. On a 10 up, they lose all their conditions, and you choose one:

- ☞ Mark experience,
- ☞ Carry one forward,
- ☞ Gain a String on them

On a 7-9, they choose one:

- ☞ They lose all their conditions,
- ☞ They gain a String on you.





○ Dissipate

You can walk through walls.

Your Backstory

Someone knows that you're dead, and how you died. They gain a String on you.

You've been inside someone's bedroom while they were sleeping. Take a String on them.

Advancement

- Take another Ghost move.
- Take another Ghost move.
- Take a move from another Skin.
- Take a move from another Skin.
- You have a **House of Spooks**.
- Add 1 to Hot (max 3).
- Add 1 to Cold (max 3).
- Add 1 to Volatile (max 3).
- Add 1 to Dark (max 3).

Sex Move

When you have sex with someone, you both get to ask a question of one another's characters. This can be spoken by your character, or simply asked player-to-player. The other person must answer honestly and directly.

Darkest Self

You become invisible. No one can see you, feel you, or hear your voice. You can still affect inanimate objects, but this is your only avenue of communication. You escape your Darkest Self when someone acknowledges your presence, and demonstrates how much they want you around.





Playing The Ghost

Tormented, insecure, intuitive, fickle. The ghost is all about channeling past trauma, seeing people's true selves, and having spooky powers.

There are several different directions to take The Ghost. The first is a callous and dangerous spirit, using *Unresolved Trauma* and *Vengeful* to vent your pain upon the next generation. The second is a voyeuristic and lonely spook, forever trapped in a state of pubescent tragedy. *Creep* and *Hungry Ghost* both contribute here. The third is someone trapped in a cycle of confused self-haunting, vacillating between *Unresolved Trauma* and *Forgive and Forget*. Certainly other interpretations are possible. The Ghost has a great deal of emotional range to explore.

Other characters can remove the *blamed* Condition in the same way that they would remove any other Condition.

When you use Dissipate to escape a scary or tense situation, it still counts as *running away*.

The 7-9 options for *Hungry Ghost* represent the dangerous side of being someone's shoulder-to-cry-on. They might use your support in order to regain their composure and wellness, or they might use your empathy as a tool to gain power over you.

The idea behind the **House of Spooks** gang is that you reside within a haunted house, or have somehow banded together with the spirit inhabitants of a haunted house. Discuss with the MC the physical limitations that your gang experiences, as well as the amount of power they have over those who enter the house.



The Ghoul

Death changed you. It took away your contemplative joy, it dulled your senses, and it left you impossibly hungry. That hunger is always with you, like a hum in your ears that swells and crescendos until you can't hear anything else. Unattended, it will come to dominate you - but feeding it may be just as bad.

There is a certain beauty to what you've become. Your gaunt body, its unnatural form - it draws people in. Your stark disinterest seems exotic. But underneath that disaffected presentation - the hunger, the hunger.





Name

Akuji, Cage, Cole, Georgia, Horace, Iggy, Mara, Morrigan, Silas, Sharona, Victor, Zed

A cold-sounding name, a guttural name, a name that evokes death or rebirth, a sorrowful name

Look

gaunt, striking, thin, stiff, disfigured

hollow eyes, quiet eyes, calculating eyes, harsh eyes, hungry eyes

Origin

resurrected, constructed, disturbed, rejected, sent

Stats

Hot -1, Cold 1, Volatile 1, Dark -1



Ghoul Moves

You get this one, and choose two more:

● The Hunger

You have a Hunger for (circle 1): flesh, chaos, power, fear.

When you heedlessly pursue a Hunger, add 1 to rolls.
When you ignore a feeding opportunity, roll to *hold steady*.

○ Disaffected

When you *turn someone on*, roll with cold.

○ Short Rest for the Wicked

When you die, wait it out. Some hours later, you wake up fully healed.

○ What the Right Hand Wants

Your body was stitched together in parts and pieces. And those parts and pieces echo different histories, want different things. Create another Hunger.

○ Watchful Golem

When you defend someone without them ever knowing about it, mark experience.

○ Satiety

When you satiate a Hunger, choose one:

- ☞ heal one harm;
- ☞ remove a Condition;
- ☞ mark experience;
- ☞ carry 1 forward.

○ Ending

You remember how you died. When you tell someone about it, give them the Condition *morbid*, and roll to *turn them on*.





Your Backstory

Someone reminded you what love was, when you thought that death had stolen it away from you forever. Give them 2 Strings.

Did anyone watch you die, or watch you come back to life? If so, you both gain 2 Strings on each other.

Advancement

- Take another Ghoul move.
- Take another Ghoul move.
- Take a move from another Skin.
- Take a move from another Skin.
- You have **Necromantic Caretakers**.
- Add 1 to Hot (max 3).
- Add 1 to Cold (max 3).
- Add 1 to Volatile (max 3).
- Add 1 to Dark (max 3).

Sex Move

When you have sex with someone, add “having sex with [this person]” as an additional Hunger. If you already have this Hunger, mark experience.

Darkest Self

You will maim, kill and destroy anything in between you and the nearest object of your hunger. You will feed relentlessly. You escape your Darkest Self when someone restrains you or fends you off for long enough for you to regain your composure – at least thirty or forty minutes.





Playing The Ghoul

Cold, unwavering, hungry. The ghoul died, and came back with dulled emotions and a hunger for human flesh. The ghoul benefits from being disaffected and malicious.

The Hunger gives you an option: you can crave human flesh, like a standard zombie, or you can crave something a little bit more subtle. It's important that whatever your Hunger is, satiating it is scary and messy. Surprising someone and saying "boo!" won't fulfil your Hunger for Fear. You need to terrorize people, and make them afraid to walk home alone at night. If your Hunger is for Flesh, then a steak from the supermarket won't do. Or it'll do, but you require pounds and pounds of steak every day. Whatever the specifics, Hungers should be a big and difficult struggle for your character to deal with.

Short Rest for the Wicked gives the MC a chance to frame you into freaky, unexpected situations. Choosing to die and then return to life is like saying, "Alright, MC, hit me. I can take it." Savour the pandemonium.

Watchful Golem allows you to add a gentle side to your character without disrupting the unnerving sociopath image that The Ghoul readily cultivates.





The Infernal

At first, it seemed innocent. It gave you things, made you feel good about yourself. You came to it with your problems, and it fixed them. When you asked how you could return the favour, it told you to be patient - that all debts would be settled in due time. That was the first time you heard it mention debts.

You've got Satan as your corner-man, or a demon in your brain. Or maybe the stars glow just for you. Regardless, you owe a debt to something much bigger and scarier than you'll ever be.





Name

Baron, Cain, Chloe, Damien, Logan, Mark, Mika, Omar, Ophelia, Poe, Yoanna

An authoritative name, a cowardly name, a name implying doom, a fierce-sounding name

Look

distant, quiet, anxious, tense, frantic, vicious

empty eyes, calculating eyes, burning eyes, flickering eyes, piercing eyes

Origin

bartered soul, last-chancer, returned, emissary, legion, lackey, chosen

69

Stats

Hot -1, Cold -1, Volatile 1, Dark 1





Infernal Moves

You get this one, and choose one more:

● Soul Debt

Name a dark power that you owe a debt to. Choose two Bargains that it has made with you. It can hold Strings against you. Whenever it collects 5 Strings against you, trigger your Darkest Self.

○ Dark Recruiter

When you bring an innocent soul to the dark power, mark experience.

○ Unknowable

When you *lash out physically* against someone, on a 10 up, they lose 1 String on you. • On a 7-9, add to your list of options: they lose 1 String on you.

○ Can't Save Myself

When somebody saves you from forces too powerful for you to reckon with, they mark experience, and you gain a String on them.

Your Dark Power

Come up with a name for your dark power, if you know its name. Choose a title from the list, to describe this entity that you've made your bargains with:

- The Poisoner
- The Trickster
- The Connoisseur
- The Fallen
- The Glutton
- The Emissary
- The Butcher
- The Tyrant

Or, if you prefer not to know what or who you have been making bargains with, that's fine - just let the MC know.





Bargains

Choose two Bargains that the dark power has made with you:

○ The Power Flows Through You

You can give the dark power a String in order to add 2 to your next roll (choose before rolling).

○ Numbing It Out

You can give the dark power a String in order to remove a Condition or up to two harm.

○ Elsewise Power

You can give the dark power a String to use a move you don't have, just this once. This move can come from any playbook.

○ Uncanny Voices

You can give the dark power a String in order to realize a secret about someone you're talking to. The owner of that character will reveal one of their secret fears, secret desires, or secret strengths (they choose.)

○ Strings Attached

You can ask the dark power for something that you really, really want. The MC will attach a price to the thing you want, and hint at an undesired twist in its nature. If you pay the price, you'll get what you're after.





Your Backstory

You owe debts. Give away 3 Strings, divided any way you like between the dark power and the other characters.

Someone thinks they can save you. Gain a String on them.

Advancement

- Take another Infernal move.
- Take the remaining Bargains.
- Create a new Bargain (MC approval).
- Take a move from another Skin.
- Take a move from another Skin.
- You supply for **Needy Fiends**.
- Add 1 to Hot (max 3).
- Add 1 to Cold (max 3).
- Add 1 to Volatile (max 3).
- Add 1 to Dark (max 3).

Sex Move

When you have sex, the dark power loses a String on you and gains a String on whoever you had sex with.

Darkest Self

You can't get what you need, anymore. The world has left you cold and alone, shivering in the wake of your own addictions. The dark power will make some open-ended demands of you, and it'll promise you some lucrative (and perhaps volatile) things in return. Every demand you fulfill brings you a little closer to feeling whole again, to rekindling the fire in your heart. Whenever you fulfill those demands, remove a String it holds on you. You escape your Darkest Self when the dark power has no more Strings on you, or when you agree to an even worse bargain with an even more dangerous dark power.





Playing The Infernal

Powerful, desperate, addicted. The infernal has a demonic sugar daddy - someone who gets them things they want. At a price.

The central mechanical game that The Infernal plays is choosing when to give the dark power Strings (via Bargains). The Infernal is extremely powerful when they're borrowing power heavily, but eventually they crash and become powerless for a while.

It's important to remember that the crashing part isn't a punishment, but part of a story arc. There's no need to avoid the crash, nor to stop using Bargains once the dark power has 4 Strings on you. Your character is interesting and powerful because they are compliant with this story arc of meteoric power and sudden withdrawal.

With *Dark Recruiter*, the specifics of what it means to "bring someone to the dark power" is left up to interpretation and context. It might mean a sacrificial killing, it might mean physically presenting them before the dark power, or it might mean something different altogether.

With *Strings Attached*, you'll never get exactly the thing you're looking for. The MC is instructed to add an undesirable twist to the thing. If you want a car, it might be stolen, or possessed, or have a dead person in the trunk. You can always turn the thing down.





The Mortal

None of them would understand. What you have here, in this dark and secret place, it's beautiful. They'd warn you that this sort of beauty is dangerous, like a raging fire. Well some things are worth getting burned for.

Love has eclipsed all hope. And the dark has left you feeling beautiful.





Names

Anne, Carla, Deirdre, James, Jonathan, Leena, Patrick, Robin, Shen, Timothy, Wendy

A common name, a soft-sounding name, a pretty name, an unadorned name

Look

quiet, desperate, awkward, beautiful, displaced

doe eyes, sad eyes, darting eyes, nervous eyes, human eyes

Origin

new kid in town, kid next door, your barista, someone's girlfriend, someone's boyfriend, nobody

75

Stats

Hot 1, Cold -1, Volatile -1, Dark 1





Mortal Moves

You get this one, and choose two more:

● True Love

You always have exactly one lover. The first is chosen during your backstory. If you ever fall in love with someone else instead, give them a String and they become your new lover. You always carry 1 forward to earning your lover's heart or fancy.

○ Mess With Me, Mess With Him

When you use your lover's name as a threat, add 2 to your roll to *shut someone down* or *hold steady*. Your lover gains a String on you.

○ Sympathy is My Weapon

Every time you forgive someone for hurting you, and excuse their base nature, take a String on them.

○ Excuses Are My Armour

When you ignore some blatant problem with your lover or how they treat you, mark experience.

○ Downward Spiral

When you *gaze into the abyss*, you may cause yourself 1 harm. If you do, add 2 to your roll.

○ Down the Rabbit Hole

When you go poking your nose in affairs not meant for your kind, someone involved in the situation gains a String on you, and you mark experience.

○ Entrenched

If you and another character have a total of 5 or more Strings on one another, gain 1 to all rolls against them.





Your Backstory

The Mortal always declares their backstory last. Declare one person to be your lover. Give them three Strings on you. Take one String on them.

Advancement

- Take another Mortal move.
- Take another Mortal move.
- Take a move from another Skin.
- Take a move from another Skin.
- Take a move from another Skin.
- Add 1 to Hot (max 3).
- Add 1 to Cold (max 3).
- Add 1 to Volatile (max 3).
- Add 1 to Dark (max 3).

Sex Move

When you have sex with someone, trigger their Darkest Self.

Darkest Self

Nobody understands you, or even wants to. They'd rather you disappear. Well, you're not going to disappear. You're going to make life a living hell for them. You'll betray the wicked to the judges, the weak to the executioners. You'll pit humans and supernaturals against one another, until everyone looks like monsters. Only seeing the pain that you're causing your lover will let you escape your Darkest Self.





Playing The Mortal

Vulnerable, codependent, magnetic, beautiful. The mortal is all about benefiting from codependency, and racking up experience.

For anybody else, giving away a String would represent a loss of control. For you, it's more symbiotic - you get power by giving it away.

You don't necessarily need to be in a relationship with someone to declare them your *True Love*.

Mess With Me, Mess With Him allows you to escape your current problem by creating potential future problems for yourself (by giving more power to your *lover*). The hidden benefit here is that you're better equipped to deal with your *lover's* problems than you are anyone else's.

Entrenched gives you a concrete benefit for giving away Strings. So long as you and another character have 5 Strings between one another (perhaps you have 1 on them, and they have 4 on you), you prosper.

Your Sex Move might seem negative, but remember: The Mortal benefits from victim-hood. Their Darkest Self transition need not be immediate - it could take place an hour after you leave their place, for example.



The Queen

You're one of the special ones. A sovereign beauty. You deserve more than the rest of this wretched world does. You deserve the will and worship of those around you.

And it's not only because you're better than them. It's because you make them better. Strong, beautiful, complete. They'd be nothing without you.





Name

Burton, Brittany, Cordelia, Drake, Jacqueline, Kimball, Raymond, Reyes, Varun, Veronica

A lordly name, a cold-sounding name, a harsh-sounding name, a name evoking leadership

Look

stunning, domineering, icy, stuck up

calculating eyes, captivating eyes, brooding eyes, murky eyes, vacant eyes

Origin

most popular kid in school, most dangerous person around, occult leader, firstborn of the hive mind, source of the infection

Stats

Hot 1, Cold 1, Volatile -1, Dark -1



Queen Moves

You get this one, and choose one more:

● The Clique

You're at the head of the toughest, coolest, most powerful clique around. They count as a gang. Choose one of the following strengths for your gang:

- ☞ they're armed (with guns and real dangerous stuff);
- ☞ they're connected (with money and designer drugs);
- ☞ they're talented (in a band or sports team);
- ☞ they're cultists (with dark oaths and willingness to die).

○ The Shield

When you're surrounded by your gang, subtract 1 from any rolls against you. (NPCs act at a Disadvantage.)

○ Bought Loyalty

You can give an NPC a String against you to add 2 to your *manipulate an NPC* roll against them. (You can only choose to do so before rolling.)

○ And Your Enemies Closer

When someone betrays you, gain a String on them.

○ Many Bodies

When you promise one of your gang members to someone, add 2 to your roll to *turn someone on*. When one of your gang members has sex with someone, it triggers your Sex Move.

○ Streaming

You have a telepathic connection with your gang members. You can always hear their emotions and fears. When you try to hear specific thoughts, *gaze into the abyss* about it and add 1 to your roll.





Your Backstory

Name three NPCs who are members of your gang. Gain a String on each.

You find someone threatening. Give them a String on you, and take two Strings on them.

Advancement

- Take another Queen move.
- Take another Queen move.
- Take a move from another Skin.
- Take a move from another Skin.
- Take *The Clique* again, detailing a second gang.
- Add 1 to Hot (max 3).
- Add 1 to Cold (max 3).
- Add 1 to Volatile (max 3).
- Add 1 to Dark (max 3).

Sex Move

When you have sex with someone, they gain the Condition *one of them*. While the Condition remains, they count as part of your gang.

Darkest Self

They've failed you. This is all their fault, and there's no reason why you should have to suffer the consequences of their idiocy. You need to make an example out of each of them, a cruel and unwavering example. You escape your Darkest Self when you relinquish part of your power over to someone more deserving, or when you destroy an innocent person in order to prove your might.





Playing The Queen

Commanding, irresistible, bitchy, sexy. The queen is about turning cliques and popularity into weapons.

The different strength options for *The Clique* don't have a specific mechanical effect. Rather, they help define what your gang is going to be able to help you with and what kind of power they will afford you.

The Shield works differently depending on whether the person approaching you is a PC or an NPC. If it's a PC, then that character suffers -1 toward acting against you. If it's an NPC, then tell the MC that "*The Shield* puts them at a Disadvantage." That's a specific MC mechanic that will make NPCs who act against you weaker and more vulnerable.

With *And Your Enemies Closer*, someone can only betray you if you were depending on them to help you out in some way. It's valid to count a screw-up as a betrayal.

Streaming is the only overtly supernatural ability that The Queen possesses (although *Many Bodies* does strongly imply some kind of supernatural bond at work). Avoid this move and you can make a mundane super-popular teen queen character.

The title "Queen" is used in a gender-nonspecific way. It's fine to make a male Queen.





The Vampire

You are beauty eternal. You are the darkness that everyone wants to taste, but no one wants to understand. It's there in your eyes, your carefully-chosen words, and your every gesture: you no longer have a soul.

Some vampire revel in that fact, their afterlife a tapestry of exsanguination and hedonism. Others hate the evil in their skin, solemnly vowing to a chaste and lonely existence. Either way, someone suffers. The choice is yours.





Names

Amanda, Cassius, Clayton, Helene, Isaiah, Jessamine, Jong, Lucian, Marcell, Morana, Serina

A stately name, an antiquated name, a biblical name, a brooding name, a snobby name

Look

intense, aloof, pale, predatory, smoldering, old-fashioned

dead eyes, hungry eyes, thirsty eyes, lusty eyes, pained eyes

Origin

newly reborn, old by human terms, taken this century, many ages old, maker, lord

85

Stats

Hot 1, Cold 1, Volatile -1, Dark -1





Vampire Moves

Choose two:

○ Hypnotic

You can hypnotize people who have no Strings on you. Roll with hot. On a 10 up, they do exactly what you wish and have no idea that anything is wrong. • On a 7-9, the hypnosis works, but choose one:

- ☞ they realize you hypnotized them;
- ☞ they fuck up your commands;
- ☞ their sanity is unhinged.

○ Invited

You cannot enter a home without being invited. Whenever someone invites you, take a String on them.

○ The Feeding

You feed on hot blood. If this is the first time they've ever been fed upon, you both mark experience. When you feed, choose two:

- ☞ you heal 1 harm previously suffered,
- ☞ you carry 1 forward,
- ☞ they don't die.

○ Marked for the Hunt

When you feed on someone, you establish a close bond with them. When you *gaze into the abyss* concerning their whereabouts or well-being, roll as if you had Dark 3.

○ Cold as Ice

When you successfully *shut someone down* (7 up), you may choose an extra option from the 7-9 list.

○ Inescapable

You may spend a String on someone to demand that they not walk out on you. If they still do, gain 2 Strings on them.





Your Backstory

You're beautiful. Gain a String on everyone.

Someone once saved your unlife. They gain 2 Strings on you.

Advancement

- Take another Vampire move.
- Take another Vampire move.
- Take a move from another Skin.
- Take a move from another Skin.
- You belong to a **Vampire Coterie**.
- Add 1 to Hot (max 3).
- Add 1 to Cold (max 3).
- Add 1 to Volatile (max 3).
- Add 1 to Dark (max 3).

Sex Move

When you deny someone sexually, gain a String on them.
When you have sex with someone, lose all Strings on that person.

Darkest Self

Everyone is your pawn, your plaything. You hurt them and make them vulnerable, for sport, like a cat does with a mouse. You feed to the point of death whenever you're alone with someone, though you take your time. You escape your Darkest Self when you're put in your rightful place, by someone more powerful than you.





Playing The Vampire

Icy, manipulative, pretty, hypnotic. The vampire is about emotional entrenchment and emotional dominance.

As The Vampire, you'll benefit from getting under people's skins without ever provoking them to physical confrontation. The Vampire is the master of hot-and-cold dynamics.

We all know a lot of vampire myths, some of them even contradictory. It's up to your playgroup to determine what holds true in your game. Are vampires allergic to garlic and crosses? If you don't take *Invited*, it's fine to disregard the myth about vampires needing permission to enter a private residence.

With *Marked For The Hunt*, it's assumed that you can track someone easily no matter how recently the feeding took place, unless there's some reason why their scent or blood would have changed.



The Werewolf

Everyone around you seems so willing to play the roles they are handed, to quietly colour within the lines. They've been tamed, domesticated. You're of a different stock. You've broken down the fence built to contain you. You've howled at the moon, and heard it howl back.

The transformation is complete. This is what you were always meant to be. Wild. Unwavering. Alive.





Name

Cassidy, Candika, Flinch, Levi, Margot, Lorrie, Luna, Peter, Tucker, Zachary

A trailer park name, a tough name, a name that evokes the full moon, a primal name

Look

Primal, unkempt, lunatic, wiry, rugged, feisty

Fierce eyes, savage eyes, cunning eyes, predatory eyes, wolf eyes

Origin

Born a wolf, raised by wolves, ancestral power, awoken, bitten, favoured by the moon

Stats

Hot 1, Cold -1, Volatile 1, Dark -1



Werewolf Moves

Choose two:

○ Scent of Blood

Add 1 to all rolls against those who have been harmed in this scene already.

○ Unstable

When you become your Darkest Self, mark experience.

○ Primal Dominance

When you harm someone, take a String on them.

○ Uncontainable

When you attempt to escape any form of physical entrapment, roll with volatile. On a 10 up, you escape. • On a 7-9 the MC will offer you a hard bargain: agree if you want to escape.

○ Bare Your Fangs

While you are your Darkest Self, you may use Volatile instead of Cold to *shut someone down or hold steady*.

○ Howl at the Moon

When basked in moonlight, add 2 to your Dark score.

○ Heightened Senses

When you rely on your animal instincts to make sense of a charged situation, roll with dark. On a 10 up, ask the MC three questions. If you act on one of the MC's answers, add 1 to your first roll. • On a 7-9, ask one:

- ☞ Where's my best escape route or way in?
- ☞ Which enemy is the most vulnerable to me?
- ☞ What's their secret weakness?
- ☞ What poses the biggest threat to me?
- ☞ Who's in control here?

○ Spirit Armour

When basked in moonlight, any harm that you suffer is reduced by 1, and you add 2 to *hold steady* rolls.





Your Backstory

You lack subtlety. Give a String to everyone.

You've spent weeks watching someone from a distance. Their scent and mannerisms are unmistakable to you now. Take 2 Strings on them.

Advancement

- Take another Werewolf move.
- Take another Werewolf move.
- Take a move from another Skin.
- Take a move from another Skin.
- You belong to a **Wolf Pack**.
- Add 1 to Hot (max 3).
- Add 1 to Cold (max 3).
- Add 1 to Volatile (max 3).
- Add 1 to Dark (max 3).

Sex Move

When you have sex with someone, you establish a spirit connection with them. Until either of you breaks that spirit connection, by having sex with someone else, add 1 to all rolls made to defend them. You can tell when that connection has been broken.

Darkest Self

You transform into a terrifying wolf-creature. You crave power and dominance, and those are earned through bloodshed. If anyone attempts to stand in your way, they must be brought down and made to bleed. You escape your Darkest Self when you wound someone you really care about or the sun rises, whichever happens first.





Playing the Werewolf

Passionate, violent, muscular, fickle. The werewolf is all about using physical violence and transformation to get what it wants.

With both *Scent of Blood* and *Primal Dominance*, harm refers to causing physical damage to a character that's recorded on their harm track.

If you've played *Apocalypse World*, you'll note that *Heightened Senses* is the parallel to that game's *read a charged situation*.

There are a number of different werewolf mythologies around the world, many of which contradict one another. In *Monsterhearts*, you can make decisions about which of those mythologies hold true.

Since someone could potentially become their Darkest Self at any time, we know that werewolves don't always need to wait until the full moon to transform. It's up to your playgroup to decide whether you can turn into a wolf without becoming your Darkest Self. If a Darkest Self transformation is required, you can provoke that transformation by putting yourself at four harm.

Your wolf self has the same stats as your human self. What changes is your role and place in the story - new actions and opportunities will make sense in this new context. Further, moves like *Unstable* and *Bare Your Fangs* take effect when you become your Darkest Self.





The Witch

In every lock of hair, every furtive glance, every secret note that transfers hands during history class – there is an invitation. An invitation to be fucked with. Not that witchcraft is about fucking with others, exactly, but it's hard not to notice how utterly malleable the world is, once you know a thing or two about magick.

Of course, a good witch like you knows restraint. A good witch turns a blind eye to all those invitations, and doesn't think about how sweet vengeance and control might be. A good witch is above that sort of thing. At least, most of the time.





Names

Abrielle, Annalee, Cordelia, Darius, Evelyn, Gerard, Lucca, Merrill, Sabrina, Vanessa

A pretty name, a pagan name, a cold-sounding name, a pretentious name

Look

lithe, guarded, coy, edgy, brooding

calculating eyes, sinister eyes, playful eyes, smirking eyes, deep eyes

Origin

voodoo, wiccan, shamanic, dabbler, gifted, awoken

95

Stats

Hot -1, Cold 1, Volatile -1, Dark 1





Witch Moves

You get these two, and choose one more:

● Sympathetic Tokens

You gain power from sympathetic tokens - items of personal significance that you take from others. Each sympathetic token counts as a String.

● Hex-Casting

You can cast Hexes. Choose two that you know. To cast them, either expend a sympathetic token during a secret ritual, or meet the target's gaze and chant at them in tongues. Then roll with dark. On a 10 up, the Hex works, and can easily be reversed. On a 7-9, it works but choose one:

- ☞ the casting does you 1 harm;
- ☞ the Hex has unexpected side effects;
- ☞ trigger your Darkest Self.

○ Transgressive Magic

When your ritual transgresses the community's moral and sexual standards, add 1 to your *hex-casting* roll.

○ Bide My Time

If you've got a sympathetic token against someone, add 1 to all rolls to *hold steady* against their actions or to *run away* from them.

○ Sanctuary

You have a secret place for practising witchcraft. Add 1 to all rolls you make within this space.





Hexes

○ Wither

The person loses all of their hair, or their teeth start rotting and falling out, or their period comes and it comes by the bucketful, or their skin gets all sickly yellow and spotty. Whatever the specifics, it's bad.

○ Binding

The person cannot physically harm others.

○ Ring of Lies

Whenever the person attempts to lie, they hear a piercing ringing noise. Big lies will often make their knees buckle and disorient them. Severe lies can cause harm or even brain damage.

○ Watching

You enter a deep sleep, and begin to see the world through the eyes of the hexed. You can feel their reactions to and impressions of what they are seeing.

○ Illusions

Pick one: snakes and bugs, demonic visages, false prophecies, non-existent subtext. The hexed sees that thing everywhere. You have no control over the exact images or manifestations.





Your Backstory

You start the game with two sympathetic tokens. Decide whose and what they are.

One of the others caught you rummaging through their friend's stuff, but kept quiet. They get a String on you.

Advancement

- Take another Witch move.
- Take the remaining hexes.
- Create a new hex (MC approval).
- Take a move from another Skin.
- Take a move from another Skin.
- You belong to a **Witch Coven**.
- Add 1 to Hot (max 3).
- Add 1 to Cold (max 3).
- Add 1 to Volatile (max 3).
- Add 1 to Dark (max 3).

Sex Move

After sex, you can take a sympathetic token from them. They know about it, and it's cool.

Darkest Self

The time for subtlety and patience is over. You're too powerful to put up with their garbage any longer. You hex anyone who slights you. All of your hexes have unexpected side effects, and are more effective than you are comfortable with. To escape your Darkest Self, you must offer peace to the one you have hurt the most.





Playing The Witch

Manipulative, secretive, judgemental, brooding. The witch is all about casting silent judgement, and powerful hexes, from the safety of her own bedroom.

Sympathetic Tokens can be anything personal - a lock of their hair, a note they penned, their journal, or lipstick that they lent you. These are things that you'll need to steal, borrow, or otherwise scheme to get your hands on.

It's possible for someone to have access to *Hex-Casting* without *Sympathetic Tokens* (say, another Skin takes the move through advancement). In that case, the Hexes can only be cast by chanting in tongues.

If you chose "the Hex has unexpected side effects" from *Hex-Casting*, the MC gets to determine what those side effects are.

With the Hex *Illusions*, you chose which type of illusions the hexed sees, but the MC gets to describe the specific visions and the reactions of the hexed.



Chapter Four

Being MC

Being MC

100

Chapter Four





The Others

The rules described in *Playing The Game* walk the players through roleplaying a protagonist in a *Monsterhearts* story. But a good story has more than just its protagonists - there are supporting characters, antagonists, bit parts, and an entire world existing around them.

In *Monsterhearts*, there is one player who takes on the role of all of these additional characters. That person is called the Master of Ceremonies, or MC. They are still a player of the game, but they have a different role and set of responsibilities than the other players.

Rather than being tasked with playing a single character with integrity, the MC is tasked with playing the world at-large with integrity, and doing so in a way that puts the PCs in the spotlight.

The MC's role, and the rules that they follow in carrying out this role, are the subject of this chapter. Only the MC need read this chapter and understand its contents.

101

The MC

As the MC, it is your job to balance priorities.

The game provides you with a short list of Agendas - ultimate goals you have in introducing any narrative twist or character. It is your job to decide which Agenda needs the most attention in any given moment, and how to pursue it. The game also provides you with a list of Principles - best practises for creating compelling stories and evoking the feel of a teen monster sex drama. It is your job to decide how to interpret the Principles in a given situation, and which ones to pay the most attention to. And finally, the game provides you with a list of Hard Moves - specific actions that you can take to create





compelling situations and force hard decisions upon the other players. A big part of balancing your priorities is deciding which Agendas to focus on, which Principles to follow most closely in any given moment, and which Moves to make in order to deliver on those Principles.

Another part of balancing your priorities is using your scene framing authority to give each player an equitable share of the spotlight, and to give each aspect of the characters' lives its due as well.

It's easy to think of the MC as the person who "creates the story," but this is a dangerous trap. In actuality, the MC is the person who plays the world at-large with integrity, and decides who and what has the spotlight at any given moment. It's the job of the other players (as their PCs) to take decisive action, make mistakes, screw up and try again differently, sleep around, and stir the sleeping dragons of one another's natures. Story is what emerges naturally from the immediate, instinctual interactions between the players and their characters.

Another way that you will need to balance priorities is that you cannot love the characters you create too dearly. The PCs have more agency and more spotlight than your antagonists and background characters ever will. Should you try to best them and subordinate them, you will find yourself embarrassingly overmatched. That's good! Your characters aren't supposed to be the focus of our story. It's easy to develop a close bond with any of your creations, and to start to consider a non-player character (NPC) to be a priority. Balancing priorities involves knowing when to feed your sacred creations to the wolves. Or, more accurately, to the PCs.

Play the world with integrity, and do so in a way that puts the PCs in the spotlight. Say things in the service of Agendas. Use Moves to enact Principles. Balance your priorities.





Agendas

These Agendas are the reason that you say things in the game. Your goal is to make these three imperatives come to life throughout the game. Doing so will create interesting, unexpected stories about the messy lives of teenage monsters.

- ~ Make the PCs' lives not boring.
- ~ Make the PCs feel unaccepted.
- ~ Keep the story feral.

If you need a refresher on what it means to keep the story feral, see page 44.

Always Say

You need to balance a lot of priorities as the MC, and it won't always be clear what direction you need to steer in any given moment. A good way to clarify what you need to say is to always say:

- ~ What the principles demand.
- ~ What the rules demand.
- ~ What honesty demands.

103

NOTES FROM THE APOCALYPSE

Always be scrupulous, even generous, with the truth. The players depend on you to give them real information they can really use, about their characters' surroundings, about what's happening when and where. Same with the game's rules: play with integrity and an open hand. The players are entitled to the full benefit of their moves, their rolls, their characters' strengths and resources. Don't chisel them, don't weasel, don't play gotcha.





The Principles

The Agendas tell you what your goals are, and the Principles tell you how to accomplish those goals. These are the things you should try to do over the course of the game. Doing them will help to ensure that your Agendas are accomplished and that the game is interesting and rife with drama. Principles are a list of best practises.

- 🌀 Blanket the world in darkness.
- 🌀 Address yourself to the characters, not the players.
- 🌀 Make your move, but misdirect.
- 🌀 Make your move, but never speak its name.
- 🌀 Make monsters seem human.
- 🌀 Make humans seem monstrous.
- 🌀 Give everyone a life.
- 🌀 Accept people, but only conditionally.
- 🌀 Happiness always comes at someone else's expense.
- 🌀 Ask provocative questions and build on the answers.
- 🌀 Be a fan of the PCs.
- 🌀 Treat your NPCs like stolen cars.
- 🌀 Give your NPCs simple motivations that divide the PCs.
- 🌀 Sometimes, disclaim decision making.

Blanket the world in darkness

Evoke melodrama and darkness in all of your descriptions. Introduce sad hermits in the depths of stormy nights. If a scene could be set in a cemetery, set it there. If a scene could take place in someone's bedroom at midnight, set it there. This tone-setting will guide the players towards melodramatic actions.





Address yourself to the characters, not the players

Don't call your players by their names. Call them by the names of their characters. Doing this will jostle them into thinking as their character and playing that character with integrity.

When you address yourself to the characters, the players will begin to think like those characters. The thoughts and emotions of those characters will seem more vivid, bleeding into the player's own experience. The character will become more than a pawn in a game. It'll be a conduit for feeling all those melodramatic and beautiful and hideous teenage things.

Make your move, but misdirect

Make your move, but never speak its name

You will be called upon frequently to make hard moves, and that involves choosing from a list. The trick is to misdirect the audience, so that it seems like your narration is emerging directly from what they just did, a natural consequence of it. Don't announce your hard move, and don't call it by its name. Let the hard move inform your narration, and then weave that narration seamlessly into the dialogue happening at the table.

105

NOTES FROM THE APOCALYPSE

Maybe your move is to separate them, but you should never just say that. Instead, say how Foster's thugs drag one of them off, and Foster invites the other to eat lunch with her. Maybe your move is to announce future badness, but for god sake never say the words "future badness." Instead, say how this morning, filthy, stinking black smoke is rising from somewhere in the car yard, and I wonder what's brewing over there?

These two principles are cause and effect. The truth is that you've chosen a move and made it. Pretend, though, that there's a fictional cause; pretend that it has a fictional effect.



**Make monsters seem human.****Make humans seem monstrous.**

When you start the game, there will be monsters and there will be humans, and they'll seem like two separate groups with distinct members. Your players will assume that adult humans have their shit together, and that adult monsters are lecherous parasites. Whenever possible, make the situation more complicated than that. Have monsters demonstrate unbelievable altruism, sometimes, before retreating into pathology once again. Show how "good people" have their clandestine and perverse natures, sometimes, as wretched as any beast of myth. The moment you draw a line in the fiction, start thinking about ways to blur and bend it. Work to apply this thinking to age and gender, as well as the division between humans and monsters.

An essential part of the teenage experience is dealing with labels and prejudice. This is the point in a person's life when sex, gender, race, class, beauty, talent - they become acutely aware of all of it. They feel controlled by labels which only ever half-apply. Make sure those labels are omnipresent. Make sure they have teeth.

Give everyone a life.

You've got all these characters to play - the members of the football team, the guardians and siblings of the monster teens, teachers, shopkeepers, others. It's important to remember that when you switch between these various NPCs, the other characters in your repertoire don't just power down and go to sleep. They're off living their lives. That means that they're stealing money from one another, sleeping around, snooping into matters that don't concern them, and all the other things that people do.

It's not necessary to chart out the days of all of your various characters. Instead, every once in a while, ask yourself what they might be up to. If it's been a session since you saw Jeremy, wonder what mischief he might have gotten into. Occasionally, surprise the other players by reminding them that every character that touches the fiction has a vibrant and messy life going on.





Accept people, but only conditionally.

Happiness always comes at someone else's expense.

Whenever someone opens their arms to someone else, it's your goal to prove that their acceptance is conditional. If someone says "I love you," or "I'm here to help," look for the limits of that sentiment. Ask provocative questions about it. Search for the "but..." clause hiding between the lines.

Have your NPCs only give out lopsided and conditional acceptance. When a PC makes an accepting motion towards another PC, return to this principle. Acceptance is never absolute, so start looking for its fault lines. Start looking for its lopsided-ness and its many conditions. Challenge it.

And when acceptance or kindness *are* given out freely, when characters *do* make one another happy - look for the person who's suffering as a result. Salima may be in a healthy relationship with Jackson, but Rocko's in love with Salima. How does Rocko feel? Rocko feels hurt, abandoned, and jealous. He wants to usurp Jackson. The more hurt and abandoned Rocko feels, the more likely he is to lash out at Jackson or undermine Salima's happiness. Look for the Rocko in every otherwise-happy situation.

Ask provocative questions and build on the answers.

Ask questions all the time. Ask questions in order to build up sensory details ("What does your room smell like?"). Ask questions in order to reveal perspectives ("So, what do you think about this bush party?"). Ask questions to highlight potential story directions ("Have you and Lorna ever hooked up? Have you ever thought about the possibility?"). Ask questions to reveal insecurities and fears ("Why don't you want to sneak back into Jake's place?"). Ask questions to reveal sources of tension ("He's never seen you with a girl, but Brandon keeps calling you a dyke. Why?")

Whatever answer you get, trust it and build upon it. Add your own details to the answers that players give, and incorporate whatever they say into future descriptions. If





someone answers a question with something provocative and interesting, maybe even something that changes the game, go with it. Let their answers steer the story in new and unexpected directions. Ask questions in the hope that you'll be surprised by what you hear.

Be a fan of the PCs.

It's not your job to thwart the PCs. It's not your job to oppose them. It's your job to introduce difficult situations, and to Make the PCs' lives not boring. The best way to do that is to be a fan of the PCs, to play the game in order to witness their struggles and triumphs. Being a fan of a character doesn't mean removing them from harm's way, though - it means putting them directly into it and hoping that they beat the odds and emerge triumphant.

NOTES FROM THE APOCALYPSE

"Make the characters' lives not boring" does not mean "always worse." Sometimes worse, sure, of course. Always? Definitely not.

The worst way there is to make a character's life more interesting is to take away the things that made the character cool to begin with. The gunlugger's guns, but also the gunlugger's collection of ancient photographs - what makes the character match our expectations and also what makes the character rise above them. Don't take those away.

The other worst way is to deny the character success when the character's fought for it and won it. Always give the characters what they work for! No, the way to make a character's success interesting is to make it consequential.





Treat your NPCs like stolen cars.

Think of the characters you play as stolen cars. You're in control of them for a time, but you don't own them and you can't really keep them. You hold onto them for as long as they're fun and useful, and abandon them when they become dead weight.

The other players, they own their characters and are loyal to them. That isn't the case for you. Joyride your characters. Play them recklessly, and play them knowing that they aren't going to last. If you do so, you'll have constant drama, constant sex, constant violence, and constant chaos. That's ideal.

Give your NPCs simple motivations that divide the PCs.

Make your NPCs straightforward and obvious enough that the other players know how to react to them. Give them obvious goals and obvious means to achieve them. And then make sure that their goals divide the PCs, pitting them against one another. By making your NPCs transparent, you will ensure that the game isn't about getting information out of NPCs. By giving them divisive goals, you will help focus the game on the dramatic conflict between the PCs and everyone they encounter in the world.

NOTES FROM THE APOCALYPSE

In your game, make all your NPCs just not that complicated. They do what they want to do, when they want to do it, and if something gets in their way, well, they deal with that now. What they do in life is follow their parts around - their noses, their stomachs, their hearts, their clits & dicks, their guts, their ears, their inner children, their visions.

Then, you can make PC-NPC-PC triangles - and make your NPCs even more human - just by making sure that their uncomplicated self-interests involve the players' characters individually, not as a group. Show different sides of their personalities to the players' different characters.





Sometimes, disclaim decision making.

In order to keep the story feral, give away your decision-making power from time to time. You're doing this already when you *ask provocative questions and build upon the answers*. You can give your decision-making power over to your characters, or to the other players.

NOTES FROM THE APOCALYPSE

You can **(1) put it in your NPC's hands**. Just ask yourself, *in this circumstance, is Birdie really going to kill her? If the answer's yes, she dies. If it's no, she lives. Yes, this leaves the decision in your hands, but it gives you a way to make it with integrity.*

You can **(2) put it in the players' hands**. For instance, *"Dou's been shot, yeah, she's shuddering and going into shock. What do you do?" If the character helps her, she lives; if the character doesn't or can't, she dies. You could even create a custom move for it, if you wanted, to serve the exact circumstances.*





Hard Moves

Hard moves are the things you do whenever the players look at you expectantly, waiting to see what happens next. Whenever someone fails a roll (6 or less), make a hard move. Whenever people put themselves in harm's way, make a hard move. Whenever it's unclear what should happen next, make a hard move.

When the PCs are already at one another's throats, creating their own compelling drama, back off. As long as your Agendas and Principles are being accomplished, you can relax and enjoy the show. When the dust begins to settle again, make a hard move.

Don't tell people you're making a hard move, and don't call it by name. Just do it, weaving it into the conversation. These rules are here to make sure that you always have something interesting to say, but by all means steal the credit for yourself. Use hard moves all the time, but don't call attention to the fact that you're doing so.

III

- ☞ Separate them.
- ☞ Put them together.
- ☞ Announce off-screen badness.
- ☞ Announce future badness.
- ☞ Inflict harm (as established).
- ☞ Make them pay a price.
- ☞ Tell them the possible consequences and ask.
- ☞ Leap to the worst possible conclusion.
- ☞ Turn their move back on them.
- ☞ Expose a dangerous secret to the wrong person.
- ☞ Take a String on someone.
- ☞ Trigger their Darkest Self.
- ☞ Herald the abyss.
- ☞ After every move: "What do you do?"



**Separate them.**

If two PCs are working together, or they're trying to spend a romantic evening together, separate them. Have hooded villains kidnap one of them. Have a friend call from the ER to demand the help of one of them. Figure out how to divide them, and then take advantage of the fact that you have them isolated.

Put them together.

Pick two characters that have major gripes with one another. Pick two characters that are afraid of one another. Pick a predator and a prey. Pick any interesting combination of characters, and put them together. If possible, set the situation up so that it'll be difficult for either of them to just walk away gracefully. And then see what happens.

Announce off-screen badness.**Announce future badness.**

Remember: all of the characters you play throughout the game, they have lives. Some of those lives aren't very interesting for our purposes. But some of those lives are pregnant with chaos and conflict. Whenever a brilliant scheme comes to mind, something that one of those characters would be off doing, drop hints about their actions. Foreshadow their dramatic return to the spotlight. Hint at bad things that are taking place off-screen. Announce bad things that are going to happen in the near future – or might happen, if the PCs don't do anything about it.

Inflict harm (as established)

Say Rico's standing in the middle of the courtyard, and one of your undead motorcycle gangsters has a gun pointed at him. Rico takes the stupid way out, and bolts for it. He rolls a 6. You've established that Rico's in danger of getting shot, and a gun would probably do 2 harm at this distance. So, bang. Rico's been hit for 2 harm.





Make them pay a price.

Tell them the possible consequences and ask.

When the PCs are after something, and you've got an obstacle in their way, make it clear what kind of price they'll have to pay to get what they want. If they're trying to get into a new club with fake IDs, the bouncer sees through their bluff. He'll let them in, but it'll cost them: maybe money, maybe some action from the cute blond boy, maybe a favour. Or maybe it's not a price, but a risk. They can sneak in the back, but they might get caught and the police might get called in. Tell them what's at stake, and let them decide whether to take the chance.

Leap to the worst possible conclusion.

Whenever your NPCs have an incomplete understanding of the situation (which should be the case most of the time), have them leap to the worst possible conclusion. If Jake's mom knows that he wasn't home during Bryah's murder, and she finds a gun in his bedroom, maybe she becomes convinced that her son is a murderer. Have her leap to the worst possible conclusion.

113

Turn their move back on them.

Sometimes, the PCs create their own trouble, and all you need to do is capitalize on it. Have their actions create unexpected consequences that put them in dire straits. So, Logan takes a swing at the leader of a gang? Maybe she trips backwards, and smashes her head on the sidewalk. It's gushing blood. She's non-responsive. The rest of the gang looks bewildered and furious. Now what?

Expose a dangerous secret to the wrong person.

Sometimes, the wrong person will just happen to witness something. Like, Jake transforms into a werewolf and bounds off into the darkness, and all you need to do is narrate Sergeant Davis standing there, wide-eyed, trembling. Sometimes, the wrong person will finally put together all the clues. Jake's mom has probably been pulling fur out of the dryer lint trap for months, and noticing strange disturbances, and heard her son howling like a mongrel dog late at night. Sooner or later, she realizes what's happening.



**Take a String on someone.**

NPCs can hold Strings on PCs. When a PC reveals something of their true nature, or gives their power away, or somehow lets an NPC gain some leverage over them, you have a perfect opportunity for an NPC to take a String on them. When Jake (PC) asks Roca (NPC) out to the Spring Formal, and Roca turns the offer down, have Roca take a String on Jake. She knows how to manipulate him and his emotions now.

Trigger their Darkest Self.

Use this move sparingly, and only when the situation is perfect. Tell someone what makes them snap, what pushes them into the darkest corner of their nature. Then let them run with their Darkest Self.

Herald the abyss.

The PCs can choose to *gaze into the abyss*, and establish a sort of dialogue with it. But sometimes, the abyss is going to reach out and start that conversation on its own. The abyss is going to be really different for each PC, and so what it means for the abyss to reach out and contact them will be different in each case. Maybe voices follow them around. Maybe they have fever dreams. Maybe phantoms show up and ask for tea.

After every move: “What do you do?”

Whenever you use one of these moves, do so to create interesting situations that the PCs can react to. That also means giving them a chance to react. After every move, ask this question, over and over again: “What do you do?” Eventually, the question will become automatic, and players will instinctively leap to respond to everything you say.





Chain Reaction

NOTES FROM THE APOCALYPSE

Any given conflict between characters, one move alone probably won't resolve it. Very often it'll take several moves and counter-moves, a whole back-and-forth between them. Hitting rolls on a 7-9, especially, usually leaves a whole lot unresolved, primed for followthrough or a counterstrike.

The moves cascade very naturally. [...] Outcomes nest and double up and flow seamlessly into new moves. Just remember the rule - if you do it, you do it; to do it, you have to do it - and see their logic through.



Moves – whether PC moves or Hard Moves taken by the MC – should never result in a fictional dead-end. They should always push the story in new directions, so that there is something new for the PCs to react to. It doesn't matter if the PCs succeed or fail, the story should gain momentum and characters should be pushed forward into new situations. When the MC makes a hard move or introduces a new NPC, it should be done with an eye towards adding momentum to the story. And no matter what, remember – it always ends with, “So, what do you do?”

115

The Long Example

At the end of this book (in the Gazing Into the Abyss chapter), you'll find an extended example of play. It demonstrates how all of the Agendas, Principles, and Hard Moves might work in a specific situation, as well as demonstrating how moves set off chain reactions and lead the PCs into making more moves. See page 150.





Managing NPCs

You'll have lots of different characters to juggle: teachers, parents, peers, other monsters, freaky cultists, police chiefs, and more. The MC Booklet comes in handy here. It's a reference booklet (one letter-sized page, folded in half) with fill-in sections to help you manage your NPCs.

Inside, there's a full-page chart. List each NPC along the left-hand side. Describe them briefly in the next column. To save space and keep the list manageable, you'll probably want to keep your description succinct: "police chief, jake's dad, alone" is about the right amount of information here. NPCs can collect Strings on people, and the next column is where you can keep that recorded. A single NPC might have Strings on three different PCs, meaning that you need to leave enough space here for multiple entries. The final column, labelled Other Information, can record anything else that comes up during play. NPCs can gain Conditions, which you can record here. Or an NPC might have an important item, like an heirloom monster-hunting weapon. They might know an important secret, or be host to a body-hopping demon. These are all great things to make note of in this section.





NPC Strings

NPCs can gain Strings on PCs. They're recorded and managed by the MC. As a result, you will have a number of separate String tallies to keep organized.

The MC has created an NPC named Heraldo, an ostentatious vampire lord. Heraldo's fallen for one of the PCs - a mortal boy named Robin. Robin's friend Vanessa (another PC) doesn't trust Heraldo as far as she could throw him. The MC also has an NPC named Bradford, Robin's father. The father and son have a complicated and messy relationship.

Heraldo has two Strings on Robin, and one String on Vanessa. Bradford has two Strings on Robin. Thus, the MC has three String tallies to keep track of between these two NPCs. Vanessa and Robin have Strings on the NPCs as well, but they keep track of those in their Skin booklet, just like they do for PC Strings.

117

The MC can spend NPC Strings on someone to:

- ☞ Put the NPC's action against them at an Advantage.
- ☞ Add an extra harm to whatever harm the NPC is dealing to them.
- ☞ Place a Condition on them.
- ☞ Offer them experience to do what you want.
- ☞ Come out of nowhere with a hard move.

NPC Strings are always held on a specific PC, and can only be spent when interacting with that PC. Remember that in order to do it, you have to do it. Spending a String means that in the fiction, your NPC is in some way cashing in on the emotional hold they have over this PC.

The astute MC will note that some of these are things that can be done without Strings (placing Conditions, forcing characters to *hold steady*, making hard moves). Strings represent a context for these actions.





Let's imagine that a mean vamp has our innocent heroine cornered. He threatens to kill her. That's a moment where the MC is likely to make the hard move: force someone to *hold steady*. Now, imagine that the mean vamp encounters her when she's surrounded by strong friends in a public place. She's safe here. He makes a snarky comment that suggests he knows where she lives. That's a moment where the MC could spend a String to *come out of nowhere with a hard move*, and force her to *hold steady*.

In the first case, the MC was poised to make a hard move, by virtue of following her principles and creating a sticky situation. In the second case, the String gave that hard move a context and justification: spending it affirmed that this seemingly innocuous situation was actually sticky and dangerous, by virtue of the emotional power that one character was exercising over another.

Spending NPC Strings creates a context for hard moves. Through play, the MC will develop a sense of fairness and context for hard moves. NPC Strings shift the baseline of what's considered fair, allowing the NPC to strike without warning or suddenly reveal an unexpected amount of power.





Advantage & Disadvantage

PCs can have -1s and +1s applied to their rolls. Since the MC doesn't roll dice, NPCs don't have dice rolls to apply bonuses and penalties to. Instead, NPCs can act at an Advantage or Disadvantage.

NPCs act at an Advantage whenever:

- ☞ They're able to take advantage of a PC's Condition while acting against that PC.
- ☞ You spend one of their Strings on a PC to put them at an Advantage against that PC.
- ☞ Something would grant the NPC +1 to their action.
- ☞ A custom move or special rule makes them do so.

NPCs act at a Disadvantage whenever:

- ☞ They have a Condition that would interfere with their action.
- ☞ Something would grant the NPC -1 to their action.
- ☞ A custom move or special rule makes them do so.

119

Essentially, whenever numerical bonuses or penalties would be granted to an NPC, translate them into Advantages and Disadvantages instead. Advantages and Disadvantages cancel one another out.

When at an Advantage, an NPC's actions have one of these added effects:

- ☞ The action gains the NPC new followers or support;
- ☞ The action leave the NPC better protected in some way;
- ☞ The action set the NPC up perfectly for a follow-up action of some sort.

When at a Disadvantage, an NPC's actions have one of these added effects:

- ☞ The action alienates the NPC's friends and allies;
- ☞ The action leaves the NPC exposed to danger;
- ☞ The action leaves the NPC exhausted or without an escape plan.





You'll notice that the Advantage and Disadvantage lists mirror one another. It's fine to interpret this list flexibly, or even narrate an Advantage that makes sense in context but doesn't fit the list.

If you know that one of your NPCs would be acting at a Disadvantage, don't let that stop you from taking the action. For example, The Queen has a move called *The Shield*. When surrounded by her gang, NPCs act at a Disadvantage if they try to mess with her. The player didn't take this move in order to be left alone; they took it so that NPCs would accidentally expose themselves to her wrath. Give the players what they deserve, and say *what honesty demands*. Sometimes, that means feeding a Disadvantaged NPC to the wolves.

The Advantage and Disadvantage rules are something to keep in mind as you make a hard move, or something to remember when you glance at an NPC's notes. It's better to interpret the constraints loosely than to slow the game down by fretting about how to implement an Advantage option exactly as listed.

Blending In

Unless a player says otherwise, it's assumed that all of the PCs are able to blend in. Everyone looks just normal enough to go to school, or the local pool hall, or wherever it is that kids go these days. Sometimes they trip up and do something that attracts suspicion. Sometimes, their secrets are going to be exposed to the wrong people. But generally, their peers and teachers should be oblivious to their monstrosity until they choose to reveal it.

Ask questions about how blending in works for each PC. Be willing to accept far-fetched answers. If someone playing a Vampire doesn't want to deal with the whole sunlight situation, accept their answer when they say, "I dunno, I have a magic ring that protects me from the





sun?” This gives them a chance to bypass the conceits about a monster archetype that they find uninteresting, and allows you to both focus on what is interesting.

When the players talk about how their characters blend in, use your NPCs to reveal how the rest of the world sees them. Make it clear that these characters are blending in, but just barely.

Nobody really knows that Helena is a Ghost. But people tend to not even notice she's there, and then act surprised when she says anything. People bump into her in the hallway all the time, like she's practically invisible. Her classmates laugh at the fact that her fashion choices are decades out of date. But she's still able to show up to class like any other kid, and her teacher still expects her to turn in his Grapes of Wrath essay like everyone else.

Maybe nobody knows that Allister is a Fae. But people make mean comments about how dainty he is. A few people are spreading rumours about the fact that they saw him prancing around the woods naked, talking to himself. Maybe someone's even suspicious that he might have some kind of strange power over them. But everyone assumes that he's human. After all, what else could he be?

The PCs are able to blend in with the rest of human society, but they might still know what one another really are - and it's almost certain that some people will learn their secret over the course of a game. Whenever someone learns about a PC's monstrous nature, remember to ask, “So, now that they know what you really are, what do you do?”





Under Each Skin

It's important that your MCing helps to highlight what's cool about each of the PCs, and sets up situations that meaningfully engage what's important to them. When a player chooses a Skin, they are hinting at something that's interesting to them. When they choose Skin moves, more hints. The actions they take in the game and the things they say are similarly hints, suggesting to you what it is that they want the game to be about.

Give players the opportunities they're hoping for. When someone chooses to be a Werewolf and takes the *Uncontainable* move, they clearly want to be locked up at some point. The move is only interesting if the PC has a chance to use it. So when you're making your hard moves, ask yourself if there's some way you can contain this big bad wolf. Maybe the police show up and arrest the PC when he botches some criminal activity. Maybe his girlfriend, aware of his lycanthropic condition, insists he be chained up during the full moon. However you do it, respond to the flags that players create. Give them what they want, what they fear, and what they're curious about. Play to both their strengths and their weaknesses.

People come to the game with expectations around monster mythology. They'll expect that because things worked a certain way in a book or on a television show, the same will be true in *Monsterhearts*. It's important to establish a common set of expectations around monster limitations and powers. If a Skin doesn't mention monster limitation or power, then it isn't necessarily a fact in *Monsterhearts*. Players should ask questions about these bits of mythology in order to determine what is and isn't fact in the game. For example, some vampire mythology states that vampires cannot cross running water, but the Vampire Skin makes no mention of it. The player and MC should come to a conclusion together.





In some cases, the Skin will contain a bit of monster mythology in an optional Skin move. Examples include *Invited* for the Vampire and *Guide* for the Fae. These bits of mythology will only apply to that character if they take the move.

Here are some Skin-specific things to watch out for:

The Chosen

The Chosen is a monster-hunter, which means that when this Skin is in play you need to introduce scary, city-changing monsters. Maybe you'll need a werewolf mafia boss, or a kraken that dwells in the sewage system, or a horde of cultists with strange burn marks all over their faces. If The Chosen takes *Final Showdown*, you should introduce monsters that are otherwise nigh-immortal. Consider creating a custom move for one of these villains, like "Whenever this demon dies, it reconstitutes itself elsewhere after a few hours." *Final Showdown* is the only reason that you should make your villains hard to kill. If they take *To The Books*, then they're looking for mysteries and bizarre supernatural puzzles.

123

The Fae

Fae mythology tends to revolve around woodland locations. If there's a Fae in your game, set it at the edge of a thickly-forested area. Since Fae have several moves that revolve around promises, create some NPCs that make promises without forethought, and others that are guarded and tentative. Occasionally make promises that you know will create hell for the characters that pronounce them. There are several references to The Faery King in this Skin, so you'll need to pay attention to how interested the player is in faery politics and courtly intrigue. If she's interested, introduce it into the game where possible. If she's uninterested, let it rest.





The Ghost

The Ghost is fixated on its death. You can interact with that by deciding how the town reacted to their death. Is the whole town still in mourning? Or did they largely fail to notice when a teen murder occurred? Ask lots of questions about how the ghost feels, being immersed in a world that's moved beyond them. If *Creep* or *Dissipate* are taken, that's a flag that this player wants to be sneaky and invasive. Put lots of private conversations behind closed doors - The Ghost will revel in finding ways to listen in. Have at least one spooky old mansion in the game, so that The Ghost's gang (a **House of Spooks**) has a place to take residence if that advancement is chosen.

The Ghoul

If The Ghoul takes *Watchful Golem*, then give them someone to defend and introduce lots of threats to that person that would take place behind their back. Allow The Ghoul an opportunity to step in and be a silent hero. Ask leading questions about how The Ghoul's body might be deteriorating, in order to create a context for the possible introduction of The Ghoul's gang (the **Necromantic Caretakers**).

The Infernal

During character creation, The Infernal player will select a descriptive title for their dark power, from a list. Ask the player questions about their dark power, starting with the title they chose. Some players will want to put all of the decisions about who or what their dark power is in your hands. This is fine. Even if they have a strong initial idea about their power, remember to add your own twisted perspective to whatever it is they suggest. The dark power itself should be turned into a Threat and tied into a Menace as soon as it makes sense, and their *Craving/Offering/Capacity* should inform how you play them, along with the player's answers to your previous questions.

Regardless of its origins or motives, have the dark power always offering things to The Infernal with strings attached. Have the dark power make off-handed and ominous remarks about debt. Keep their true intentions





cloudy unless someone specifically goes snooping around, trying to uncover them. Put The Infernal in situations where it's tempting to use and abuse their Bargains. *Strings Attached* is a powerful Bargain, and you should let the player use it in powerful ways. If they want a new car, or the key to someone's house, or a perfect boyfriend, give it to them. But play evil genie, and give it to them with some terrible consequences or unnatural twists.

The Mortal

Find opportunities to tempt The Mortal away from her lover. Create situations where The Mortal will be dependent on other people, and occasionally pull out a hard move to *separate them*. If The Mortal takes *Mess With Me, Mess With Him*, that's a strong hint that you should have some dangerous people corner The Mortal when she's alone. You might find it useful to create a concerned best friend-type character who wants to separate The Mortal from her lover. That sort of triangle will help create compelling drama and difficult choices.

The Queen

From time to time, have one of The Queen's gang members start acting against her best interests, especially if The Queen takes *And Your Enemies Closer*. If there's no drama within the gang, it will start to resemble a piece of equipment instead of a powerful social circle. Learn through play whether the player wants their Queen to have to face other social leaders and kingpins, and introduce those kinds of gang politics if it's what the player is after.

The Vampire

Be flexible in interpreting vampire mythology, and be willing to accept that things might work differently in Monsterhearts than they do in your favourite vampire literature. In some source material, vampires find ways of walking around in the daylight - mystical rings, heavy cloud coverage, trenchcoats and masks, etc. If The Vampire's player wants to introduce one of these devices into the game, let them. That way, you can take the device away at a crucial moment.





The Werewolf

It's up to the group to establish whether The Werewolf can transform without becoming their Darkest Self. Since moonlight features prominently in both werewolf mythology and two of The Werewolf's moves (*Howl at the Moon* and *Spirit Armour*), if there's a werewolf in your game make sure that lots of scenes happen at night, under the light of the moon. If they take *Uncontainable*, find opportunities to contain them - getting put in the back of a cop car, getting chained down during a full moon, or getting kidnapped by vampire rivals.

The Witch

Give The Witch reasons to be angry with people. Ask leading questions that reveal how people have disappointed or frustrated The Witch, and have people say snarky things to her in the hallway. That way, the hexes will flow freely. When The Witch casts a Hex, ask lots of questions that reveal how awesome the magical rituals are. Don't let magic be a stale and uneventful part of the game. When The Witch is at their Darkest Self, pay close attention to PC-PC interactions. Be quick to ask, "Does that count as slighting you?"



After Graduation

While the default assumption in *Monsterhearts* is that the PCs are teenagers who go to high school together, this doesn't need to be the case. It's fine to have the game focus on twenty-somethings who work together, or a sports team, or some similar departure from the high school milieu.

If you choose to shift away from that default, it's important to know what the high school setting and teenage protagonists were providing. Otherwise, you might lose some of the magic that keeps this game alive and interesting.

The PCs need to be in the midst of a major transition. They need to feel alienated - both alienated from their own bodies and alienated from the world at large. They need to be put together in an environment of petty social politics.

The game flourishes when PCs are passionate, dramatic, catty, loveable but unlikeable, confused, and divided against themselves. It doesn't have to be teenagers who share a home room, but that's the assumption that the game is based on.

On page 136, there are instructions for creating a homeroom seating chart, and using it to create compelling drama. If your game doesn't take place in a high school classroom, try to find an appropriate equivalent to the seating chart.





Chapter Five

Teaching & Running the Game





Before You Start

Before you start a game of Monsterhearts, you'll need to do some setup work. First, arrange a dedicated time to play with your friends. Be clear that it takes 3-4 hours to play a session of the game, and that the game might entail multiple sessions if everyone is on board.

You'll need to print one copy of each of the following: all of the Skins, the Reference Booklet, the MC Booklet, and the Menace Booklet. Each of these is a double-sided piece of letter paper that needs to be folded in half.

These materials can be found at
www.buriedwithoutceremony.com/monsterhearts/

You'll also need pencils, erasers, and dice. At a minimum, you need two dice, but two per player may be preferable.

Some groups like to have snacks on hand while they play, or to get together for a group dinner beforehand. Clarify the food plan when you invite people to play.





Guiding Character Creation

The first session of a Monsterhearts game always starts with the creation of characters - specifically, the players' characters (PCs). For the most part, this is a step-by-step process. Since you'll probably want to explain rules and context as you go through this process, creating characters can take between 30-60 minutes all told.

First, randomly distribute the Skins evenly amongst yourself and the players at the table. Each player should have 2-4 Skins in front of them at this point. Explain that they aren't necessarily the character type in front of them, but that they are going to introduce that Skin to the group.

Starting with you, go around clockwise and have everyone announce one of the Skins in front of them, and then read its flavour text (the italicized text below the name) in their most melodramatic voice. If you have The Witch, read the flavour text in a shady, calculated manner. If you have The Werewolf, read with a hungry snarl in your tone. When you read a Skin, let its tone seep into yours, and really ham it up. Go around the table, and have everyone read for one Skin. Then go around again, taking turns until all the Skins have been read aloud.

Once all the Skins are introduced, put them back in the centre of the table. Everyone but the MC now chooses one to play. If two people want to play the same Skin, that's okay, so long as you can print out a second copy of the booklet. No more than two people can play a single Skin.

The Skin booklet acts as a workbook for creating the character, as described in Choosing a Skin (page 8). Lead everyone through picking a name, a look, and an origin.

At this point, explain what the stats are, and how rolling dice works. Introduce the players to the list of basic moves, so that the players have some sense of how their stats will be used. Explain how to assign their stats, (page 10).





After reviewing the basic moves and allotting stats, explain how Skin-specific moves work (page 11). As some moves generate Strings or Conditions, explain what they are and how they work. Do the same thing for how experience works.

Walk through both Darkest Self and Sex Moves with the group. Explain that Darkest Self can be triggered in a number of ways - through failing a roll, as the result of a hard choice, or to avert death. Point out the fact that each Darkest Self has an escape clause that can draw the character back to their normal self. You may want to have players read their Darkest Self and Sex Move aloud to the group now, or wait until it becomes relevant during play.

At this point, the characters are almost complete, except for Backstories. Explain Strings again, and then complete Backstories (page 12). The final stage of Backstories is to determine which stats start out highlighted. After stats have been highlighted, remind players of how advancement works, and how that relates to their highlighted stats.

Teaching the Game

As the MC, it's likely that you'll be responsible for teaching the game to others. Teaching something as complex as a story game can be difficult! What order should you teach things in, and how much information should you give them all at once?

The key considerations to have in mind when teaching are:

- ~ Teach the mechanics in a concentric way.
- ~ Teach the context as you teach the mechanics.
- ~ Use examples and demonstrations.
- ~ Teach as you go.
- ~ Teach what they need in order to make informed decisions.



Teach the mechanics in a concentric way.

It's easy to get caught up in the details, or how everything fits together. After all, you're knowledgeable about the game, so that's the level at which you're processing this information. But new players are at a different level, and that kind of information can be overwhelming to them. Start with the most basic piece of information, and state it as simply as possible. Then introduce the next piece of information, one that builds on what you've said already and expands their knowledge. Start simple and expand out. This is called concentric teaching.

With moves, the simplest thing you can say is, "You can just say what your character does. Sometimes, what they're doing counts as one of these moves, and then we'll have to roll dice and follow some rules." Start with that, and then expand out concentrically from there.

Teach the context as you teach the mechanics.

There's a reason why *Monsterhearts* has all of these rules. It's because they all do something to help create interesting stories with interesting characters. It's important that as you teach players about the mechanics, you mention what these mechanics do for the story.

When you explain Strings, don't just talk about how you get them and spend them. Talk about what it means to have emotional leverage over one another, and what Strings can represent.

Use examples and demonstrations.

People need examples in order to confirm and solidify what you're teaching them. Use short examples throughout any explanation that you give.

When you explain how to roll dice for moves, pass two dice to someone. Say, "Let's say you've got Hot 2, and you're rolling to *turn someone on*. Go ahead and roll. Great. Add those two dice together, and add in your Hot 2. What's the total?" This will help make what you're saying concrete, and will clarify any misinterpretations.



Teach as you go.

If you spend the first hour of a game explaining the entirety of the rules, you'll lose buy-in from any players who aren't excited about the intricacies of game design. So avoid doing that. Instead, teach as you go. Trust that it's okay to teach your players some of the details now and the rest later. Many people have a limit to how much knowledge they can absorb in a single period. They need to be able to put their knowledge into action before they're ready to learn more.

Teach what they need in order to make informed decisions.

While giving players too much information can overwhelm them, giving them too little information will lose their trust and confidence. Give players the information they need in order to make informed decisions. Make sure they understand the choices that they are making. If someone makes a bad choice early on, like picking a Skin move that they later realize they'll never use, be generous and allow them to go back and change their decision.

When people are picking Skins, note that they should read the Darkest Self on the back and the Skin moves on the inside. Suggest that if they find what they're reading interesting, that this Skin will be a good choice. Before they choose their Stats and Skin moves, explain how rolling dice and acting on moves works. Tell them what they need to know, when they need it.





The First Session

In Apocalypse World, Vincent Baker lists the things to do during the first session:

NOTES FROM THE APOCALYPSE

Just because it's the first session, whatever, you're still playing the game.

∞ *MC the game. Bring it.*

But especially do these:

∞ *Describe. [Blanket the world in darkness.]*

∞ *Springboard off character creation.*

∞ *Ask questions like crazy.*

∞ *Leave yourself things to wonder about.*

∞ *Look for where they're not in control.*

∞ *Push there.*

∞ *Nudge the players to have their characters make moves.*

∞ *Give every character good screen time with other characters.*

∞ *Leap forward with named, human NPCs.*

∞ *Hell, have a fight.*

Do all of those things. Constantly leap forward with sensory descriptions, melancholic backdrops, and probing questions. Use your scene framing to put characters together and see what their chemistry is like. Ask questions, and when there's no clear answer, make finding an answer part of what the game is about.

In addition, do these things:

∞ *Create a homeroom seating chart.*

∞ *Follow the characters around.*

∞ *Learn what they want and what they're afraid of.*

∞ *Wonder what kind of Menace might be dwelling within this town.*





Use the first session to establish some names and personalities, to build an initial roster of NPCs. The next section talks about the process of creating a seating chart, and why it matters to Monsterhearts.

Don't try to frame the characters into an intense rollercoaster of action scenes right away. Instead, spend some time following them around. Learn their daily routine. That way, when it gets upset and turned upside down later, we'll have a frame of reference to understand why that drama is interesting. Learn what each character wants, and what they're afraid might happen to them. This way, you can tempt them and create chaos for them later on.

While it's important that play be centered on the PCs, look for places where you could eventually introduce a Menace. If the PCs live a life of petty crime, daydream about a police force Menace - the stern chief of police and the crooked beat cops. If the PCs dabble in dark arts, daydream about a demon or warlock Menace - someone with more power and access than they do.





Seating Charts

At some point during the first session of the game, early on, you should establish a seating chart for home-room. This does a few things: it allows you to collaboratively populate the setting with extra characters, it allows you to establish relationships between the characters, and it reminds everyone that the game draws on petty high school politics.

Draw a simple classroom outline - a teacher's desk at the front, and several rows of student desks. Three rows of five is ideal for our purposes, despite the fact that real high school classrooms typically have double that many desks.

The process of populating the classroom is your chance to bring one of the game's Principles to life: *Ask provocative questions and build on the answers*. Choose one of the players, and ask, "Where in the classroom do you sit?" Pencil their name in the appropriate seat. Then next to them, write in an invented name, and ask a leading question, something designed to provoke new relationships and new dynamics in the game. As an example, you could ask, "So, you sit next to Todd... why don't you trust him?"

Continue to invent new classmates, ask provocative questions about them, get the players to create some of the classmates, and get the players to choose where their PCs sit. Create classmates that have obvious hooks into the PCs. If there's a Werewolf character on the football team, one of the classmates you create should be Aseem, star quarterback. You should ask of the werewolf, "What did Aseem do to piss you off, last practice?"

Further examples of leading questions include:

- ~ Why did Jenna miss so much school last year?
- ~ Last summer, what did Desmond get arrested for?
- ~ Are the rumours about Miguel true? What are they?
- ~ Is Lucia actually gay, or is this a weird attention thing?





The Party, The Fight, The Disappearance

As the session kicks off, collaborate on a seating chart, or find some other way to establish a social milieu. Spend some time playing out a classroom scene, provoking the PCs in little ways and seeing how they react. Maybe there's a class bully, and he walks past one of the PCs and knocks over his books. What does he do? Maybe there's a totally cute girl, and she asks out a PC. What does the player say?

Use that early scene to gather information. But when that scene runs its course or starts to drag, frame ahead to something interesting. Maybe Rolf's throwing a big party that night, and everyone's got to figure out whether they're going and how they're going to procure drinks. Maybe a tough guy in leather picks a fight with one of the PCs, and a brawl breaks out in the school cafeteria. Maybe second period teacher has gone missing, and there have been numerous homicides over the past six months. Introduce some sort of action, and ask the players how they respond.

Once things are in motion and you've got a roster of NPCs to work with, you should find that scenes naturally lead into one another. One bad situation triggers another, and the narrative develops its own momentum. If the pace starts to lag, turn to your Principles and Hard Moves. Usually something will jump out as an obvious and interesting next move. If not, return to the sure-fire list of options: throw a party, stage a fight, announce a disappearance.



Chapter Six

Real Monsters

Real Monsters

138

Chapter Six





Villains

One of your Agendas is to *make the PCs' lives not boring*. It's important to stir up trouble, make people feel unwanted, and set the stage for bloody melodrama. Sometimes, you'll be able to do this by *blanketing the world in darkness and asking provocative questions and building on the answers*. Other times, you'll be able to do this by introducing parents and classmates who *accept people conditionally*.

But sometimes, those mundane tools won't be enough to get under their skin. These teenage monsters might start feeling comfortable living double lives, or maybe start making altruistic gestures to their fellow monsters. You'll need a wedge, a way to divide these PCs and pit them against each other once more. After all, another of your Agendas is to *make the PCs feel unaccepted*. Keeping things unstable and tumultuous is vital to this goal.

This is where villains come in. Villains exist in our stories in order to provoke the PCs. In a way, introducing a villain is like making a hard move. You should *make your move, but misdirect*. Make it seem like the villain has been a part of the world all along, and that they enter the story now for reasons derived entirely from the fiction.

A good villain is one that people love to hate. Rather than existing to block the PCs from doing something, they should exist to introduce new opportunities and conflicts into the story.

Ultimately, the PCs are stronger than any villain you introduce. Remember to *treat your NPCs like stolen cars*. They aren't your property, so you don't need to worry about losing them. Have fun with your villains, cause chaos with them, and abandon them the minute they're played out.





The player characters are monsters, but they're also just teenagers. There's a difference between monsters and *monsters*. One of the things villains let you do is to underscore this difference. Real monsters kill people. Real monsters eat babies. When you introduce a villain, you have the opportunity to remind people how real monsters behave. Don't waste this opportunity proving how edgy your villain is. Use it to put things the PCs care about at stake. Use it as a dark mirror for the PCs, showing them that this is how you could be. Use it for something meaningful, or don't use it at all.

When the PCs become their Darkest Selves, they become villains in their own right. Each character's Darkest Self is like a permission - a permission to burn bridges and hurt people and to never have to justify their behavior to themselves. When a PC becomes their Darkest Self, you should use your principles and your expert knowledge of villainy to help them be the worst that they can be. Maybe you'll even have your own Villain waiting in the rafters, ready to join the fallen PC in debauchery and evil.

Menace

When you create a villain, or a cult of vampire-worshippers arrives in town, or the police launch a major enquiry into a mysterious death, you have the perfect opportunity to create a Menace. A Menace is a package of information that makes it easy for you to manage outside threats, and play them in interesting and suspenseful ways. A Menace is something you create between sessions, to give you interesting things to say when everyone looks to you expectantly.

A Menace is composed of the following parts:

- ☞ An outline, quickly summarizing what the menace is;
- ☞ Stakes, questions about what might happen if the menace gets its way;
- ☞ Threats, the villains and dangers introduced by the menace.





A good Menace has a few essential qualities. First, it is powerful enough to shape the social landscape of the game. The specific repercussions it might have are always posed as questions, in the Stakes section. Second, a Menace always relates to at least one of the PCs. If the Menace doesn't interact with the hopes, fears or strengths of at least one of the PCs, then it's irrelevant and should be abandoned. Finally, a Menace should widen the scope of the game, introducing new backdrops, new kinds of antagonism, and new risks. If there's already been a badass vampire queen in your game, then introducing another badass underworld lord is redundant.

When you fill out a Menace Sheet, start with an outline. In a few sentences or notes, describe what this Menace is all about. Then, think about what could happen if the menace got its way, or what hard choices the characters might be forced to make when confronting it. Record these ideas as open-ended questions, in the Stakes section.

The MC has introduced two vampiric characters into the game so far, both of whom have created interesting problems for the PCs - a Mortal and a Witch. The MC decides to group these vampires into a Menace. She takes out a new Menace sheet and writes in the outline section: "The Vampire underworld is making a bid for power in the city of Newfordshire."

Next, the MC creates a few Stakes: "Will the vampires manage to take control of the police department? Will Vanessa (The Witch) find a magical defense against them? Will Heraldo (a vampire NPC) fall for Robin (The Mortal)? Will the vampires expose themselves?"





A Menace is made up of one to three Threats. Threats are villains or concrete dangers – they’re the actual manifestations of the Menace that the PCs will have to deal with. For each Threat, write its name and a few notes about it, and then choose a Craving, Offering and Capacity to reflect its true nature. Cravings are the impulses that might drive a villain or group into action. Offerings are what they use to try and sway the PCs. Finally, Capacities are what they are willing and able to do if you cross them.

Each Craving, Offering, and Capacity has a hard move tied to it. When you’re called on to make a hard move, consider these as part of your list.

Cravings

- ☞ Intimacy (isolate them)
- ☞ Notoriety (lash out and provoke reaction)
- ☞ Ownership (viciously protect coveted things)
- ☞ Transcendence (enlist others to do unethical bidding)

Offerings

- ☞ Sex (tempt them and seek promises)
- ☞ Power (shower them with outlandish gifts)
- ☞ Inclusion (show them what they’re missing)
- ☞ Support (save their skin at a vital moment)

Capacity

- ☞ Sudden Violence (outright kill someone they love)
- ☞ Cold Betrayal (turn their friends against them)
- ☞ Calculated Sacrifice (lose an eye to gouge an eye)

It’s important to tie the Craving, Offering and Capacity of your Threats in with the PCs. When you are choosing options, think about whose buttons each choice will help you push. Don’t create characters that seem cool on paper but won’t actually interact with the protagonists in a meaningful way.





The first Threat tied into this Menace is Heraldo. Heraldo is a sort of iconic master vampire, and the MC thinks that he craves either Notoriety or Transcendence. Either would be fine, but his interactions with Robin would be more interesting if it was Notoriety. The MC decides that Heraldo offers Power, and begins to form a mental picture of Heraldo: ostentatious, a high roller, and deeply sensitive to judgments about himself. Finally, the MC decides he has a Capacity for Cold Betrayal.

Threat: Heraldo (ostentatious master vampire)
Notoriety (move: lash out and provoke reaction)
Power (move: shower them with outlandish gifts)
Cold Betrayal (move: turn their friends against them)

The second Threat tied into this Menace is Vampiric Underlings. The MC decides that they crave Ownership (of the town), they offer Inclusion (into vampirism), and they have a capacity for Sudden Violence.

Threat: Vampiric Underlings (preparing for hostile takeover)
Ownership (move: viciously protect coveted things)
Inclusion (move: show them what they're missing)
Sudden Violence (move: outright kill someone they love)

143

Each Threat can optionally come with a custom move attached to it. Custom moves let you highlight the weird or unique within a Threat. They're new moves for the PCs, not for you. They should generally follow the same format as the other moves in the game. Those formats are:

- ☞ When you [do something], roll with [a stat]. On a 10 up, [a good result]. • On a 7-9, [a mixed result or hard choice].
- ☞ When you [do something], [an effect is triggered].
- ☞ You have the ability to [do something]. When you do so, [a certain effect is triggered.]





The MC creates a custom move for Heraldo: Whenever you compliment Heraldo or accept a gift from him, he gains a String on you. Now, Heraldo looks like:

Threat: Heraldo (ostentatious master vampire)

Notoriety (move: lash out and provoke reaction)

Power (move: shower them with outlandish gifts)

Cold Betrayal (move: turn their friends against them)

Custom Move: Whenever you compliment Heraldo or accept a gift from him, he gains a String on you.

The MC decides not to create a custom move for the Vampiric Underlings at the moment, as nothing seems particularly compelling.

While both of the example Threats are about vampires and their schemes, the range of things that could constitute Threats is significantly wider than that. You can create a Threat out of any character or group of characters that wants something from a PC and could pose a serious threat to their social or physical wellbeing. It's important to note that if you can't imagine an entity offering something to the PCs, or you can't imagine its actions having dire consequences for a PC, then it probably isn't a Threat. If a horde of undead birds begins circling the town, and you can't imagine them communicating with the PCs and offering them something important, then they are just some interesting background colour – part of the landscape, blanketing the world in darkness. If, however, you can imagine them bringing the PCs gifts, or whispering advice to them in a raspy voice, then by all means grab your pencil and make them a Threat.

Chapter Seven

Utterly Malleable





Mad Science

Custom moves are an important tool for the MC. They let you tinker with how the game plays, expanding the scope of the action or focusing in on abilities or dangers that are unique to your particular game. Once you start playing around with custom moves, you'll quickly realize that *Monsterhearts* is designed to be tinkered with.

Moves all follow a similar pattern. Skins are all composed of the same building blocks. Almost everything hinges upon open-ended lists - agendas, principles, moves, name lists, looks, origins, threat types, all of it.

Once you have a firm grasp on the game and some play experience, you can get your hands dirty tinkering with all this stuff - writing new basic moves, new Skin moves, or even entirely new Skins. There's never any demand for you to tinker in this fashion, only an invitation. If you've got a mad scientist streak in you, this chapter examines how best to conduct your experiments.

Shifting the Action

Basic moves inform the group about what actions are important to the genre, and how those actions propel the fiction forward. If you want to change what's important to the genre, and how those actions interact with one another, you can do so by modifying existing basic moves or adding entirely new ones.

For example, if you and your friends want to play a game of *Monsterhearts* that involves walking between dimensions and realities, and maybe you want that portal-walking to be a source of tension and weirdness, you can create another basic move to add to the list. The basic moves all follow the same pattern:

- When you do [something], roll with [a stat]. On a 10 up, [a good result]. • On a 7-9, [a mixed result or hard choice].





In this case, the [something] is already specified. What stat does portal-walking tie into? At a glance, I would guess that it's Dark. The finished move might look like:

*When you **walk between dimensions**, roll with dark. On a 10 up, you arrive in a safe and useful place. • On a 7-9, choose one:*

- ☞ You arrive in the midst of a dangerous situation;*
- ☞ You arrive somewhere else altogether;*
- ☞ You arrive with the conditions **disoriented** and **terrified**.*

New moves can also represent subtler shifts in the social dynamics of the story. For example, in my experience the teen monster genre doesn't have a lot of room for characters helping one another – it's doing it yourself or getting someone else to do it for you. However, maybe you decide that you'd like to change that dynamic, to create a move that encourages people working together and helping one another.

If so, you can create a new basic move for doing exactly that. The [something] is helping people, but that needs further clarification. Can it be used to help anyone, or is it limited to fellow PCs? Perhaps you decide that it's limited to helping PCs. The next thing to decide is which stat it relies on. While a case could be made for Hot, none of the stats really feel relevant. You could simply say "roll with +1" instead of specifying a stat, giving everyone an equal ability to help those around them.

Finally, you need to determine what the move actually does. On a 10 up, there should be a good result. "They add +2 to their roll" is an easy solution here. On a 7-9, there should be a mixed result. One option would be to have the MC introduce an ugly bargain, using language like "The MC will tell you what danger you're exposing yourself to by helping them; if you accept the danger, they add +2 to their roll." Alternately, you could have an automatic drawback, like "They add +2 to their roll, but you gain the Condition *exposed*." The finished move might look like:





When you **help another PC**, roll with +1. On a 10 up, they add +2 to their roll. On a 7-9, the MC will tell you what danger you're exposing yourself to by helping them. If you accept the danger, they add +2 to their roll.

Modifying Skins

Maybe you want to tinker with The Mortal a little bit, to create a character that's obsessed with their best friend, rather than their codependent lover. The first step would be crafting an alternate to True Love, one that awards a *best friend* tag instead of *lover*. Looking over the other moves, it's easy to use *Mess With Me*, *Mess With Him* and *Excuses Are My Armour* as is, by simply subbing in *best friend* for *lover*.

Perhaps you decide that *Downward Spiral* and *Entrenched* both feel odd for this modified Mortal. Scratch them out! Write something new to fill their place. Rewrite the Sex Move if necessary - same for the Darkest Self. Each Darkest Self follows the same format:

~ [Some nebulous statements about your outlook] and [some sinister actions that you must take while in this state]. You escape your Darkest Self when [a certain criterion is met].

Often, you'll find that you can achieve great results with only a few modifications. In the case of the *best friend*-centric Mortal, I would personally do very little: rewrite *True Love*, and probably replace *Downward Spiral*, and rewrite the first half of the Darkest Self. That's it.

Changing the MC Toolkit

Maybe you're designing a Threat, and you wish there were a fourth Craving option. Create it! Make sure that whatever you create is going to lead to dynamic situations, and put the PCs firmly in the spotlight. If you're doing that, you're golden. Whenever you tinker, keep your agendas and principles in mind.



Creating New Skins

There are a lot of monster tropes out there that are still untouched. Where's The Succubi? What about a Skin that's focused on channeling animist spirits? What about The Psychic?

Skins aren't just different types of monsters. They also represent different relationship dynamics, insecurities, and outlooks. The Werewolf is more than just a lycanthrope; it's also that over-protective boyfriend you had in college, the one who was fiercely loyal but also fiercely domineering. When you create a new Skin, it's important that you design with this principle in mind. Otherwise, your new Skin will be one-dimensional and hard to connect with.

Each Skin is composed of the same elements:

- ☞ A list of names, and a list of naming patterns
- ☞ A list of looks (general appearance; eyes)
- ☞ A list of origins
- ☞ A stat line (two stats at 1, two stats at -1)
- ☞ 5-7 Skin moves, and directions on how to pick initial moves
- ☞ Your Backstory (which gives away and gains some initial Strings)
- ☞ A Sex Move, which reflects something of their outlook and powers
- ☞ A Darkest Self, with an escape clause built into it

Many Skins have a special thing to keep track of in their "Other" section, whether it's an added currency or a special relationship. The Mortal has their *lover*, The Witch has sympathetic tokens and Hexes, The Fae has promises held and broken, The Ghoul has Hungers, and almost every Skin can gain a Gang during play. Be clear about what special currencies need to be tracked for your new Skin.





The Long Example

What follows is an extended example of play, demonstrating how moves chain together and play proceeds from moment to moment. It follows the same characters seen in the book's other examples: Vanessa the Witch, Robin the Mortal, and Cassidy the Werewolf. In order to better see the MC's tools in action, the example is written in first person from their perspective.

Vanessa's mom is in the hospital, so she's staying with Cassidy's family - something that she's not at all pleased about. Her pride's still wounded from the beating that Cassidy dished out to her in the locker room, even though they've theoretically made up.

*School's out for the day. I frame a new scene: "Vanessa, you probably get back to Cassidy's house before she does. Her dad's back from the office already, his coat flung carelessly over the banister. TV's on, and he calls out a warm greeting from the next room. What do you do?" Since we haven't seen these two characters interact yet, I'm **putting them together**.*

*I don't have any particular plan for this scene, other than to **let story emerge from the feral unknown**.*

Vanessa's player shrugs and says, "Well, Vanessa doesn't have any issue with Cassidy's family, so she'll walk into the living room and take a seat next to him. 'Hey, Mr. Lupa. How's it going?'"

*Looking at the list of Principles, **Make humans seem monstrous** stands out. I say, "Mr. Lupa's got blood on his collar, and his right eye is swollen shut. He's managing to hold both a bottle of whiskey and a cigarette in his left hand. 'Oh, just fuckin' peachy.'"*





Vanessa's player: "Vanessa doesn't care about Mr. Lupa one way or the other, but she does want some leverage over him, and a way to even the score with Cassidy."

"So, what do you do?" Even when the players speak in third person, I make sure to **address myself to the characters, not the players**.

"Well, I get up and walk over to the fridge. I walk in front of him, rather than behind the couch. A little slower than necessary, adding some extra sway to my step."

"Are you **turning him on**?" I ask.

"Yeah, in a second," Vanessa's player responds. "Is the fridge in clear view of the couch that Mr. Lupa's on?"

I see where she's going with this, and since it's my job to **be a fan of the PCs**, I am happy to help her set the situation up. "Definitely. And they've got one of those fridges where the freezer is on the bottom."

151

"Perfect. I'm going to open it up, and look through the freezer for something to use as an ice pack for the man's face. But I'm definitely going to bend at the waist, not the knees. While in my miniskirt. And for good measure, I'm going to call out to him, 'Hey, do you guys have any ice packs?'"

"Roll it," I say, grinning. Cassidy's player has an epic scowl on her face.

Vanessa's player rolls to **turn someone on**, and gets a 4 and 5. Her hot score is an unfortunate zero, though, leaving her with a total of 9. On a 7-9, the person being turned on has to choose an option. "Give themselves to you" is tempting, but I don't think it makes sense in the fiction yet. So I settle with, "give you a String against them." I narrate my choice, "You hear the bottle of whiskey drop out of Mr. Lupa's hand and fall onto the floor. 'Fuck,' he whispers to himself. He's clearly hot and bothered by what he sees. Take a String on him."



Vanessa's player marks the String down, and narrates returning with a bag of peas. "I sit uncomfortably close to him, and hold the bag of peas to his head. I coo some sympathetic words at him. Is that **turning him on**?"

*I probably is, but she only gets to roll that move on Mr. Lupa once in any given situation. Vanessa's player narrates kissing a bruise on his forehead, and lingering a bit too long. I'm not sure what would be better, to have him reject her advances or respond in kind. So I choose to **disclaim decision making**, and turn to Cassidy's player. "What would your father do in a situation like this?"*

*Cassidy's player thinks for a second. In the past, we've seen some pretty bad parenting from this character. "Honestly, I think he'd cave. He's a rat bastard." I have no qualms with that answer. Since I **treat my NPCs like stolen cars**, it's fun to watch them lose control and crash from time to time.*

*I wait until Vanessa's undoing Mr. Lupa's buttons and his hand is gripping her thigh to say, "Mr Lupa lets out a small moan under his breath, and whispers, 'Leanne, yes.'" I'm **accepting people conditionally**. Vanessa can have her revenge sex, but only if she's willing to hear another woman's name being called.*

"Whatever," Vanessa's player says, "this gives me power and leverage over him no matter what he calls me. I bring my leg around and straddle him, reaching a hand into my backpack for a condom."

I look around the room. The consensus seems to be that we fade to black at this moment, rather than continuing on with the nitty-gritty details of their sordid encounter. That's totally fine with me. I ask, "What's your Sex Move?"

Vanessa's player reads it out, "After sex, you can take a sympathetic token from them. They know about it, and it's cool. I think I'm going to stand up pretty abruptly once we're done, grab the bottle of booze that he was



drinking, and walk away from the couch. I leave my panties wherever they ended up, and I kept the rest of my clothes on." The bottle of booze counts as a **sympathetic token** for Mr. Lupa, no problem.

I glance at my Principles, and remember that **happiness always comes at someone else's expense**. Both of these characters got what they wanted, which means I might want to make a hard move in order to live up to my Principles. Ah, **put them together!** "Cassidy, this is probably the moment when you walk through the door."

I'm right; she does. Cassidy's player says, "Right away I see Vanessa swaggering away from the couch, my dad's booze in her hand." I interject, "He's sliding his pants back up as you enter, too. Vanessa's panties are clutched tight in his left hand. Has this kind of thing ever happened before?" I'm **asking provocative questions**.

"Once, with Leanne." Nice.

"And what did you do about it last time?"

"I bashed the girl's face in, which is exactly what I plan to do now. First, I'm going to reach out and grab the bottle from Vanessa's hand." Cassidy's player grabs some dice, asking, "does that count as **lashing out physically?**"

"Well," I reply, glancing at the basic moves for guidance, "you're not actually attacking Vanessa, at least not yet. I think this counts as **holding steady** in a tense situation. Can you just coolly swipe the bottle right out of her hands?"

If Vanessa had been actively protecting the bottle, the answer would probably have been different. I probably would have said that Cassidy couldn't get the bottle without beating it out of Vanessa's clutches.



Cassidy's player rolls to **hold steady**, and gets two 4s. With a cold of -1, that gives her a final score of 7. She chooses to keep her cool, meaning that she swipes the bottle without a struggle.

"Vanessa, how do you respond?" Cassidy's clearly got a next move planned, but it's part of my job to make sure everyone gets their time in the spotlight. Besides, I'm curious to see how Vanessa will react.

"I run a hand through my dishevelled hair, kind of rubbing her face in the fact that I just got with her dad. I smile my most malicious smile, and say, 'Cass, welcome home sweetie.'" She's rolling to **shut someone down**, by demonstrating that she has all the social power here, but she botches the roll.

I have an opportunity to make a hard move here, as direct and nasty as I like. But I'm pretty sure that Cassidy's about to deal out some punishment, and I don't really want to interfere with that. So I focus on the dad, and choose to **expose a dangerous secret to the wrong person**. "As the two of you are facing off in the lobby, Mr. Lupa notices somewhere weird hanging out of your backpack, Vanessa. It's still unzipped, so he opens it up. Whatever witch-y stuff is in there, he begins to pull it out and rifle through it. Books, objects of power, all that stuff." I **make my move, but misdirect** – so that it seems like he's discovered this stuff because the fiction set it up, when in actual fact he discovered it because I picked an option from a list.

I gesture, indicating that they should return to their hostile exchange. Cassidy's player says, "I'm going to take a step forward, and try to smash this bottle against the side of Vanessa's face. Does she have any Conditions I can take advantage of here?" Nope, she doesn't.

Cassidy's player rolls 1 and 4 to **lash out physically**. With her volatile stat at 2, that's just barely in the 7-9 range. She deals harm, but has to choose from a list of ugly options. "Oh, I'm totally going to turn into my Darkest



Self. Werewolf transformation, here we come. First, though, I'm going to spend a String on Vanessa to add 1 to whatever harm I deal."

*Looking at the harm guidelines, I'm not sure if it would count as 1 or 2 harm by default. If it broke and cut her up, it'd probably count as 2. I decide to **disclaim decision making**, and ask Robin whether the bottle breaks. "Uh, sure."*

The bottle breaks over Vanessa's head for 2 harm, and Cassidy spends a String against her to bump that up to 3 harm. "Vanessa, your head is ringing and you immediately feel the warmth of running blood on the side of your head. That's 3 harm total. And at that moment..." I trail off, letting Cassidy jump in.

"...yeah, at that moment I reel backwards, my eyes bloodshot and glowing red. It looks like I'm rocking back and forth for a second, but it's actually my bones realigning themselves and patches of fur bursting out of my flesh. I tear my clothes up pretty bad, but they don't fall away. It seems like I grow a foot, and the transformation ends with a loud howl that shakes the mirror beside you right off the wall."

Cassidy's her Darkest Self now. Her dad's probably sneaking out the back door, or huddled up in terror. Vanessa's bleeding profusely and might need medical attention. I follow up with the most important move in the MC's arsenal.

"Vanessa, what do you do?"





Mediography

Games

Apocalypse World
Vampire: the Masquerade (3rd ed)

Movies

The Craft
Disco Pigs
Ginger Snaps
Jennifer's Body
Kaboom
Let The Right One In
Lost Boys
Nowhere
The Twilight Saga

156

Television

Being Human
Buffy the Vampire Slayer
Misfits
Roswell
The Vampire Diaries
True Blood

Music

30 Seconds to Mars, Andrew Jackson Jihad, Brand New, Bright Eyes, Bush, CoCo Rosie, Coheed and Cambria, City and Colour, Cursive, Dresden Dolls, The Faint, Hellcat and the Prowl, The Hellfreaks, Horrorpops, Iggy Pop, Jackalope, Jack Off Jill, Ladytron, Low Shoulder, Mass Undergoe, Misfits, Mother Mother, The Mountain Goats, My Chemical Romance, Okkervil River, Panic! at the Disco, Paramore, Placebo, Portishead, Pretty Girls Make Graves, Sneaker Pimps, Spookshow, Stateless, Still Corners, Toadies, Type O Negative, Venetian Snares, Widowspeak





A Perfect Moment

Let's say you don't have time to watch all the same movies and television shows that I did, but you still want to understand this teen monster genre.

Here's the entire genre, distilled down into a single moment. It's one of the last scenes of *Jennifer's Body*. Major spoilers on this page.

Needy has decided that enough is enough. Jennifer might be her best friend, but she's also a flesh-eating demon who's wracked up a pretty serious body count. Needy's the only one who can do something about it. Jennifer must die.

And so Needy breaks into Jennifer's room in the middle of the night. She's got Jennifer pinned to the bed, straddling her. There's an x-acto knife in Needy's hand, and she's wrestling to drive it home. She somehow manages to overpower Jennifer and drive the x-acto knife into her chest.

"My... tit."

"No," says Needy, "Your heart."

Jennifer wilts. There's a moment of silence. And then her mom walks in and flips on the light. Cut to Needy in an insane asylum.

There's not a single thing missing from that scene. Someone murders their best friend. An element of messy sexuality. Punchy, over-the-top dialogue. Betrayal. Melodrama. Crude violence (with a boxcutter, no less!) And finally, the mundane world suddenly rearing its head.

Flawless.



Index

Advancement 34

Backstory 12–14

Characters

Blending In 120–121

Guiding Character Creation 130–131

Retiring 39

Conditions 28

Customizing. *See* **Tinkering**

Darkest Self 12, 32

Rewriting 38

Death 30

Dice 19

Equipment 14

Experience Points 34

Feral 44

First Session 134–135

Forward 28–29

Gangs 35

Hacking. *See* **Tinkering**

Harm 30

Healing 31

Highlighting. *See* **Stats: Highlighting**

High School

After Graduation 127

Blending In 120–121

Party, Fight, Disappearance 137

Seating Charts 136

Look 9

Materials 6, 129

MC

Advantage & Disadvantage 119–120

Agendas 103

Always Say 103

First Session 134

Hard Moves 111

Menace. *See* **Menace**

NPC Strings 117–118

Party, Fight, Disappearance 137

- Playing NPCs 101, 116
 - Villains* 139
- Principles 104–110
- Priorities 101
- Seating Charts 136
- Teaching the Game 131–133
- Under Each Skin 122–126
- Villains 139
- Mediography** 156
- Menace** 140–145
 - Components 140
 - Cravings/Offerings/Capacity 142
 - Custom Moves 143–144
 - Stakes 141
 - Threats 142–144
- Modifying.** *See* **Tinkering**
- Moves** 11
 - Basic Moves 11, 20–24
 - Gaze Into The Abyss* 24
 - Hold Steady* 22
 - Lash Out Physically* 23
 - Manipulate an NPC* 21
 - Run Away* 23–24
 - Shut Someone Down* 21–22
 - Turn Someone On* 20
 - Chain Reaction 115
 - Custom Moves (Threat) 143–144
 - Growing Up Moves 39–41
 - Call People On Their Shit* 40
 - Intervene Against an Act of Violence* 41
 - Make Others Feel Beautiful* 40
 - Share Your Pain* 41
 - Hard Moves 111
 - Sex Moves. *See* Sex Moves
 - Skin Moves 11
 - Talking & Moves 18
- Name** 9
- Notes from the Apocalypse** 5, 38, 103, 105, 108, 109, 110, 115, 134
- Origin** 10
- Queer Content** 20, 42
- Rolling Dice** 19

Scenes

Experience Point Limits 34

Scene Framing 17

Strings Limit 34

Seasons 36

How Season Advances Work 36–37

Season Advances List 37–41

Sex Moves 12

Rewriting 38

Skins 8

Changing Skins 38

Creating New Skins 149

List 46–47

The Chosen 48–52

The Fae 53–57

The Ghost 58–62

The Ghoul 63–67

The Infernal 68–73

The Mortal 74–78

The Queen 79–83

The Vampire 84–88

The Werewolf 89–93

The Witch 94–99

Playing The Same Skin 9

Under Each Skin 122–126

Stats 10

Highlighting 13

Initial Stats 10

Strings 25

NPC Strings 117–118

Significance of Spending Them 26

Spending on NPCs 26

Spending on PCs 25

Teaching the Game 131–133

The Long Example 150–155

Tinkering 146

Custom Moves 143–144

MC Toolkit 148

Modifying Skins 148

New Basic Moves 146–148

New Skins 149

Your Backstory. See Backstory