

Necromancy

A roleplaying game by Holden Shearer

Preview for Patreon subscribers: Core rules

Chapter Three: Rules

These are the rules you'll need to know if you're going to portray a character in this game. They're pretty simple, and the MC and other players can help you out if there are one or two you don't remember when the game begins. The MC also needs to know these rules, and has some additional rules to follow, but if you're just going to portray a character you don't need to worry about those. Additional rules for the MC are in Chapter XX.

The Commandments

These are the most important rules in the game, more like a guiding philosophy than rules *per se*. If any other rule seems like it comes into conflict with the commandments, the commandments take precedence.

The Golden Rule

You bought this, so it's your game now. If your group thinks one of the rules sucks, or would just be more fun some other way, you should change, ignore, expand, or replace that rule as you see fit.

The Red Rule

This is a game about bringing horror into your story—not into your gaming group. If someone is uncomfortable with certain content, then the game doesn't go there, not even if I wrote in a monster or even a whole campaign revolving around it. In particular, no character or storyline should ever contain sexual content everyone at the table (including all participants *and bystanders*) isn't cool with. This is, frankly, not *that* kind of dark fantasy game, and you are not compromising the experience by establishing boundaries for yourself. If someone in the group does so, respect them; that person is extending their trust to you.

Okay, now on to the standard “pick up the dice and do this when that happens” portion of the rules.

Using Moves

When you roll the dice to decide what happens next, that is known as “making a move.” Moves happen when you say things in the story to trigger them. Some moves *always* happen when certain things happen in the story; this usually happens in combat. Other moves—most moves, really—can be made up on the fly. The MC will tell you when you're making a move, and you can always back up if you hadn't intended to make that particular move.

For example:

You: “I slam the door open and storm into the captain's office, glaring daggers.”

The MC: “It sounds like you're trying to intimidate him? OK, grab the dice.”

You: “Oh! No, I’m just pissed off because of what Yorsha said, I’m not trying to get anything from the captain.”

That’s cool. The game can move fast and loose, and you should go with that—don’t worry about getting trapped in some course of action you didn’t really want.

Making a move is simple. Grab a pair of six-sided dice, roll them, and add up the results. If the result is a 2-6, you don’t accomplish whatever it was you wanted to do, and your life usually gets interesting pretty soon after. If the dice add up to 7-9, you will either:

- Get what you want, but with a complication

or

- Get *some* of what you were trying to accomplish

or

- Have to make a decision about the outcome of your move

On a 10+ result, you accomplish whatever it is you were trying to make happen.

There are additional guidelines in the MC’s rules for putting together moves on the fly, but you don’t need to worry about them; it’s the MC’s job to call for moves anyway. All you need to do is pick up two dice, roll them, and check the result.

Modifiers

Sometimes a move will have *modifiers* attached. The character rules in your playbook will tell you when this is the case. When you have a modifier, it will say something like “roll at +1” or “roll at -2” or “suffer a -1 penalty” or “get a +1 bonus the next time you roll.”

When you have a modifier, you add that modifier to (or subtract it from) the result of your dice roll while making a move. For example, let’s say you make a move and roll at +2, and the dice come up 4 and 4. Normally that would be an 8, but since you rolled at +2, it’s a 10 instead.

In the same situation, you might *also* have a rule making you suffer a -1 penalty. In that case, you’d subtract -1 from your modifier, so that it becomes +1, and the roll would produce a 9.

In no case can the final modifier on a roll, after taking everything into account, produce a bonus higher than +3 or a penalty worse than -3.

Examples and Common Moves

Some moves are going to come up more frequently than others. Below are ready-to-use rules for some of the most common moves that might appear in your game. Remember, though, that these are there to help you along, not to constrain you. If you want to add to, change, or modify any of these moves to produce a better story for your group, you should certainly do so. Many of these call for a *hard move* on a miss. These are detailed in the MC’s rules section. If you’re a player, don’t worry about them; they basically amount to “inflict consequences that make sense, or else use the failure to push the story into a more dynamic pace.”

Act With Grace

This move describes you attempting to do something requiring agility, coordination, and physical prowess in a hurry—climbing the side of a tower, leaping from branch to branch, or running

across a slanted and slippery roof in the rain, for example. On a miss, the MC makes a hard move. On a 10+, you succeed. On a 7-9, you succeed, but choose one:

- You create an immediate or potential future complication for yourself in the course of succeeding (such as making a ruckus, or knocking loose a branch behind yourself and making it impossible to go back out by the same route).
- You suffer 1 harm in the course of succeeding.

Skullduggery

This move describes you doing something sneaky, underhanded, and apt to get you in a lot of trouble if you get caught, such as jimmying windows, picking locks, making objects that don't belong to you disappear up your sleeves, and fishing things out of people's pockets. On a miss, get neither, and rest assured a hard move is soon to follow. On a 7-9, pick one. On a 10+, get both:

- You succeed at the task.
- Nobody notices what you did until long after the fact.

Tracking

This move describes an attempt to follow the trail left behind by someone... or something. On a miss, the MC makes a hard move. On a 10+, you find a means to effectively track your prey. On a 7-9, you find signs of your quarry, but the MC chooses one:

- The trail leads across precarious ground or through a place of great danger, even before any inevitable dangers such as descending into a monster's lair.
- The trail is difficult to follow, and progress is slow.

Foraging

This move describes your attempts to live off the land for at least a little while, locating needed supplies like shelter, food, potable water, or dead bodies. On a miss, the MC makes a hard move. On a 10+, you find at least enough of what you're looking for to get you through the day. On a 7-9, the MC chooses one:

- You find what you're after, but you'll have to brave some kind of difficulty to get it.
- You find what you're after, but it's not entirely adequate to your needs.
- You don't find what you're after, but you find something else useful instead.

Feat of Strength

This move describes getting something done through sheer muscle power—lifting something really heavy, bashing down a door, muscling open a heavy stone sarcophagus, winning an arm-wrestling contest, stuff like that. On a miss, the MC makes a hard move. On a 7-9, you can get the job done, but only by accepting a drawback like suffering 1 harm or breaking/damaging a tool in the process. On a 10+, you succeed.

Pursuit

This move describes attempting to run down someone or something that is trying to get away. On a miss, the MC makes a hard move. On a 7-9, you catch up, but either suffer 1 harm in the

process or else are winded by the chase, and suffer -1 to your next action. On a 10+, you catch up.

Escape

This move describes an attempt to flee from combat and vanish into the night. On a miss, you don't escape. On a 10+, you get away. On a 7-9, you get away but choose one:

- You leave an obvious trail which might potentially be followed.
- You get separated from your allies, and maybe lost.
- You hurt yourself in the course of fleeing into the dark, and suffer 1 harm.

Shadowing

This move describes an attempt to follow someone or something stealthily, without being detected. On a miss, you're spotted. On a 10+, you shadow your target successfully. On a 7-9 you shadow your target, but the MC chooses one:

- You get stranded in hiding in a position that makes it difficult to get away again unseen.
- You are lead into way more trouble than you bargained for.
- You shadow your target for a while, but eventually they lead you to a place where you'll have to break off pursuit, reveal yourself, or come up with a new plan fast if you want to keep trailing them.

Investigate

This move comes into play when you search for clues, dig around in ruins, ransack a room, or otherwise go poking about to see what's going on. On a miss, the MC makes a hard move. On a 7-9, ask one from the list below and the MC will answer. On a 10+, ask two.

- What the hell am I looking at?
- What happened here recently?
- What is about to happen?
- Is there anything here I should be wary of?
- What here is useful or valuable to me?
- What here is not what it appears to be?

Act Under Pressure

This move comes into play when you have to do something that would normally be no sweat—grab a sword, run down a hallway, slam and lock a door—except that you're doing it under immediate threat of something terrible happening: grab a sword from a hissing pile of snakes, run down a hallway that is collapsing around you, slam and lock a door before the slobbering monster chasing you can catch up and get through it. On a miss, the MC makes a hard move. On a 10+, you succeed. On a 7-9, you flinch, hesitate, or stall: the MC will offer you a partially successful outcome, or a hard bargain or nasty price in exchange for success (such as suffering harm, or being forced to leave an item or ally behind).

Intimidate

You use this move when you're trying to threaten someone to get what you want, but you're not actually in a fight, or at least not yet. "What you want" might be almost anything; you might just be trying to get them to back down, but you also might be trying to make them let you pass, or to give you something. On a miss, the MC makes a hard move. On a 10+, the MC or the targeted player chooses one:

- Call your threat, forcing you to go through with it or to back down. If you go through with it, gain +1 because you've rattled them already.
- Cave in and give you what you want.

On a 7-9, the target can choose one from the 10+ list, but also gains the following options:

- Flee from you or barricade themselves away from you.
- Give you something they think you want, or tell you something they think you want to hear.

Seduce, Appeal, Fast-Talk, Lie, Manipulate

When you try to get something out of someone by appealing to them, you have to establish what kind of appeal you're laying out—sex, falsehoods, promises, ego-stroking, bribes, playing to convictions, whatever—as well as what you're trying to get out of them. On a miss, the MC makes a hard move. On a 7-9 they'll go along with what you want, but need some kind of tangible assurance, evidence, or corroboration first. On a 10+, they'll go along with you until some fact or action contradicts the reason you gave them.

Read Their Eyes

You can use this move when interacting with someone else. As the name implies, interacting means speaking, arguing, fighting, fucking—some kind of actual give-and-take exchange, not just glancing at someone and trying to read their mind. On a miss, they realize something about you that you'd rather they hadn't. On a 7-9 you learn something about them, and can ask the MC a question about this person: choose one. On a 10+, choose two:

- Are they telling the truth?
- How do they really feel right now?
- What do they intend to do next?
- What do they wish I'd do?
- What are they afraid I'll do?

Exercise Vigilance

This move comes into play when you're actively alert and on guard—standing watch over camp, or creeping slowly and carefully through a monster's lair with every sense attuned to danger—and something bad is coming your way. It's not appropriate if you're just standing around, eating supper, or trudging along on a journey and making good time. On a miss, you're caught unaware, with consequences dictated by the MC. On a 7-9, you have at least enough forewarning to lay hold of your weapons and shout a warning. On a 10+, you see trouble coming with enough time to make ready for it—you and your companions gain +1 on your first action in response to the threat.

Celebrate

This move comes into play when you lead your settlement in a celebration of triumph—usually after a successful hunt, but maybe you safely delivered a baby or found a big cache of much-needed supplies. On a miss, your presence brings down the mood, canceling out one choice from the successful result of another player, if anyone else is also taking part in the carousing. On a 7-9, choose two. On a 10+, choose 3:

- Things don't get out of hand.
- You befriend someone, or manage to smooth over an existing animosity.
- You uncover useful information or a promising opportunity.
- You put the settlement at ease, erasing one mark from the panic clock.

Harm

The long night is full of all kinds of nastiness ready, willing, and able to hurt you. There are a hundred ways to lose your footing and get banged up in the dark. There are brigands and cannibals lurking out in the wastes. Parasitic monsters want to lay eggs in your chest. It's not a fun time to be alive, and it's pretty easy to get rendered not-alive.

When something hurts your character, you've suffered *harm*. There are particular rules for combat, but we'll worry about those later. For now, just be aware that you can suffer harm in battle, sure, but it's not the only time or place you can get hurt.

Luckily, you're playing an important hero, made of sterner stuff than the average farmer: you can roll with the punches and handle a lot of grief before going down. Unfortunately, the monsters stalking the darkness are often made of even sterner stuff than you. Good thing you're not alone. (You're *not* alone, right? Oh God, why did you split the party?!)

In combat, most sources of harm are already defined by particular rules, but sometimes you'll have to assign harm on the fly. Here's how to do that, measured against the common-sense imaginary yardstick of "what if this happened to me:"

If the damage would make you wince, if it would *hurt* but not be the end of your plans for the day, like running through some brambles or getting punched in the face, that's 1 harm.

If the damage would *definitely* require stitches, maybe a trip to the ER, like getting hit with a bat or slashed with a knife or falling down a flight of stairs or off of a ladder, that's 2 harm.

If the damage would *absolutely* send you to the hospital, like getting stabbed in the gut or kicked in the head by a horse or thrown off a balcony, that's 3 harm.

If the damage would stand a good chance of straight-up killing you on the spot, that's 4 harm.

Most characters can't just drop 4 harm on an enemy whenever they feel like it in the middle of a fight, so it can be worth it to set things up in advance so that you can do something like collapse an old building onto a monster or roll a boulder into it.

The Death Clock

Player characters have a *death clock* on their record sheet. As the name implies, it looks like a little clock, with 12 segments, and it counts down to you having a really bad day. When you take harm, you mark off an equal number of portions on your death clock. When all 12 segments are marked, you erase all marks in the death clock and have to make a *death move*.

Harm in the death clock is largely notional until the clock fills up. You've gotten banged around, sure, but nothing *really* bad has happened to you yet. If you think of it like an action movie or a TV show, a character with harm in their death clock has maybe got a bloody lip or some cosmetic scuffing or shallow gashes—you can tell they've been in a fight or through some hardship by looking at them, but they're not really *impaired* yet. Once the death clock fills up, things get more serious.

Death Moves

When your death clock fills with harm, you erase all the harm and make a *death move*. Your death moves are listed in your playbook; every playbook has different death moves, but there are a few things to know about them as a general thing. First, *most* playbooks have at least two standard death moves in them. One of them leaves you *badly injured*, and the other just says “You die.”

Let's talk about *badly injured* for a moment. There are rules in your playbook for it, but what it *means* in terms of the story is that you're no longer a scuffed-up hero with blood trickling from your hairline—you're one who now has serious, impairing, no-shit wounds to worry about. Moving around hurts, you're probably limping, and something may be broken, but you can still push through the pain and the wounds to do stuff. Being *badly injured* sucks, but it's usually better than any of the alternative death moves, and it gets your death clock cleared so you can keep on keeping on.

That other common one, well, it does what it says. If you take the “You die” death move, then you die. This character's role in the story is... probably over. (Probably. There's a lot of necromancy going on in this game!)

Now, it's worth pointing out that most players, most of the time, are going to use *badly injured* to put off “You die” for as long as they can, but you don't *have* to. When your death clock fills up, you *must* make a death move, but unless a death move has particular rules telling you when you can or can't play it, you can make whatever death move you want. You *can* skip straight to “You die” if it would make for a dramatically poignant storytelling moment, or if a death at this particular moment would empower some terrible black magic ritual that might save the day and you feel that's worth dying for, or if it would divert the attention of the corpse-eating monster and allow the rest of the group to escape, or whatever.

There are also other death moves particular to certain playbooks. Often these let you stave off death for even longer, usually with a nasty cost attached; you'll find their particular rules in your chosen playbook. No matter what, though, you always get to erase all harm in your death clock when you play one.

Recovery

When you get somewhere *reasonably* safe and take an hour or two to rest, you can clear all the harm out of your death clock. You may still have some superficial bumps and scrapes but on the whole, you're ready to roll.

If you're *badly injured* or have some similar condition, that's a little different. A short, safe rest will still clear out your death clock, but you'll remain *badly injured*: it's a story condition, and as such, what it says about you *must* remain present and true in the story you're telling until it makes sense for it to go away.

The most common way to get rid of *badly injured* is to rest up for several days, maybe even a couple of weeks, in a safe place while taking it easy and not exerting yourself. The MC will decide the exact details, based on what makes sense for the narrative your group's spinning. Receiving medical aid from someone with proper supplies and training can speed up your recovery time significantly, but unless someone is playing The Surgeon, those skills and supplies can be tough to come by.

Intimacy

Every playbook has an *Intimacy* rule. They all begin with “When you share a moment of intimacy with someone, be it physical or emotional,” and then say what happens. In some playbooks, what happens gives you an advantage. In others, it creates problems. In others still, it just gives the story an opportunity to head off in interesting directions.

First, let's talk about why your character has an Intimacy “move.” This is a game about dark fantasy heroes in a doomed world, but angst isn't generally *focal*. Frankly, you're too powerful and important for people fearing or rejecting you to be that big of an impediment. However, not being focal doesn't mean the angst of being a terrifying death-magician or flesh-eating monster isn't *there*. Your power, and the frightening, deathly nature of that power, sets you aside from the ordinary people you're fighting for, and even from your fellow heroes. Moreover, life in the endless night has become fleeting, cheap, and easily lost. As a result, those moments when you *connect* with someone else, when you manage to just *feel human*, or to *express and make someone understand* what it's like to *not* feel human... those matter. Those are precious to you, even if you don't want them to be, even if they hurt. The Intimacy rules exist to highlight that part of the story.

Next, let's break down what Intimacy with a capital-I *is*. First, elephant in the room, yeah, fuckin' counts, but that's not the only thing that does or even really the main thing. Someone holding you while you cry, or doing that for someone else—that's Intimacy. Listening to an old, old, old man talk about seeing the sun when he was a child, when there's nothing else between the two of you but the night and his voice and the far-away look in his eyes and you feel a little bit of the bittersweet wonder and loss of the memory he's sharing—that's Intimacy, too. Confessing your nature, opening yourself up to someone, making yourself vulnerable—that's Intimacy. Taking someone's family necklace out onto the hunt and promising to bring it back—that's Intimacy. Even putting a hand on someone's shoulder to let them know they're not alone—even that can be Intimacy, if they needed it badly enough and you saw them clearly enough to realize it.

Intimacy *has* to be sincere. You can't just go up and randomly hug someone to get a game bonus. It's part of the greater movement of the story, and if intimacy isn't really present in the story, it's not there in the rules, either. Intimacy also can't be antagonistic. Sure, you can forge a very personal connection through mutual loathing, but you're The Death Knight or The Ghoul or The Necromancer or whatever—you're not exactly the most uplifting band of heroes the world has ever seen. Making folks hate or fear you isn't really a stand-out accomplishment for characters who eat human flesh or reanimate grandpa to be their mindless slave.

The Settlement

There just aren't many people left these days. They say the Brass City is still standing, somewhere deep beneath the earth, but otherwise? The great cities, the vast sprawling

metropolises, the walled bastions of humanity, they're gone: burned down, shaken down, or just emptied out and full of things looking to eat you alive or spells run amok that will do a lot worse than that.

So the settlements of living people you find scattered across the endless night, they're not that big. A few hundred souls, maybe. Maybe less. In a brighter age, they would have barely qualified as villages; these days, they're bright and vibrant collections of people in a world where mostly you just find single families holed up in a cave or old cellar somewhere, and if you're lucky, they don't waylay you and try to eat you.

Play scenarios in **Necromancy** always revolve around a settlement of some kind—a pocket of ordinary people who've managed to scrape out some kind of quasi-safe haven in the endless night. Of course, it's only quasi-safety. The night never ends. Sustenance, shelter—these things aren't *immediately* imminent crisis concerns, but they're a constant source of tension and worry. And the security of the settlement is only contingent on monsters *normally* staying away. Sometimes people vanish into the dark, leaving behind only broken walls and smears of blood. If you want this to be a place where people can continue to live, you should probably do something about that.

Your character *probably* doesn't originally come from this settlement, but they might! Either way, it's where they've ended up, by whatever road led you to it, and the story you'll be telling is the story of this little place's ultimate fate. When the settlement's destiny is resolved, so is the story, for better or worse.

There are various ways to bring a settlement's story to its conclusion, varying from campaign to campaign and settlement to settlement, but dissolution due to mounting instability is a potential dire end that *all* settlements potentially face. The *panic clock* represents this instability.

The Panic Clock

The panic clock works a lot like your *death clock*, and is similarly represented by a little clock on your settlement sheet, divided into 12 segments. The panic clock measures settlement stability and morale. There are a *lot* of things to worry about in a world of never-ending darkness full of hungry monsters and broken magic. Like, say, the scary-ass death wizard that just took up permanent residence in the settlement. How much can anyone trust someone like *that*?

When the story begins, your settlement exists in a kind of rough but very fragile equilibrium. It's *unstable*, and can be tilted from day-to-day living into chaos pretty easily, particularly now that a band of powerful and deathly beings have shown up and taken an interest in the place. You're both a source of potential hope and persistent dread for your settlement, and your actions will have significant consequences on the balance and stability of the people living there.

When something happens to shake the settlement's confidence or put fear into it, the panic clock advances and you *set it forward* by a certain number of marks, just like recording harm in the death clock. When the panic clock fills up, clear it of all marks and your settlement experiences a *crisis*.

During a crisis, people get worked up to a fever pitch, things tumble out of control, and there's some kind of major trouble that you'll have to get under control or let work itself out. At the end of a crisis, your settlement gains one point of *instability*. When you gain instability, completely fill in the last unmarked space in your panic clock. It's *always* considered to be a marked

segment now, and it doesn't clear out when a crisis hits. Fear, suspicion, paranoia, and chronic worry have become an inextricable part of life within the settlement, and it is now permanently easier to fill up the panic clock. As instability mounts, the settlement risks falling into a death spiral, with crisis after crisis smashing into it with little rest or reprieve between them.

Once instability completely fills the panic clock, your settlement is finished. Most of the population has been killed by wave upon wave of unchecked crisis, and those who remain will drift apart into the night in the coming days and months, preferring to take their chances in the long dark than to remain aboard a clearly sinking ship. This is no longer a place where people band together: it's just another collection of bloody stains, abandoned belongings, dust, and desolation. If this happens, your story has reached a bleak but all too common conclusion.

Panic Triggers

This isn't a comprehensive list of ways to add marks to the panic clock—if something happens in the story and it seems like it would strike fear and dread into the settlement, the MC can simply declare it adds a mark—but it's certainly a list of the most common stimuli that create panic, and should be taken as a good example of the sorts of things that put marks on the clock.

[NOTE FOR PATRONS: I'm constantly tinkering with these as I test and re-test gain rates and monster difficulties, to see what feels like a fill rate for the clock that feels menacing but not insurmountable or unmanageable. Expect to see this section change.]

- When you flee from battle, add a mark to the panic clock. If the entire group flees and returns to town without slaying the target of a hunt, an additional two marks.
- When you make a death move, add a mark to the panic clock.
- When make a death move that renders you permanently dead, add three marks to the panic clock.
- When a monster victimizes the settlement, add one to three marks to the panic clock, depending on how dangerous the beast is and how terrible its depredations are. *Engaging in a hunt to slay the beast can erase these marks if carried out successfully.*
- When you intimidate or otherwise deliberately terrorize someone important, you might add a mark to the panic clock—especially if you rolled a 7-9 and the MC offered you a mark in exchange for success.
- When you directly victimize someone in the settlement, such as by beating them, taking their blood, or overriding their will with magic, add a mark to the panic clock.
- When you directly victimize someone in the settlement in an irreparable fashion, such as by crippling or killing them, add two marks to the panic clock.
- When you directly victimize a *group of people* in the settlement, add two marks. When you victimize a group in an irreparable fashion, add three marks.
- When you do something horrible to the settlement's dead without the settlement's prior consent (such as eating them or raising them as undead minions) and the populace finds out about it, add a mark to the panic clock.

Combat Rules

When you face down a terrible monster or some other deadly adversary, you have entered combat and a set of slightly more formal rules kick in.

The majority of monsters in the endless night are solitary horrors, and these rules are presented with the assumption that combat will feature your group of heroes fighting a single powerful opponent. Occasionally, you will face more than one enemy at once; rules for encounters with multiple monsters can be found at the end of this section, and are only a slight elaboration on the rules for fighting one monster. For now, we'll focus on just learning to fight one awful man-eating terror at a time.

Action Order

Combat proceeds in *rounds*, which are divided up into *turns*. When it's time for your character to act, that's your turn. A round is finished when every player, as well as the monster, has taken a turn.

Determining which order the combatants act in is very simple: In each round, the monster always takes its turn first. Then, the players act in whatever order they wish to, until everyone has taken one turn. After that, it's on to the next round.

On a character's turn, they get to *move* and *act*, though they may opt to forfeit either of these options. Players can move and act in whichever sequence suits them—that is to say, they can act and then move, or move and then act. Monsters must always move and *then* act.

Distance and Movement

You don't need a map or a grid or anything for combat, although you can use one if you like. Instead, positioning is roughly abstracted into a series of *range bands* establishing the rough distance between combatants. These are measured as follows:

- **Close:** Two combatants at *close* range are able to interact with one another easily and directly. They can engage in hand-to-hand combat by taking only a few steps. This is sword-fight range, and usually the range at which monsters are the most dangerous.
- **Medium:** Two combatants at *medium* range are too far away to easily move up and strike at one another with melee weapons. This is the range at which you need to shout to be heard, and can generally only attack with projectiles like throwing weapons.
- **Long:** Two combatants at *long* range are too far away to communicate with anything other than energetic waving. Attacking at this range is generally only possible with dedicated ranged weaponry such as bows, or with spells.
- **Disengaged:** Anyone farther away from another character than *long* range is *disengaged*, and cannot interact with the other character in any way. They're a speck in the distance.

Most characters are able to move one range band on their turn, either toward or away from the monster or some other player. Monsters can often move significantly farther. Distance is relative and subject to what makes sense in the narrative. If you're *close* to Alaster but at *medium* distance from the monster, which is in turn fighting Sadow at *close* range, and then you move up one range band to *close* range with the monster, you are logically also now at *close* range with Sadow and at *medium* range from Alaster. If you get confused about where someone or something is, just ask the MC and they'll hash it out for you.

I Don't Like Range Bands

Some groups don't care for range bands and abstracted movement, or find them confusing. If this is the case, use a grid for combat, and assume everyone can move one space in any direction (including diagonally) on their turn. (The monster may be able to move farther.) Anything in an adjacent square is at *close* range, anything within 2 squares is at *medium*, anything within 3 squares is at *long*, and anything farther away is *disengaged*. Easy.

Combat Moves

When you act on your turn, you'll be executing a combat move. Usually, that means an attack, but it doesn't *have* to be an attack. You could do something else, like break down a door, untie a hostage, try to set the room on fire, protect someone else, or whatever other creative thing comes to mind. Sometimes it's more useful than attacking. Sometimes it's more *important* than attacking.

But usually, yeah, you're attacking the monster. Fundamentally, attacking works like every other move in the game: pick up a pair of six-sided dice, roll them, add them together, and apply a modifier. A 2-6 is always a miss, a 7-9 is a hit, and a 10+ is a really good hit.

Here's where things are a little different than other moves. First, the modifier for your attack move is based on what you're using to attack with. Your playbook will give you some kind of weapon or choice of weapon, and will tell you what kind of modifier to roll with when you use it. The playbook will also tell you how much harm the weapon does when it hits.

Some weapons get to attack more than once. If a weapon's description tells you to attack three times, for example, then on your turn when you attack, you get to roll your attack move once, a second time, and then a third time, giving you three potential opportunities to inflict harm.

You don't *have* to use the weapons in your playbook. You might find a spear or something and decide to use that. You might have a torch and decide to stick it in a monster's face. But generally, the weapons in your playbook are the ones you're best with. When using any other kind of attack, you always roll a single attack at +0, with harm dictated by the MC according to the general harm guidelines: generally 1 harm for your fists and feet and teeth or weapons capable of attacking from farther away than *close* range, 2 harm for small weapons, 3 harm for things like swords and spears, and 4 harm for really crazy stuff like rolling a boulder down a hill and onto a monster.

Defense

When a monster attacks you, you'll generally be prompted to roll defense. You can describe this move however you want—dodging, parrying, whatever seems to make the most sense. Your playbook will tell you what modifier to apply to your defense roll. The results of the roll will be determined by the attack the monster uses, but generally speaking, 2-6 is bad news, 10+ keeps you safe, and 7-9 is... maybe safe, maybe not, but certainly not as bad as 2-6.

Monster Rules

Monsters work a bit differently than your character, and are controlled by the MC. Here's what you need to know:

Action and Movement

As mentioned before, the monster always goes first in each round. On its turn, the monster must move and *then* act. If it decides to simply attack someone already at *close* range, for example, then it has opted not to move during this turn.

The monster's action is generally an attack selected by the MC from the monster's rules, but it doesn't *have* to be. Like players, monsters can take any kind of action that makes sense for them. A monster might smash down a door to get to a hero hiding on the other side, for example. Monsters never prompt the MC to roll when they act; either the monster can do something, or it can't.

When a monster attacks you, rather than the monster making an attack roll against you, you'll generally be prompted to make a defense roll to protect yourself, as detailed above.

Vitality

Monsters don't have a death clock. Instead, they have a *vitality gauge*, which is a numerical value (often *much* higher than the 12 segments of your death clock) that is reduced when the monster suffers harm. With only a few exceptions, monsters don't get death moves. When a monster runs out of vitality, it simply dies.

The Death Deck

The biggest difference between you and the monster you're fighting is that the monster has a *death deck*. This is a deck of specialized cards determining what happens when you attack the monster—where your attack lands, what happens to the monster based on how you rolled, and what, if anything, the monster does to you in return. Many death cards will prompt a *reaction* from the monster, generally a retaliatory attack of some kind, especially if your attack misses. Other death cards provide the opportunity to seriously cripple, debilitate, or even outright slay the monster without depleting its vitality gauge first.

When a fight begins, the MC shuffles the monster's death deck and places it in a stack on the table face-down. When you attack, draw a number of cards from the top of the death deck equal to the number of attacks you are making, then turn them face up and roll to resolve them in the order drawn. Once all your attacks are resolved, place the death cards face-up in a discard pile. Any player can look through the discard pile at any time they like, but undrawn cards in the death deck remain a mystery to everyone, including the MC, unless your playbook gives you some special ability to peek at cards before drawing them.

Occasionally, a card's result will tell you to set it aside from the deck. *Don't* place these cards in the discard pile; set them off somewhere else on the table face-up where everyone can see them. Usually, these are cards that represent some lasting injury to the monster that inflicts an ongoing penalty, such as having a hand chopped off.

Each death deck contains at least one special card known as a *trap card*, detailed in its own section below. For now, just be aware that as its name suggests, the trap card is really bad and you don't want to draw it.

Reactions

As mentioned above, many death cards will contain a reaction from the monster. They'll say something like "On a miss, suffer *Claw Strike*," and if you roll a 2-6, then the monster will use the listed attack and you'll probably have to roll to defend.

Luckily, *you can only suffer a reaction attack from a single death card on your turn*. This will always be the first death card that inflicts an attack on you as a result of your roll.

Let's say you have a weapon that makes three attacks on your turn. You draw three death cards, all with attack reactions in response to a miss, and manage to miss with all three attacks—ouch. In this situation, you only suffer the reaction attack listed on the first of the three cards; the reaction attacks from the second and third cards simply don't happen, even though the cards say they trigger an attack on a miss.

Trap Cards

Trap cards work a little bit differently. Most death decks only contain a single trap card, though a few contain more. Trap cards represent the monster anticipating your attack and having something really nasty prepared to take advantage of your mistake. Drawing a trap card generally sucks, and puts you in a world of hurt. Worse, most trap cards don't offer the opportunity for a defense roll.

When you draw a trap card, you always ignore any other death cards drawn. Don't even roll to resolve them; just send them straight to the discard pile without the opportunity to inflict harm or the risk of reaction attacks. Then, follow the instructions on the death card, probably while cursing profusely. Once the death card has been resolved, add it to the discard pile and shuffle the discard pile back into the death deck.

Do *not* shuffle cards that have been “set aside” back into the death deck when you resolve a trap card. As bad as the trap card is, it's not going to stick a monster's severed hand back on.

In the hopefully rare event that you draw more than one trap card on your turn, only resolve the first trap card drawn. Put the others straight into the discard pile.

Multiple Monsters

Occasionally, your MC may be cruel enough or your group may be unwise enough that you'll find yourself fighting two *different* monsters at once (for example, a manticore and a harpy). These fights proceed exactly like a solo battle, save that the second monster has its own death deck and vitality track. At the beginning of each round, the MC will select a monster to act first, and then a player gets the opportunity to act, and then the second monster will act, and so on.

If you're facing more than one of the *same kind* of monster (for example, two manticores—and it happens, a few monsters travel in packs), the rules are *mostly* the same. The order of actions is the same—one monster goes first, then a player, then a monster, and so on until the MC runs out of monsters—and each monster has its own separate vitality track. However, all monsters of the same type share a single death deck. You just keep drawing out of the same single deck, regardless of which of the monsters present you're attacking. Any cards “set aside” affect only the monster whose injury they represent, and go into the discard pile when that monster dies.