

[This is the second part of a series of design commentary on the Powered by the Apocalypse hack I made to run VtM, explaining design considerations in translating objectives into mechanics and the particular demands of the PbtA engine/framework that I've encountered.]

Special Systems

If you're playing, you'll need to track the following resources on your record sheet. The Storyteller also needs to track Edges, Conditions, and harm for NPCs.

Humanity/Path

Every vampire must stave off the Beast by clinging to something: either your dwindling Humanity, or an inhuman code of rigid ethics in the form of a Path of Enlightenment. Your Humanity/Path score is rated from 1-10. If it falls to 0, you are forever lost to the Beast.

If you are an adherent of Humanity, you begin with Humanity 7. If you follow a Path, you begin with your Path at 5.

[The Humanity loss/gain mechanics were the first idea I had for this hack, and I liked them enough that they're the main reason I bothered to go ahead and do the hack in the first place.

I've said before that Vampire is about a lot of things, and it is, but if I had to point to a fixed center for all versions of the game, I'd probably point to Humanity. Everything you do as a vampire should be a negotiation with your code of ethics. "Do I want this badly enough to pay the price? Do I want this badly enough to lose part of myself, even knowing I might not get it back, and knowing for *damn* sure that if I do get it back, it'll be expensive?"

Path support is included because it's trivially easy to have once Humanity support exists, and I like Sabbat play. You start with a lower Path rating than Humanity rating because building up an alien system of ethics is tougher than clinging to your basic personhood.]

Humanity/Path Modifier

You will sometimes be asked to roll with your Humanity/Path modifier. Like all modifiers, this can be anywhere from -3 to +3. It's based on your Humanity/Path score, as follows:

10: +3

9: +2

8: +1

7: +1

6: +0

5: +0

4: -1

3: -1

2: -2

1: -3

[I spent a fair bit of time wrestling with the question of the Virtues--you know, Compassion, Self-Control, Courage. As discussed previously, I toyed with making them the game's Attributes, but once I discarded that, I realized I didn't actually need them at *all* and that most of what they really did was to try to arbitrate your Humanity and frenzies.

Since Humanity gain/loss is choice-based rather than half-choice/half-luck in this hack, I no longer needed anything to perform the function of deciding whether you dropped when you violated your ethics—there goes Courage/Conviction. And Self-Control, Instincts, and Courage are three entire stats dedicated to handling frenzy, which early on I figured I could just manage with the *stand your ground* move, so I tossed them as well.

Still, I didn't want Humanity/Path to *just* be a meter that tracked how close you were to losing your character. But at the same time, I also didn't want to have it constantly throwing bonus caps or debuffs on your basic moves; the bonus/penalty range in PbtA is just too small to put that kind of stuff in unless it's *really* important to thematic thrust or play balance. Humanity 4 vampires needed to be viable to play, and while you can maybe get by with 4 dice for social pools when dealing with mortals in WoD, you *can't* reasonably get by with no way to push your social moves above -1 in PbtA.

That's when I realized I could attach modifier values to Humanity ratings and simply run a bunch of moves off of your Humanity. It's probably the least 'clean' mechanic in the hack, since it involves a lookup table rather than a natural 7-point swing range from -3 to +3, but it seemed worth the tiny complexity gain to be able to use the various Hierarchies of Sin from different books unchanged.

Incidentally, if you manage to get some use out of this, I'd be very interested in hearing how the Humanity/Path bonuses shake out. I ultimately ended up using the spread you see above, but there's a different chart I very strongly considered, based on the fact that it's a lot more practical for a vampire to exist for a long time at low Humanity/Path ratings than at high ones. It looked like this:

10: +3

9: +2

8: +2

7: +1

6: +1

5: +1

4: +0

3: -1

2: -2

1: -3

Would that make Beast management more practical? Or *should* managing the Beast be a constant battle for someone with Humanity 4?]

Losing Humanity/Path

When you **violate your current Humanity/Path rating's hierarchy of sins**, you lose a point of Humanity/Path and fall into *turmoil of the spirit*. You remain in a state of spiritual turmoil until your next advance. When you reach your next advance, you must make a choice: either spend it on something else as normal, or spend the advance to stabilize your Humanity/Path, restoring the last point that you lost. If you opt to spend your advance on anything else, the Humanity/Path simply remains lost. Likewise, if you lose more than one point of Humanity/Path before reaching your next advance, only the last point of lost Humanity/Path can be salvaged.

[So here's the biggest change in the hack: Humanity loss is decision-based, not chance-based. If you decide to violate the hierarchy of sins, you *will* lose Humanity. A lucky dice roll can't stop it. But by the same token, if you can manage not to slide even *deeper* into depravity for a while, you can also choose to get that point of Humanity back.

You gotta give up an advance, though.

In Storyteller games, XP is a precious resource and having any of it get 'flushed' into something transitory is always painful. In some games, it may even cause you to fall significantly behind the power curve of the rest of the group. But in PbtA, advances are fairly easy-come. One's always around the corner. Moreover, the system is *very* power-bounded: no matter how many cool powers and bonuses and stuff you pile up, you'll never be rocking better than +3 on a roll, and the 10+ results of the various moves... are what they are. There's simply no way to force the game to give you some absurd payout where you roll an 18 and get to deal 10 harm to everything in front of you.

So "throwing away" an advance is more about delaying self-gratification than losing out on getting somewhere or falling behind. *I was really, really looking forward to getting that new Dominate power*. Well, you can still have it. After all, you're only at Humanity 6 now. That's still plenty of Humanity to burn. You have lots of time to turn it around. All the time in the world, in fact.

All the time in the world.]

Raising Humanity/Path

To raise Humanity/Path, you must spend an entire period between advances behaving as though you have at least one higher point of Humanity/Path than you actually possess. At that point, you can spend your advance to enter a state of *seeking lost grace/seeking greater enlightenment*. You remain in this seeking state until your next advance. If you manage to behave in accordance with a higher standard of Humanity/Path than your current value, you may spend that next advance to add a dot of Humanity/Path to your total.

[In standard Vampire, raising Humanity is sort of... mystified, in a way I didn't want. "Well, if you behave in *exemplary* fashion and say your prayers and eat your veggies, your Storyteller *may* let you spend experience to raise—" Yeah, no. If you seek, you may attempt to find.

But where one advance to stabilize Humanity loss is a gimme... climbing back up, that hurts. Tossing two advances stings, just because the "meter" of this hack is that you get a fun new toy of power-gain every session or two. And the rewards of raising Humanity are *fairly* minimal. Going from 5 back up to 6, for example, doesn't net you *anything* in mechanical terms except a more restrictive hierarchy of sins; your +0 modifier is still +0.

The only thing you get out of it, really, is a tiny bit more space between you and the Beast, and being, well. Less of a fucking monster.

It was important that the cost of Humanity/Path advancement sting, but not be just a dreary punitive bullshit slog. There's a difference between *making a painful choice* and *boring the player for minimal gains*, a mistake I didn't want to repeat from mechanics like Mage: the Ascension's Arete, Exalted 1e and 2e's Essence rating, or all of the "power" stats in nWoD (Blood Potency, Primal-Urge, etc).

Wassail

If your Humanity/Path falls to 0, you are *in the jaws of the Beast*. Your Beast is considered to be permanently *awake* (see below) so long as you remain at Humanity 0. You *must* use your next advance to restore your lost Humanity/Path, or you lose your mind and descend into a feral, endless frenzy as the Beast claims your soul for its own. If you commit a Humanity/Path violation capable of dropping you from 1 to 0 again while *in the jaws of the Beast*, you forfeit the ability to spend an advance to stabilize, and enter the final frenzy by the end of the current scene.

[I did some polling around once and discovered only one person who had ever seen a character *actually* removed from play by being lost to the Beast during a real Vampire campaign. So Wassail is primarily a notional threat. I didn't want to ramp it up in the form of aggressively taking your character away, especially since any character flirting with Wassail is probably one that has been played for a long time. I did, however, want to give it a bit more in the way of teeth, so I opted to turn it into a pit that eats your next advance every time you fall into it, and forces you to be hyper-aware of your behavior while you wait for that advance to come in. Do be careful with that.]

The Beast

The Beast is always lurking within, waiting to be roused to wakefulness and to take over your vampire. Certain events may cause the *beast to stir*, including but definitely not limited to partial successes on a number of standard moves. When the beast stirs, make a mark on your record sheet to indicate it. If the beast stirs three times in a single night, then *the Beast is awake* and you must immediately resist either frenzy or *rötschreck*, depending on the circumstances which

provoked its awakening. Any further goads to the Beast will necessitate additional frenzy or *rötschreck* rolls, but won't add further marks.

In addition to the goads present in the basic moves, the Storyteller may declare that the Beast stirs as a result of any other criteria that make sense, such as:

- Rolling a miss on a move (especially *stand your ground*).
- Being exposed to uncontrolled fire.
- Being exposed to sunlight.
- Seeing or smelling blood while you have no blood remaining in your pool.
- Realizing that a loved one is in pain or danger.
- Being awakened by danger during the day.

Just as the Beast can stir to wakefulness, it can also be quelled back into slumber. When you *quell the Beast*, erase one mark indicating that it has stirred toward wakefulness. The basic moves provide a number of ways to quell the beast, and when you go to sleep for the day, remove all marks of the Beast from your sheet.

[Stirring and quelling the Beast is probably the biggest shift introduced by this hack, and it's entirely the result of staring at the basic moves and seeing that they often wanted to inflict some kind of drawback on you for a partial success. In Monsterhearts, drawbacks usually take the form of someone getting a string on you, and in this hack, the equivalent would be giving someone an Edge. But most of the moves in Monsterhearts are social, and that isn't the case for Vampire. But on the other hand, risking a full-blown tilt into frenzy seems like a huge punishment to attach to what is, fundamentally, supposed to be a successful roll.]

This is where the notion of stirring and quelling emerged. In the Storyteller system, there are a lot of levers to play with when adjudicating a frenzy roll: the difficulty of the roll based on the severity of the goad, how many successes you need, dice bonuses and penalties... rolls in PbtA are a lot simpler and don't give you as much leeway to fiddle. So, instead, I built the fiddling into the Beast's intrusion into the story. You don't generally need to worry about going from zero to psychotic killing rage right after you wake up, or when you're otherwise having a good night on even keel. By the same token, once the Beast has stirred twice, you know that your vampire is on edge. You know that the next thing that pushes you is going to make tonight dangerous for everyone around you. You can incorporate this into your roleplaying. And if you're really worried (you still have to put in an appearance at Elysium and Alistair is sure to try to bait you in front of the Harpies...), you can use the decisions you make when you take moves to try to get the Beast to settle down.]

Frenzy

The Beast attempts to enter frenzy when goaded by hunger or anger. When you enter frenzy, gain the Condition *frenzied* and ignore all other Conditions. You will lash out violently at anyone

and anything nearby without regard for friend or foe, although the first and foremost target of your frenzy will generally be whoever or whatever touched the frenzy off. After that, you prefer hostile targets over passive or fleeing ones, and those nearby over those far away. The Condition doesn't end until there's nobody else present for you to tear to pieces.

When frenzy looms, how you handle it depends on your Humanity/Path of choice. If you follow Humanity or one of the Paths in the "Paths of Self-Control" sidebar, you seek to resist the frenzy. If you follow any other Path, you cannot resist your frenzy and instead seek to ride the wave.

When you resist your frenzy, roll with your Humanity/Path modifier. On a 10+, you don't succumb to frenzy, and you quell the Beast. On a 7-9, you don't succumb to frenzy. On a miss, you enter frenzy.

When you seek to ride the wave, roll with your Path modifier. On a 10+, you enter frenzy, but you also gain the Condition *riding the wave*, and you can end the frenzy after drinking your fill of blood or killing something. If you choose not to end your frenzy prematurely, you quell the Beast when the frenzy ends. On a 7-9, you *ride the wave* as above, but can't end your frenzy prematurely. On a miss, you fail to *ride the wave* and enter an uncontrolled frenzy. When *riding the wave* you are still restricted to actions of bloodthirsty destruction, but can decide who to attack in which order, and can even spend a few moments, *once* per frenzy, smashing furniture and otherwise venting your rage upon the scenery to give your allies a few precious moments to escape (they take +1 forward or gain Advantage to *run for it* during this brief window).

Rötschreck

The Beast attempts to enter *rötschreck* when goaded by fear. When you enter *rötschreck*, gain the Condition *rötschreck* and ignore all other Conditions. You will attempt to escape from whatever provoked *rötschreck* at all costs, and the Condition doesn't end until you can no longer detect any sign of whatever triggered the condition.

When *rötschreck* looms, you must roll with your Humanity/Path modifier. On a 10+, you don't succumb to *rötschreck*, and you quell the beast. On a 7-9, you don't succumb to *rötschreck*. On a miss, you enter *rötschreck*.

[In the end, I decided not to go with having you *stand your ground* in the face of the Beast. That move was designed for a certain purpose and I decided that moves are simple enough to write in PbtA that re-purposing something to do anything other than the thing it was built to do was a generally bad idea.

So if you're not going to *stand your ground*, what *should* you roll with? What kind of character is best at resisting the Beast? A smart one? A social one? A strong one?

Why, a character in touch with herself. You cage the Beast with your Humanity, which, in this context of Vampire, can functionally *be* described as the capacity for self-control over your destructive and selfish impulses; or you guide it within a kennel-run constructed out of the inhuman ethics of a Path.

A practical result of this is that while frenzy is almost always destructive for a high-Humanity character's Humanity rating, such characters have less to fear from the Beast stirring in the first place. By contrast a Humanity 3 vampire, or one with only a shaky grasp on their Path, needs to carefully limit their exposure to things that can rouse the

Beast, because once it's awake and snarling, it's *much* more difficult for them to keep it in check.

I imagine that if anyone actually uses this hack as the basis for a long-running game, managing frenzy is probably going to be the biggest incentive to go through the struggle of pushing a low Path/Humanity rating all the way back up into the bonus range.]

Paths of Self-Control

The following Paths of Enlightenment allow you to resist frenzy. For all others, you must ride the wave when the Beast rises: The Path of Blood, the Path of the Bones, the Path of Death and the Soul, the Path of Honorable Accord, the Path of Harmony, the Path of Paradox, the Path of Typhon, the Path of Entelechy, the Path of Ecstasy, the Path of the Warrior, the Path of the Scorched Heart.

[In retrospect, I kind of wish I'd just gone ahead and said "if a Path uses Self-Control, it resists frenzy; if it uses Instinct, it rides the wave," because that's the real rubric behind the sidebar there. But I wanted to minimize required lookups. Oh well.]

Blood

Vampires run on blood. You get blood by drinking it from people, and can hold up to 5 blood (more if you're of lower Generation). You begin the game with as much blood as you can hold.

You can "over-feed" to hold up to 1 point of blood above your maximum, but doing so causes the Beast to stir for each point you over-feed, and any excess blood vanishes at the end of the scene.

You lose 1 blood when you wake up every night. If you have no blood to spend in order to wake up, you wake up anyway, but suffer 1 harm and the beast stirs.

[Blood point management is one of the simplest and most elegant mechanics in the history of roleplaying games. "I'm a vampire. My powers run on blood." OK, makes sense. "I get more blood by sucking it out of someone's neck." Also makes sense. Clean, straightforward, intuitive.

Your "blood pool" is smaller in this hack for a few reasons. First, PbtA is much less granular than Storyteller about mechanically describing a person's injuries and state of health. Second, the system is much more tightly bounded. Most of the "extravagant" ways to waste blood don't work here. There's not a lot of opportunity to blow a shitload blood points blood buffing yourself up to +6 in multiple Attributes. "Physical" is now a single stat and it can only go to +3. Third, keeping you "hungry" for blood means you need to keep circling back to that lovely *drink blood* move and the hard decisions it asks you to make. You can't just stock up to full and be sure you're ready for whatever your plans are tonight plus a surprise or two.

Making room for emergencies in the immediate future, well, that's what over-feeding is for. Sometimes you need all the power fuel you can get, and at any cost.]

What if I Drink...

An animal's blood: You only gain 1 blood, or 2 if it's a *big* animal like a cow or deer. The animal dies. You can't raise your blood above 4 by doing this. After a hundred years or so, you stop being able to get blood from animals at all.

A blood bag or other 'dead' source: You get 1 blood, but this can't take you above 3 blood.

A vampire's blood: Don't use the *drink blood* move. If they consent, you get as much blood as they're willing to give. If you're taking it by force, then use the *fuck them up* move and trade out harm for stealing blood when you attack with your fangs.

A werewolf's blood: If they're into it or knocked out or something, use the *drink blood* move but you stir the beast for each blood you drink. If they're not into it, uh, good fuckin luck with that, honestly.

Some other weird fucking thing: If it's undead-ish but not a vampire you probably can't get blood and probably get a Condition like *sickened* for a while. If it's a faerie or something you can probably drink its blood but it likely comes with some oddball Condition.

[In the last V20 game I was involved in, we got a lot of mileage out of illegally obtained blood bags. It was convenient. I don't think that kind of convenience should ever leave you in a comfortable position, though. So in this hack, substandard sources of blood can sustain you, but they can't take you up to full strength, no matter how much "guilt-free" or "risk-free" blood you have access to.]

Blood Buff

At any time, you can spend 1 blood to add +1 to a physical move.

[I have gotten so much mileage out of the blood buff over time that it had to make it into the hack, but by the same token... the system doesn't leave much room for it. So here it is: it only wanted one sentence, and I didn't try to make it anything more than that.]

Blood Bond

After someone drinks your blood once, you get an Edge on them.

After someone drinks your blood twice, they gain the Condition *warm regard* toward you, which lasts for at least a year, or until you form a blood bond to someone else.

After someone drinks your blood three times, a blood bond forms and they gain the Condition *in love with you*. This will persist until years have gone by without drinking your blood. If you're of low Generation, the Condition might take years or even centuries to fade.

A character can only have one blood bond at a time. Once the blood bond forms, drinking the blood of other vampires doesn't grant Edges or cause *warm regard* any more.

[Simple but powerful. Remember, Conditions aren't just something you can tag for a +1, they're statements that *must be true in the story you tell around the table*. So when under a blood bond, you can't do anything that someone who was *in love with the Prince* or whatever wouldn't do.]

The durations are fuzzy because, honestly, does anyone remember exactly how long a blood bond lasts? There have been rules written in various supplements over the years about subtract this Generation from that Generation and multiply it by a certain number of years without drinking any more blood but honestly fuck that, no, nobody remembers off the top of their head. We all remember that they last a *very long time* and if you're in constant contact are basically permanent; and we all remember that in the case of scary-ass Methuselaha, they may endure for *centuries*. That's enough to tell stories with. It doesn't need greater definition.]

Vaulderie

For Sabbath games, the Vaulderie prevents the formation of blood bonds, and all vampires who participate in a Vaulderie with one another gain the *warm regard* Condition toward as though they were two steps toward a blood bond.

[This hack simply doesn't have the system latitude for a 10-point constantly reshuffled scale of reciprocal slightly uneven affection so I went ahead and flattened it down to a generally real but not invincible social bond. If you were a big fan of the way Vaulderies worked out slightly uneven and could flux a bit over time, sorry about that.]

Blush of Life

If you want to fake the fine details of life for a scene—flushing your skin with living warmth, breathing, presenting a heartbeat, all that—roll with your Humanity modifier. On a 10+, you invoke the blush of life. On a 7-9, you can invoke the blush of life but you have to spend 1 blood to do it. On a miss, you can't remember what it was like to be alive well enough to fake it, and can't use this move again during the scene.

Vampires on a Path can't use the blush of life.

[I think the blush of life works as-is, as a simple story signifier, but I sometimes wonder if I should have made it a Condition wherein you *appear to be alive*? But should just ... not being an impossible walking corpse be worth a +1 when talking to people? Hm.]

Generation

Your character is 13th Generation. You can only increase your Generation through diablerie. Lower Generation brings with it certain advantages:

12th Generation: You can “over-feed” to hold up to 2 extra blood.

11th Generation: You can “over-feed” to hold up to 3 extra blood.

10th Generation: You can hold 6 blood.

9th Generation: You can “over-feed” to hold up to 4 extra blood.

8th Generation: You can hold 7 blood.

7th Generation: You can hold 8 blood. Get an extra +1 to an Attribute of your choice.

6th Generation: You can hold 9 blood. Get an extra +1 to an Attribute of your choice.

5th Generation: You can hold 10 blood. Get an extra +1 to an Attribute of your choice.

4th Generation: You can hold 12 blood. Get an extra +1 to an Attribute of your choice.

[Tricky. If I let the blood pool balloon quickly within the “standard play” range (13th to 8th Generation) I think it would have undermined a lot of the decision to shrink your maximum blood in the first place. Expanded over-feeding privileges are a lot easier to handle, since they come with their own drawback in the form of the Beast stirring.

“Elder Generations” (7th and below) don’t give you access to superhuman bonus caps because those break the system. Those free extra Attribute bonuses mean you’ll be rolling with high bonuses *really frequently*, though, which is king in PbtA. Not that I expect anyone will manage to diablerize their way up to 6th or 5th Generation in the course of anything but the weirdest of games, but hey, if it happens, you’ve got rules and I *think* they should make you feel insanely overpowered without actually melting the core resolution mechanics.]

Diablerie

When you commit diablerie on a vampire of at least equal Generation to your own, you get a free advance. If the vampire you diablerized was of lower Generation, your Generation drops by 1. This *doesn’t* reset your experience or count as an advance for the purpose of retaining or restoring Humanity/Path. It *does* automatically cost you a point of Humanity if your rating is above Humanity 1, and may cost a point of certain Paths.

You also gain the Condition *soul-stained* for a year and a day, which can be detected through Auspex.

[No “suck their soul out like you’re trying to drag an angry cat out from under the couch” rolls. If they’re down and you’ve got your fangs in, I think the decision to devour their soul is more important than rolling some dice to signify the decision.

Diablerie is another of the true genius elements of Vampire, and I wanted it to be lucrative. Eating your colleagues can get you a *lot* of power in a hurry, but it’s also a very fast track to finding out how well those Wassail rules I wrote feel in practice.]

Edges

Edges represent insights into what makes another character tick, which can be leveraged against them. In order to spend an Edge, you have to declare that you’re doing so and say how, exactly, you’re exploiting your insight. Edge can be spent to (choose one):

- Add +1 to your roll.
- Subtract -1 from someone’s roll against you. (An NPC can do this against a player, as well.)
- Force an NPC to falter, freeze up, or hesitate.
- Force an NPC to act at Disadvantage.
- Add 1 extra harm to whatever harm you’re dealing someone. (NPCs can do this to players, as well.)
- An NPC can spend an Edge to gain Advantage.

[These are basically strings from *Monsterhearts*, but in a broader context where they can also represent knowing that the Assamite coming after you fights left-handed.]

Conditions

Characters can gain Conditions over the course of play. Conditions describe something currently significant about the character, such as *happy*, *enraged*, *frightened*, *poisoned*, *exhausted*, *drunk*, *distracted*, *blinded*, or *blinded by greed*.

Conditions describe a thing that *must be true in the story*; nothing can happen if it contradicts a Condition. For example, a character with *broken legs* cannot run, and one who is *terrified* cannot display extravagant courage until they’ve gotten rid of *terrified*.

Characters lose a condition when it makes sense in the story for them to do so, or when a move allows them to. Characters can tag a Condition on themselves or on someone else when they make a move, allowing them to add 1 to their move, but they must describe how they exploit the Condition to their advantage. NPCs can tag a Condition on themselves or someone else to gain Advantage.

If the Storyteller thinks a Condition ought to make something difficult for you but not stop you from doing it altogether, she can tag it against you to give you -1 on your move.

Staked!

Getting your heart pierced by a stake or an arrow or a busted-off broom handle is a Condition: *staked*. Being *staked* paralyzes you completely until someone pulls the stake out. It sucks. It sucks so bad, in fact, that if you want to do it to someone when you *fuck them up*, you need to roll a 12+ rather than a 10+, since “give them a Condition” isn’t usually supposed to be an “I win” maneuver.

[Conditions are basically the only “difficulty” mechanic in the system, and I think they serve okay for that. They do a lot of the work for contextualizing the story that Intimacies do in Exalted and, I suppose, Aspects manage in the Fate family of games. They’re also another semi-direct import from Monsterhearts. Have I mentioned that Monsterhearts is fucking brilliant?]

Inflicting Harm

When you hurt someone, you *inflict harm as established by the narrative*. In narrative terms, 1 harm represents transitory but meaningful injury, such as being kicked in the head, slammed through a table, or running full speed through a thorny hedge. 2 harm represents serious injury, like being shot with a pistol, stabbed with a knife, or bitten by a vampire’s fangs when the vampire is looking to do serious damage. Most attacks with weapons inflict 2 harm. 3 harm represents likely fatal injury: being hit by a truck at high speed, taking a close-range shotgun blast, getting tossed off the top of a parking garage, that sort of thing.

Vampires suffer 1 less harm than they otherwise would from guns, since they’re not really in danger of bleeding out or doing anything important with most of the organs getting perforated.

[Vampire isn’t really a game *about* combat, but it’s certainly a game where people fight and get hurt. As a result, the injury rules are fairly abstract and undetailed, and combat plays out more as a scene in a story than as a mini-game within the major game.]

Suffering Harm

Mortals can suffer 3-4 harm before they go down for the count, depending on how tough they are. Vampires are a lot sturdier, since they don’t need most of their internal organs, and can withstand 6 harm before getting taken out; certain Disciplines can potentially widen this window. When you suffer your sixth point of harm, you die the Final Death. You can choose not to die by:

- Entering uncontrolled frenzy and erasing all non-aggravated harm. You can’t make this choice if you’re already in frenzy.
- Losing all blood, erasing all non-aggravated harm, and entering torpor.
- Giving the fate of your character into the hands of the Storyteller, with *carte blanche* to inflict some sort of interesting tragedy or suffering on them, and then erasing all non-aggravated harm. This is guaranteed not to kill your character, or to make them no fun to play, but these are the

only guarantees. You can only make this decision if one of the two above it is also potentially possible.

[Vampires are pretty sturdy. Since this hack doesn't have bashing damage to represent your ability to shrug off standard ass-kickings, I opted to make vampires just straight up harder to kill than mortals by making 'em a little more damage-sponge-y.]

This hack ascribes to the “gaming needs stakes, but having an interesting story you're telling abruptly canceled because your character died sucks” school of design. PCs are *very difficult* to kill, and unless facing *overwhelming* opposition or just diving into battle after battle, have a lot of ways to cheat death. But all of them come with some kind of tradeoff. I'm going to live, but someone else is going to have a bad day. I'm going to enter torpor; I need my friends to look out for me. I... I just don't want to die, and I'm not dropping into torpor alone in the middle of a fucking blood-hungry Sabbat pack; Storyteller, do what you gotta do, just give me an out.]

Recovering From Harm

You can spend 1 blood to erase 1 harm whenever you have at least a moment to stop and concentrate on pulling yourself together. While sleeping during the day, you can spend 2 blood to erase all harm; alternately, while sleeping during the day, you can spend 2 blood to erase 1 aggravated harm.

[Healing is pretty standard for Vampire, except for the 2-blood-for-a-full-dayheal feature. That's in there because during the last V20 game I played, we found that getting torn up during a fight tended to dog us for the next several sessions, as we were constantly limping along trying to find opportunities to top up on blood to heal with, but without killing our vessels in the process, it was a slow and protracted thing. I think that if you get away into reasonably controlled safety and a decent opportunity to feed, you should be okay. Vampires in fiction don't tend to limp around night after night recovering from a single fight, unless they got set on fire or something. So 3 blood is enough to fix yourself up and still wake up the following night.]

Banes (Aggravated Harm)

When you're harmed by fire or sunlight, the harm is *aggravated*. If you die because you can't take any more harm, and all of your harm is aggravated, you suffer Final Death and cannot choose not to die.

Harm from fire: Getting scorched or singed inflicts 1 aggravated harm. Being seriously burned, like by having someone jam a torch in your face or having your clothing catch on fire, inflicts 2 aggravated harm. Immolation such as being engulfed in flames or hurled into a bonfire inflicts 3 aggravated harm.

Harm from sunlight: Weak exposure to sunlight through some combination of heavy clothes, heavy curtains, and heavy cloud cover, or only having a small part of your body (say, a hand)

exposed to direct sunlight inflicts 1 aggravated harm. Brief, partial exposure to direct sunlight (dashing past a window with sunlight streaming through it) or brief but full-body exposure to weak sunlight (running unprotected from an RV to a house's front door through sunlight filtered by heavy cloud cover) inflicts 2 aggravated harm. Full-body exposure to direct sunlight inflicts 3 aggravated harm.

Harm from fire and sunlight reoccur after a few moments if you don't do something about them.

[Not much to say here. Don't get set on fire, folks, it sucks and it will kill you.]

Torpor

When you enter torpor, roll with your Humanity/Path modifier. On a 10+, you'll recover within a couple of nights, or as early as the next scene if you're fed blood. On a 7-9, you remain in torpor for weeks or months, but can be fed blood and roused early once the next session starts. On a miss, you're stuck in torpor for years or decades, but can be fed blood and roused early once the next session starts. However, it takes at least 3 blood to jump-start you.

[In the Storyteller system, there's a mandatory downtime to torpor based on your Humanity/Path rating and if your rating sucks, it's easy to get stuck in torpor for *years* on end with nothing anyone can do about it. That's... not really game-able, so I made sure you can always get "jump-started" early once your fellow players get ahold of you. Having to sit around not playing sucks, and the worst you should ever have to do for "dying" is sit out the rest of the current session.]

Ghouls

When you spend 1 blood and feed it to a mortal, they gain the Condition *ghoul* for a month. Ghouls are tough, strong, and don't age so long as they keep the Condition, which they can tag in appropriate circumstances.

[I opted for really simple ghoul rules since you're not playing them and the Storyteller shouldn't get annoyed at having a bunch of new rules to manage every time you make a ghoul. So any time being a ghoul would be useful, tag the Condition, +1, boom. Easy.]

Background Moves

When you create your character, select one Background for them.

Alternate Identity

You have an alternate identity that you can slip into when needed, complete with faked credentials, history, and so forth, which will stand up to reasonable scrutiny. This might be a false mortal identity, or you could be convincingly posing as a member of a different Clan or Sect.

Contacts

You permanently have the Condition *I know a guy*, which cannot be removed save through *major* story events. This can be tapped when you exercise your pull on “low-prestige” groups such as academia, law enforcement, the little people, medicine, the occult underground, organized crime, the street, and unions.

Domain

You have control over a useful feeding ground or chunk of real estate, and this control is recognized by other local vampires.

Fame

You permanently have the Condition *famous*, which cannot be removed save through *major* story events. This can be tapped when you exercise your pull on culture-focused groups such as bohemians, the church, high society, and the media.

Herd

You have established a group of mortal vessels to alleviate some of your feeding needs. Once each story, you may declare that you’re drawing upon your herd during a scene of downtime to gain 3 blood for free.

Influence

You permanently have the Condition *friends in high places*, which cannot be removed save through *major* story events. This can be tapped when you exercise your pull on upper-crust groups such as business, city hall, the courts, and high society.

Resources

You permanently have the Condition *wealthy*, which cannot be removed save through *major* story events.

Status

You occupy some formal position of prestige and influence within your clan or sect. What is it?

[The approach used for Backgrounds spun completely out of thinking about Resources and how rarely I’ve seen the granularity of the Background make it into actual play. Instead it always just seems to be “do you have it at 4+ or not? Are you rich?” Based on that, I decided to incorporate Backgrounds as simple “statements” about the character. “I’m rich,” “I have lots of friends,” and so forth.]

Merits and Flaws

Merits and flaws are *optional* features to customize your character. If you wish, you can take one merit, but if you do so, you must also take a flaw.

[These were one of the hardest parts of the entire hack to do. When you shrink down from Storyteller to a less-granular system, the room for 90% of the Merits and Flaws to exist vanishes.]

Merits

Bruiser: When you intimidate someone through sheer size and strength, you can roll with physical to *show your teeth*.

Iron Will: You can roll with mental to *stand your ground*.

Smooth Talker: When you apply charm, schmaltz, and fast-talk rather than knowledge, you can roll with social to *navigate a system*.

[These three Merits are the primary reason I bothered trying to figure out how to incorporate Merits and Flaws at all. “Okay so it makes sense for someone with a lot of social savvy and confidence to be good at shutting people down. But it also makes sense for a huge furious biker dude to be good at intimidating people? Ah screw it I’ll toss in a merit for people who want to shuffle it around.”

I’m actually a huge fan of “this move lets you use a strong stat instead of a weak one” type moves, like The Ghoul’s *disaffected* move in *Monsterhearts 1e* that let you *turn someone on* with Cold instead of Hot. Those are less popular these days, and there really wasn’t much room for them in this hack, but the Merits let me get at least a little of that sort of customization in.]

True Faith: Your faith in a higher power has survived even your fall into damnation. You can roll with your Humanity modifier to *show your teeth* to other vampires when using your faith as a weapon.

Eat Food: You can hold down mortal food for at least an entire scene before you need to start making rolls to *stand your ground* once per scene to avoid bringing it all back up.

Quiescent Beast: Your Beast has to stir four times in a single night before awakening. You can’t take this Merit if your Clan Weakness is in any way related to the Beast or frenzy.

[Quiescent Beast is the “I really hate dealing with frenzy” Merit; or, alternately, the horseshit overpowered one, and the reason why all the Flaws are so painful.]

Lifelike: If you have a Humanity rating, you don’t need to spend blood to invoke the blush of life on a 7-9 result. If you have a Path rating, you can attempt the blush of life, but always roll at -3.

[This is primarily here so that if you’re really invested in using the Blush but you’re on a Path, you can do that.]

Generation: Make a roll with the modifier indicated below. On a 10+, you start at 10th generation. On a 7-9, you start at 11th generation. On a miss, you start at 12th generation.

Roll at +3 if you are: a Harbinger of Skulls or Salubri

Roll at +2 if you are: an Old Clan Tzimisce, Nagaraja, or Salubri *Antitribu*

Roll at +1 if you are: a Tremere, Assamite (any bloodline), Baali, Wu Zao, or True Brujah

Roll at +0 if you are: a Gangrel, Malkavian, Nosferatu, Toreador, Ventrue, Setite, Giovanni, Daughter of Cacophony, Gargoyle, Kiasyd, Samedi, or Tlacique

Roll at -1 if you are: a Brujah, Lasombra, Tzimisce, Ravnos, Caitiff, or City Gangrel

[So this was interesting to work out. I didn't want Generation to be a Background, the problems with Generation as a Background are well-documented. *But*, the more I thought about it, the more it sounded boring for everyone to be 13th Generation flat-out in every game.

However, this hack doesn't have any expendable resources to sink into variation, and "everyone is either 13th or 12th" wasn't really much of an improvement. Thus, a Generation roll to produce a bit of variance, and even the worst result leaves you better off than if you hadn't bought Generation at all.

The modifiers are based on the general "promiscuity" of the Clan in bestowing the Embrace, or how far the blood has spread.

The Salubri and Harbingers are both extremely old bloodlines whose "average" membership are of powerful blood, and they rarely Embrace.

The Old Clan Tzimisce and Nagaraja are also small, old bloodlines, and both are very discerning with the Embrace. The Salubri *antitribu* are less discerning, but their re-emergence into the world of the Damned is *very* new and they simply haven't had room to spread the blood very far.

The Tremere and Assamites are large, widespread clans, but extremely picky about who they consider worthy of the Embrace compared to the other 11 Clans, and so for them the blood isn't quite as commonly "diluted." The Wu Zao and Trujah are small bloodlines and so haven't diluted their blood as much as others, but aren't as severely discerning with the Embrace as the Nagaraja or Old Clan Tzimisce. The Baali are probably the single oldest bloodline, and have gone through periods of massive expansion and massive die-off. In the modern nights, they're just coming back from a period where the bloodline was largely purged down to a core of elders.

The clans and bloodlines at +0 represent average distribution of the blood of Caine, or are small bloodlines whose founders weren't of extremely potent blood to begin with.

Finally, the clans and bloodlines at -1 are the mongrels of the Kindred world, who have spread their blood far and wide with impulsive Embraces. The Lasombra and Tzimisce would bristle at their inclusion here, but frankly, they participate in mass-Embraces as often as any other Sabbat vampires. If you don't want to see the potency of you blood

diluted, maybe don't give it to every guy you manage to jump in the parking lot of the 7-11, guys.]

Flaws

Typhoid Mary: You are an asymptotic carrier for some serious sickness. Add the following to the list of choices when you *drink blood*: They don't gain the Condition: *sick*.

Thin Blood: You are of the 14th or 15th generation (pick one). This works the same as being 13th generation, but you cannot (choose two): sire childer; create ghouls; create a blood bond; over-feed. If you're 15th generation, "sire childer" has to be one of your picks.

[Thin Blood is a fun Flaw. I didn't want to go as hyper-punitive as the official game did in Time of Thin Blood, since you already have a pretty small blood pool to begin with in this hack. I think getting to pick-and-choose how the weakness of your blood expresses is neat.]

Brutal Fangs: You can't lick wounds made by your fangs closed. When you *drink blood*, you have to spend two of your picks to choose "they definitely don't die."

Vulnerability to Silver: Touching silver harms you as if you were touching flames. Harm inflicted by silver is aggravated harm.

Folkloric Vulnerability: You have the Condition *susceptible to [insert vampiric bane here]*. If this is a compulsion such as counting grains of rice or not crossing running water, you must *stand your ground* to deny the compulsion. If it is an aversion, such as repulsion by garlic or church bells, you must *stand your ground* or retreat in the face of your bane.

Dark Fate: There's no good ending waiting down the line for you. When you die, you can't choose to enter Frenzy or give your fate into the hands of the Storyteller to save yourself. You have to either enter torpor or die.

Spooky: Some odd supernatural phenomenon trails in your wake, like a cold wind, the smell of a fresh-turned grave, a slow infestation of flies, or a frost that kills plants you touch. You have the Condition *spooky*, but can't tag it in your own favor. You can't take this Flaw if you already have some manner of weird, hideous, or unearthly Condition as a Clan Weakness.

Lingering Wounds: When you spend blood to erase harm, you gain the Condition *lingering wounds* as livid traces of your injuries remain manifest on your body. They don't impair you, but they're certainly alarming to anyone who sees you walking around with a half-clotted hole through your chest. You must spend 1 blood while sleeping through the day to get rid of your *lingering wounds*.

Character Creation

To make a vampire, go through the following steps:

- Write down a concept for your character ("musician forever looking for that breakout gig," "psychiatrist with late hours," "biker," "silent partner in a club," etc).

- Come up with a name for your character.
- Write down a short, punchy description of your character, incorporating the three most striking features they have. Use two sentences, tops.
- Pick one Attribute to be rated at +1, one at +0, and one at -1.
- Select a Clan. Note your Clan Disciplines and Weakness.
- Select which faction from your Clan list to get +1 pull with, if you're using pull. Your Storyteller might have alterations to the Clan lists in mind.
- Decide if you're following Humanity or a Path. If it's Humanity, start with 7. If it's a Path, decide which one and start with 5.
- Select one Background. Alternately, select no Backgrounds, and get the Generation Merit without having to take a Flaw.
- If you want to, select one merit and one flaw. This step is optional.
- Note your Generation.
- Select three moves from among your Clan Disciplines.
- Select one of the other players. They get to start with an Edge on your character.

Now you're ready to play.

[It's not quite as simple as filling out the average PbtA playbook, but you should still be able to get a character done in under ten minutes. Handing out Edges at the start of the game establishes some in-group tension: you are, after all, blood-drinking monsters and this is the World of Darkness. You deliberately *don't* have to all hand an Edge to the person or your left or anything—you get to choose who has something over you. You might, for instance, all pick the least-threatening member of the coterie... and in the process make him the most dangerous member of the coterie.]