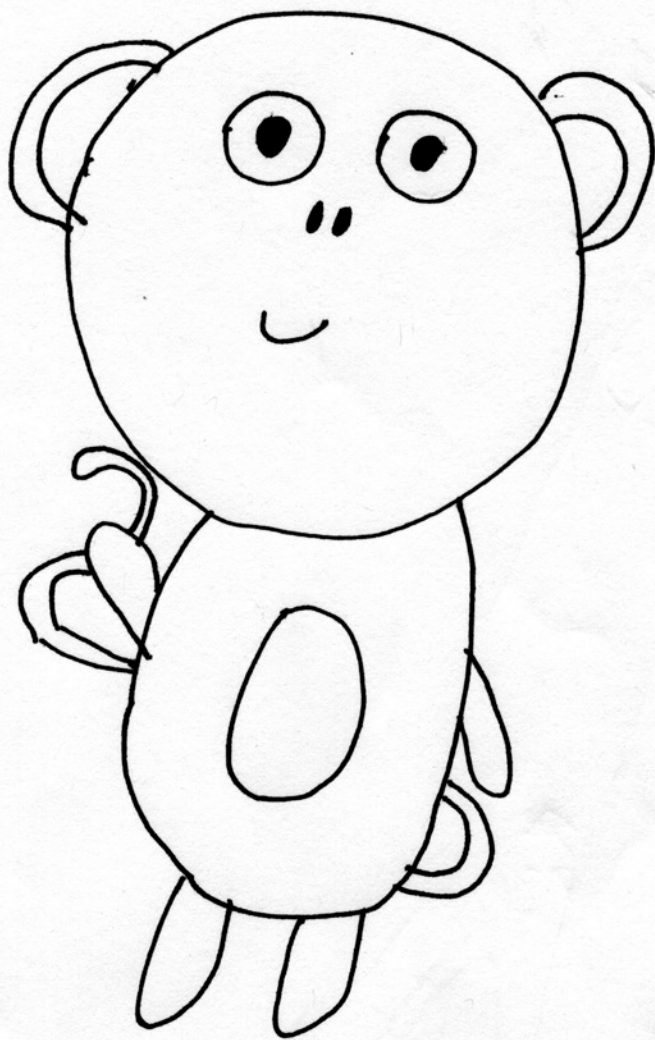


MONSTERS

AND OTHER CHILDISH THINGS



THE COMPLETELY MONSTROUS EDITION

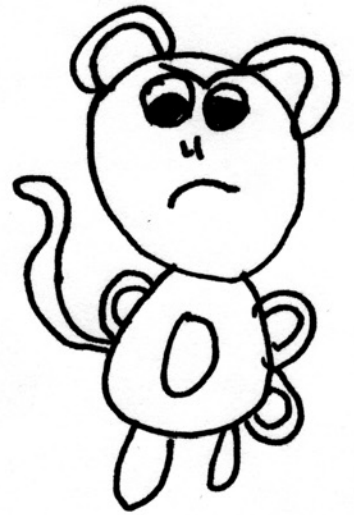


mr.

Cuddles

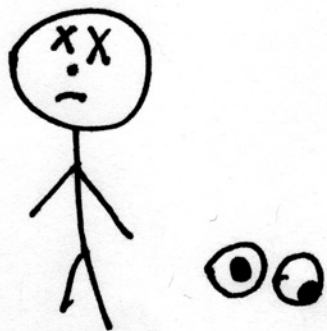
Mr. Cuddles

Mr. Cuddles is my pet spider monkey. He comes with me to school every day. He is very small, so he can fit in my pocket. He likes to go to the park, to play with the Chihuahuas. (They are about as big as he is.) The one thing Mr. Cuddles HATES is people that pick on me. If we are walking down the hall, and I run into someone mean, Mr. Cuddle will jump out of my pocket and rip out their eye balls. After that, I had to force him to put them back in. Then I got detention. Mr. Cuddles is black



With some dark brown splotches.
When someone is around, he acts like
a stuffed animal. The one thing everyone
loves about him is his long tail. Sometimes,
when he is in a good mood, he
lets the girls use it as a jump rope.
The down-side is, is that when one
of the girls trips, they land on and
crush him. He rips out their eyeballs.
There is also the way we communicate.
We use sign language. It took me
about two years to teach him, but he
caught on in the end.

That's all about my monkey!
You'd better go, before he rips
out your eyeballs!



MONSTERS

AND OTHER CHILDISH THINGS





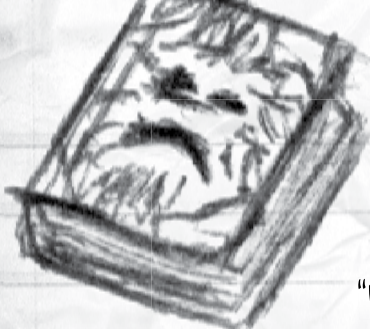
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	5	Building Your Very Own Monster	42
<i>A What-Playing Game?</i>	8	<i>Useful Bits in Conflicts</i>	43
What's This All About?	8	<i>Monster Might</i>	44
How Do You Play?	10	Personality	45
<i>'D' Means Dice</i>	11	<i>My Monster Ain't Got No Legs!</i>	45
<i>Why Bother With Relationships?</i>	12	A Way to Hide	46
What Happens In the Game?	13	Favorite Thing	47
What Do I Need to Play?	13	<i>You Can't Hurt My Monster, He's a Ghost!</i>	47
Thanks Where It's Due	13	<i>My Monster Is a Giant Blob of Goo!</i>	48
Characters.....	14	A.P. Monster Building.....	48
Stats and Skills	14	When Monsters Fight People	48
<i>Character Creation Summary</i>	15	When Monsters Fight Monsters	48
<i>Special and Unique Snowflakes</i>	16	Yummy, Yummy Relationships.....	50
Rolling Dice.....	16	Kicking Butt and Taking Names.....	51
<i>Character Creation Example</i>	18	<i>Talking Smack</i>	51
Relationships.....	19	Monster Creation Example.....	52
Relationship Shock.....	20	Janitor's Closet	53
Relationships and Monsters.....	22	<i>What Did You Do Today?</i>	54
Group Creation.....	23	Running a Monsters Game.....	54
Character Advancement	23	Adventure Ingredients.....	54
Conflicts.....	24	GM-Fu	55
Can't You Just Get Along?	25	Making It Matter: Today We Will Write A Theme.....	57
Avoiding Conflicts.....	26	Grade Level.....	62
<i>Too Hard! Too Hard!</i>	26	One-Roll Conflict Generator	64
Conflict Rounds	27	One-Roll Monster Generator	68
Damage: Shocks and Scars.....	27	Being Somebody.....	74
<i>What About Grownups?</i>	28	Lucy Awai	74
<i>Things That Shock</i>	29	Lucy's Monster: Aumakua	75
<i>Things That Scar</i>	29	Daniel Jackstone	76
Sticks, Stones and Words	28	Daniel's Monster: Snaketongue	77
Hit 'Location'	29	Ralph 'Dog' Jones	78
Dodging and Defending.....	31	Dog's Monster: Mister Whispers	79
Great, Now I'm On Fire	33	Tommy Mezlowski	80
<i>Locked and Loaded</i>	34	Tommy's Monster: Flytrap Joe	81
Damage From Other Stuff.....	34	Madison Kate Sinclair-Stevenson	82
A Conflict Example	36	Madison Kate's Monster: Yog'So-Soft.....	83
Monsters.....	38	Antagonists	85
The Ties that Bind	39	The Creepy Guy	85
Monster Basics.....	40	Creepy Guy's Monster: Bugnutz	87

Excruciator.....	88	Characters.....	120
Excruciator's Monstrous Form.....	89	Archetype.....	121
Mad Science Teacher.....	90	Relationships.....	121
Mad Science Teacher's Robot: Brotron.....	91	Monsters.....	121
M.I.B.....	92	What Did You Get for Christmas?.....	123
A Wizard (Wannabe).....	94	Where Does This Thing Go Down?.....	125
Everybody Else.....	96	<i>The Stars Are Right</i>	126
Administrator.....	96	What's Really Going On.....	126
Bully.....	97	The Grown-Ups.....	126
Cop.....	98	Who's Involved In This Hullabaloo?.....	129
Your Crush.....	99	<i>Arts and Crafts</i>	129
Drunken Clown.....	99	How Does This Go Down?.....	130
Fashion Nazi.....	100	<i>Juvenile Excruciator</i>	140
Gang Banger.....	101	<i>Bush Wolves</i>	141
Geek.....	102	<i>Meat Trees</i>	141
Gym Coach.....	102	Wrapping This Thing Up.....	143
Hood.....	103	David D. Davison.....	146
Janitor.....	104	Baby Tick-tock.....	146
Jock.....	105	Jane J. Johansson.....	147
Older Brother.....	106	The Trashman.....	147
O'Malley the Anti-Drug Dog.....	107	Marvin M. Marshal.....	148
Parents.....	108	Connie.....	148
Paparazzi.....	109	Peter P. Peters.....	149
Random Crazy.....	110	The Team In I.....	149
Teacher.....	110	Susan S. Shuman.....	150
Trenchcoat Mafioso.....	111	Lucinda.....	150
Younger Sister.....	112	Walter W. Wilson.....	151
Campaign Jumpstarts.....	113	The Watcher from the Corners of Time.....	151
Welcome to Pluto.....	113	Appendix A: How to Play Roleplaying Games.....	152
The XMFL.....	116	Appendix B: How to Run Roleplaying Games.....	162
Monsters and Wild Talents.....	120	Blank Monster Sheet.....	180
Optional Rules.....	120	Blank Character Sheet.....	182

Monsters and Other Childish Things: The Completely Monstrous Edition is written by Benjamin Baugh, © 2007. "How to Play Roleplaying Games" and "How to Run Roleplaying Games" are written by Greg Stolze, © 2007. Illustrated by Robert Mansperger, © 2007. Page design and ancillary art by Daniel Solis, © 2007. Endpaper art by Rebecca Ivey, © 2007. Edited by Shane Ivey and Kevin Pezzano. The One-Roll Engine is © Greg Stolze. *Wild Talents* is © Dennis Detwiler and Greg Stolze. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any way without the express written consent of its owner. If you get a free copy in print or download, please pay for it; our own little monsters are hungry, too. Special thanks to our playtest GMs and all their players: Daniel Bayn, Clifford Morton, Hobbie Regan, Rowdy Scarlett and Simon Stroud. Printed in Hong Kong.

Get the latest updates and sourcebooks online at www.arcdream.com/monsters.



"I didn't know I wasn't supposed to eat him."

"Well, you did! Now what are we going to do?"

"Well . . . skip dinner, for one thing. I couldn't eat another bite."

"This isn't funny."

"It's a little bit funny."

"When they find out Dad's boss got eaten, Dad is going to get fired, and then we're going to have to move into a cardboard box behind the Sip'n'Dash, and I'll have to share my corner of the box with Janie because we won't be able to afford a box big enough for me to have my own space anymore!"

"You said that all in one breath."

"I can swim all the way across the pool in one breath."

"That's pretty awesome. We should go swimming."

"OK, but—hey! You distracted me!"

"I just want you to be happy. You worry about swimming all the way across the pool and BACK again in one breath, and let me worry about your Dad's boss."

"How? How are you going to fix this?"

"OK, give me a second . . . SMUUUUUUUUURGUH! There."

"That . . . how . . . Mr. Wilkins?"

"Sure! Ever since I kicked the crap out of Chameleon Pete last week, I can turn into anything I want."

"No kidding! So like . . . you could turn into Miss July?"

"Easy peasy, my friend. Just let me eat her up, and I'm your dream girl."

"Ah. . . . We'll put that one on the 'Maybe Later' shelf, right?"

"Right."

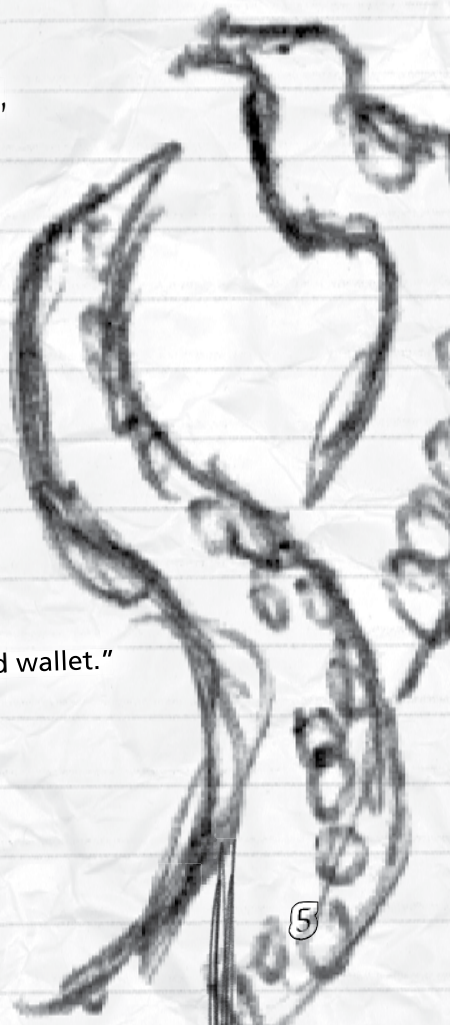
"Let's get back downstairs before Mom starts worrying her meatloaf is cold."

"I shudder to think of your mother's meatloaf."

"You just ate a full-grown CPA! With ballpoint pens and shoes and wallet."

"He tasted like salty hot dogs."

"I'm gonna barf."







INTRODUCTION

It's a confusing time, childhood. Even though it doesn't feel like it, your clay is still wet and everyone leaves fingerprints on you. The Art Teacher of Life hasn't got the kiln working, so you have to sit on the Windowsill of Time and bake in the Sun of Experience. Then you get the Cracks of Hard Knocks as the bits closest to the sun bake quicker than the bits facing away.

And while the art teacher is thrilled to play such a large role here (considering how her budget has been cut lately), the English teacher is just glaring at the run-on metaphor and sentence fragments.

Anyway, that's childhood. It's pretty much the same for you as for everyone else.

Except your best friend is a monster.

Not a kid who acts like a monster. A real monster. Hungry, scary, weird, probably huge, definitely your best buddy.

He has the habit of knocking things off shelves and sowing chaos, delight, wonder and horror throughout your life.

But even though the big retard gets you into all kinds of trouble, you know that when the chips are down, when you bowl a 7-10 split, or it's a tie game, fourth quarter and third down with thirteen seconds on the clock, he'll lunge across the table, snatch the cards from the other guy, blow down the pins with his hurricane breath, and whisk you

A What-Playing Game?

Monsters and Other Childish Things is a roleplaying game. A roleplaying game is like a combination of improv theater, cops 'n' robbers, and a board game. We'll go into this in greater detail in **How to Play Roleplaying Games** (page 152), but here are the basics.

Players have characters, which are their roles or avatars within a shared game world that everyone imagines.

The usual way this gets described is "playing pretend with rules," but some people like to emphasize the "storytelling with rules" angle. Except really you're all making up the story as you go along.

The Roleplaying . . .

So you have your character, and you describe the actions for your character, and even speak in your character's voice if you want—that's where the improv theater comparison comes in.

Maybe you say, "My character Timmy is going to write the secret name of Becky's monster Miss Yigs in his journal," and that's what your character does. Except usually people just speak in first person because it's easier. "I'm going to write the secret name in my journal." See how it's easier?

Oh, but one player acts as **game master** (or game moderator, or grand monster, or just **GM**), and moves the story along by describing the setting, saying what all the minor characters do, and handling everything else that's not a player.

The exchange might sound something like this:

YOU: I'm going to write the secret name in the journal.

GM: No problem.

YOU: Only I want to write it in Morse code, because our characters are in Encino, right? Nobody reads Morse in Encino.

GM: Oh. Well, you need to roll some dice to see if it works, using your character's Morse Code skill. You really have a Morse Code skill?

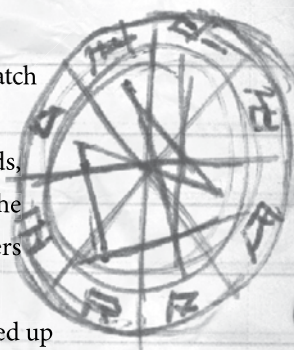
YOU: Yeah. And I just rolled really well!

GM: OK, you write the whole thing in little dashes and dots. I can't believe your character

away through a portal in spacetime so you don't have to watch any more sucky football.

OK, sometimes your monster terrorizes your friends, family, and pets. And yes, the stains *are* hard to get out of the carpet. And, sure, he does like to fight with other monsters a *bit* too much.

But when you consider what it was like before he showed up . . . yeah, you're gonna keep him.



What's This All About?

Monsters and Other Childish Things is a roleplaying game about kids and the people who matter to them most—their friends, family and loved ones.

And their horrifying pet monsters.

If you don't know what we mean by "roleplaying game," see **A What-Playing Game?** in the sidebar to the left and **How to Play Roleplaying Games** on page 152.

Monsters is about kids because childhood is full of the most extraordinary conflicts, changes, awakenings and realizations. It's a time when people *live* stories, when the wall hasn't come down so hard between fantasy and reality; a time when finding a weird green egg in your basement seems like a real possibility. And the thing that hatches? It's just so cute. And ugly. It's too *cugly* to abandon.

Childhood is a time when relationships matter in a powerful and primal way. The body remembers being utterly helpless, a babe in arms, totally dependent on love for survival. The racing monkey brain might seek independence, but it also craves contact.

Because relationships are so vital, conflict really matters. The stakes are high, every day. And that's without a giant prehuman psychic insect clinging to the ceiling and whispering suggestions about what to get your mom for her birthday while you're trying to shop.

So . . . What's This About Monsters?

Have you ever secretly wanted to be best friends with a magical unicorn? His name would be Dewdrop, and he would talk to you with his thoughts, and he would carry you on his back away from all the bullies and parents and kids who don't get you, and you'd have such wonderful adventures!

This game is pretty much like that. Except if you drew Dewdrop on your Trapper Keeper, they would send you to the principal's office, then to the school counselor, and then probably to a place with a name like Morning Meadows Home for Disturbed and Psychotic Youth.

Dewdrop has too many dimensions and can gouge bleeding wounds in reality with his infinitely fractal horn. His dainty hooves burn the floor, and his breath makes Mrs. Wombatson's prize petunias wilt and shrivel. But *he really is your best friend*.

Dewdrop's *not* too keen on Flytrap Joe. Another kid at school is friends with this other monster that looks like a huge Venus flytrap that just pops out of the ground whenever he's needed. Dewdrop *hates* Flytrap Joe. When Flytrap Joe's around, Dewdrop paws the ground and mumbles obscenities to make a prehuman mariner of the elder depths wince and look uncomfortable. Dewdrop wants to eat Flytrap Joe's stupid face off and spit out the seeds.

And you know what? Despite the fact that you sort of like the kid who's friends with Flytrap, you're starting to agree with Dewdrop. Flytrap Joe is a jerkwad, and somebody might ought to tell him so.

Sometimes when Dewdrop really gets mad, it kind of rubs off on you.

You've made some friends with other kids and their monsters. It's something you have in common, so even if that kid with the lazy eye never chips in for the pizza, at least you have things to talk about that nobody normal would understand.

And then there are the other monster cliques to deal with. Some are so lame they named their groups. Lame. But just in case it becomes un-lame, your clique is going to be the *Masters of Ultima-Cool*.

Power, Love and Trouble

Since this is a game about childhood, monsters represent lots of things. On the surface, they're big, scaly, scary bundles of superpowers. Monsters can do just about anything.

Kids can do the usual things, like play video games or send text messages or punch or pick their nose. But a monster with *vast fuming nostrils* can smell the thing you hate most about yourself, or blow caustic snotballs big enough to stick a Volvo to the wall. And if you dealt it, then he smelt it, and knows just who you are.

Monsters are all about power.

Monsters also represent unconditional friendship. Monsters don't judge. They're **monsters**. No matter how mad, bad or smelly you get, your monster will still love you. Your parents say that a lot, but sometimes . . . well, when they look at you that certain way when you screw up bad, you have some doubts. With your monster, there's no doubt at all.

Monsters also have a tendency to get you into trouble. It's sort of inevitable. They don't exactly have great moral compasses. Monsters just ain't people. They don't *get it* sometimes. If your best friend Typhon is a fallen Titan able to forge stars into javelins and chew titanium like bubblegum, and the gym

has Morse Code skill. In fact, your monster gets pretty bored while you're writing. He shambles over and looks at the dashes and dots. He says, "Hey, that's Morse code! One time I ate a guy who could write Morse code. Where did you learn that?"

YOU: "At camp. I—uh, please don't ever talk about eating people, ever, OK?"

GM: He squints with all forty-nine red and cerulean eyes. "Not even about the tasty ones?"

YOU: "Gross! No!"

GM: "All right, all right. But I can still eat them, right?"

YOU: "No way!"

GM: "What? Oh, come on!"

And so on.

Sometimes it's hard to get into roleplaying because you might feel goofy doing it, but you get over that pretty quickly when you figure out how fun it is.

And if anyone gives you grief about it, you tell me. I'll toilet paper their yard and egg their house.

. . . And the Game

In a roleplaying game you get to create a character you really like who can do cool things. Where it gets really interesting is when your character has some kind of conflict with another character. Maybe you're both after the same thing, or maybe you're after different things, or maybe you just get into a wrestling match.

You might say, "I'm going to chase Becky down the alley and make her give me my journal back," but how do you know whether your character can actually do it? How do you decide who wins?

That's where the rules come in. The game rules are there to provide arbitration. And we use dice to add some dramatic uncertainty.

Your character has traits that combine with dice rolls to tell you if you succeed at things, and how well you do at them. The better your trait, the more dice you roll.

Of course, like your mom always said, winning isn't everything. Sometimes you'll have the best time coming up with creative ways to deal

with really bad failures.

Let's say your dice roll to catch up with Becky fails. It's up to you and the GM to describe what happened and why. Do you trip over your sneakers? Do you run out of breath and have to stop and puff on your asthma inhaler? Do you slip in a big patch of sticky extradimensional goo? Use the details given by the GM to decide and fill in the blanks. It's fun!

The game system used in *Monsters and Other Childish Things* is called the **One-Roll Engine (ORE)**, and if you learn the rules for *Monsters*, you'll be able to easily get into other ORE games pretty quick. Some other ORE roleplaying games include *Godlike*, a World War II superhero game; *Wild Talents*, a non-World War 2 superhero game, and *Reign*, a fantasy game about power and leadership. You can find out more about them at www.arcdream.com.

Does This Make Me a Nerd?

Let's see. You play a roleplaying game around the table with friends, snacks, jokes and fun. A computer gamer sits alone in his room with the lights off making CG sprites kill other CG sprites.

Yeah, who's the nerd now?

teacher says, "Take a lap, Nancy-Sue! Time for the real men to shoot some hoops!" it's pretty darned hard not to let Typhon drag the gym teacher screaming through seventeen lower dimensional manifolds until his sanity curdles like lunchroom beef Stroganoff. Because Typhon *really* wants to do that.

People without monsters think it's weird or something, and sometimes they get really angry or scared and they tell you to take your monster outside and to make it spit out the end table. Sometimes people show up in big vans with antennae and stuff on top, and guys get out with guns and helmets and they yell a lot, and then your monster has to eat some of them before they go away again.

Mostly though, you go to school (and it sucks). And your parents try and tell you what to do all the time (and it sucks). And then some other kid at school shoves you, and so your monster bites him a little, and then his monster bites your monster, and then the school is on fire (again) and the police get called (again) and you get detention (again).

That's life with a monster. Sometimes it sucks, but it's never boring.

How Do You Play?

First, you need a character. Unless you're the GM, you've got a piece of paper in front of you which in game-speak is called a "character sheet." It's got some blanks and spots to write things. Here you record your character's potentials, skills, talents and relationships with other characters in the game world. See page 182.

We divide those things up into categories called *stats*, *skills* and *relationships*.

Stats (Page 14)

Stats (short for "statistics") describe your character's basic, built-in capacities. Native ability. Raw talent. Is your character clever? Quick? Strong? There are six stats, and each covers a really broad piece of your character.

The stats are **Feet**, **Guts**, **Hands**, **Brains** and **Face**. We'll talk more about them later; see page 14.

Each stat has a number associated with it. The higher that number is, the better your character is with that stat. The lowest possible stat is 1, which is lousy. The highest possible is 5, which is amazing. Average is 2.

When you use a stat to do something, you roll a number of ten-sided dice equal to the stat's value. More dice are always better when you're rolling them. We'll talk more about how to roll for things later.

So let's say you want to win a race across the yard. It turns out the stat for racing is Feet. If you have Feet at 3, you roll three dice.

Skills (Page 14)

Oh heck, I'll sweeten the deal—most of the time, you get to add dice to your stat before you roll.

Each stat has three skills nested under it which represent experience and training and . . . ah . . . skill. Like stats, each skill has a number, and the higher the number, the better you are with it.

A skill rating of 1 means you put a little time and energy into getting good at it. At 2, it's maybe a casual hobby or you've taken classes for a while but don't take it very seriously. At 3 and up, you spend a lot of time on being better at the skill than everybody else. The highest is 5, but hardly anybody has that much skill.

Skills get dice like stats, because skills add to stats. If a skill sounds like it ought to apply to whatever you're doing, add the skill dice to the stat dice.

Remember that foot race, where you roll three dice because you have Feet 3? If you also have the skill called P.E. at 2, that means you're really good at P.E. things like running races. Add the two P.E. dice to your three Feet dice. You get five dice.

In game language, we call that a stat + skill roll, so it's Feet + P.E.: You roll your Feet dice plus your P.E. dice.

We use the same format for any stat + skill roll. So if you see a reference to a Guts + Courage roll, that means you roll your Guts stat dice plus your Courage skill dice. Got it?

Relationships (Page 19)

That's still not enough dice for you? I bet. When some alien replicon from beyond the Moon is trying to catch you, you can never have enough dice.

That's where relationships come in. Relationships are the third kind of game mechanical thingy on your sheet.

Relationships tell everybody who and what your character really cares about.

Each relationship has a number of dice, just like stats and skills. If you think one of your relationships can inspire you to do better, you get to add its dice to your roll. Relationships aren't tied to any particular stat or skill. If a relationship helps, it can help with any roll.

Whether a relationship should help you with an action is up to you and the GM. Usually, if you come up with a reason that sounds, uh, reasonable, the GM will say it's OK. If it sounds far-fetched, though, it's the GM's job to get you to come up with something better.

So, let's say the fear that you'll never get to see your Mom again makes you run faster. You can add the dice from your relationship with your Mom to your Feet + P.E. dice. Got Feet 3, P.E. 2 and Relationship (Mom) 3? You can roll eight dice.

Or maybe Mom promised you'd do great in the science fair and that boosts your confidence. The stat and skill for impressing people with your science project are Face and Charm, so it's a Face + Charm roll. If your Face stat is 2 and your Charm skill is 1, ordinarily you'd roll only three dice. But with that boost from your Mom and your three-die relationship with her, you can roll six dice.

You can have relationship dice with anyone or anything. Most kids have relationships with their parents and with their best friends. But you can have a

'D' Means Dice

Any time you see a number with "d" after it, like "6d" or "10d," it means you roll that many dice. With 6d, you roll six dice. With 10d, you roll 10 dice.

Monsters and Other Childish Things uses ten-sided dice. If you don't have any, you can find them on the Internet, at a roleplaying game convention, or at your local weird games and comics shop.



relationship with your favorite TV show, Dixieland jazz, and Binky the Blue Bunny Blanket, too. Stuff Binky in your book bag before you go to take that big test and you can add your Binky dice to your test roll.

Pop quiz time. Take a glance at another player's character sheet. What do you think is the most important thing to that character? Take your time. Way to go, Tiger—you're right. Those relationships.

One Roll to Rule Them All (Page 16)

So you have a whole bunch of dice to roll. Now what? Well, roll them!

In *Monsters and Other Childish Things*, you want your dice to come up with matching numbers. If you get any dice that match each other, you manage to do something challenging and difficult. If the numbers that match each other are particularly high, or if you get more than two of the same number, you do that challenging thing really well.

So let's say you *really* need to ace that science fair presentation, and between your Face stat, Charm skill, and all your bonus relationship dice from Mom, Dixieland jazz and Binky the Blue Bunny Blanket you get to roll a whopping nine dice (we abbreviate that as 9d). Your nine dice come up 1, 1, 3, 4, 4, 4, 9, 10 and 10. That's two ones, three fours and two tens!

Wow, Mom was right! Your science fair presentation rocks!

Your Monster (Page 38)

There's something else each kid in the game has going for him: a monster. Monsters let kids break the rules, do impossible things, and get in all kinds of trouble.

Monsters are sort of like shared characters, controlled partially by their kids' players, and partially by the GM.

In a crisis such as a fight or an action scene, you get to control your monster's immediate actions. You can say what your monster is doing with his funky powers from moment to moment. (Well, usually. Some things might distract your gnarly friend; see page 45.)

Outside of a fight, your monster's dialog, reactions and decisions are in the hands of the GM—especially when the slimy dork gets you into trouble. Your monster takes its own weird actions, digs up secrets, and generally acts according to its personality and pursues its favorite things. It's there when you call, but

Why Bother With Relationships?

Relationships are crucial! Not only do they help you succeed with your rolls, but they are the major source of stories in a *Monsters* game. A Lone Wolf with no family, friends, or ties, what's he going to do? While everyone else is running around trying to save their families from being devoured by the Rik'a'rak Swarms, Solo McTrenchcoat just tags along . . . just 'cause.

Worse, kids who lose all their relationships tend to go . . . strange. Stranger, anyhow. Monsters are really supportive, but aren't great at providing limits, structure, or emotional fulfillment—and certainly not at challenging you and helping you grow as a person. Relationships keep kids plugged in, connected, anchored.

You can fly to Jupiter's moons on the back of Pauly Polyp, but when you get home Mom will be there to ask what you did at school that day.

monsters love to mess with things they shouldn't mess with. Monsters can get you into sticky situations, but they're also aces at yanking you out of the mire.

What Happens In the Game?

Games of *Monsters and Other Childish Things* mostly involve kids and their monsters getting into trouble and getting out of trouble—or perhaps just trading one kind of trouble for another.

It's not easy to balance a normal life with being best friends with a phantasmagorical horror from beyond space and time. Getting it right takes constant attention to the little things (like your Dad's birthday) while you try not to get squished by the really big things (like that jerk Danny Poe's monster, Shrubby, the Great Black Goat of the Big Black Woods).

Relationships drive the action. Look at the relationships of every player character in the game. It's the GM's job to tangle up all those threads of human connection and see what happens. If you have a relationship with your Dad who happens to be town sheriff, and another player has a relationship with her Dad who happens to run the town's drug gang, and your character totally has a crush on her character. . . . Well, there's your story, right there. Now I wonder how your monsters are going to handle all that?

Games can be structured all kinds of ways. TV shows like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Veronica Mars* have episodic stories about people and their problems that run parallel with cool stuff like solving mysteries and knock-down, drag-out, spitting-blood-and-fire monster fights.

Think of a *Monsters* game like that, focusing on whatever you and your fellow players bring to the table and write on your character sheets—kids, monsters, and the people they love.

What Do I Need to Play?

If you're reading this book, you have everything you need! Except a pile of 10-sided dice, paper, pencils, and friends. You'll need those, too. Well, I guess you could just pretend to have friends and dice and sit at the table all by yourself rolling invisible dice, if you want. But it's usually more fun with the friends and stuff.

Thanks Where It's Due

Thanks to my wife Sarah, who puts up with my crap. Thanks to my daughter Adeline, who was willing to sleep strapped to my chest while I wrote the bulk of this.

Thanks to Shane Ivey and Dennis Detwiler for busting their humps making *Wild Talents* live. That game inspired this one.

Thanks to Greg Stolze, who designed the One-Roll Engine game system, which never fails to lure out the system monkey in me like a whole bunch of golden ripe bananas.

Thanks to Robert Mansperger, who worked his magic on this and whose style now illustrates my brain (replacing Edward Gorey, whose illustrations I originally imagined).

Thanks to Daniel Solis for his butt-kicking layout and graphic design.

And thanks to Kevin Pezzano, who did a masterful job of keeping me from looking like a jerk with my editing and organization.



CHARACTERS

Characters in *Monsters and Other Childish Things* are pretty simple. They have stats, they have skills, and—most important of all—they have relationships. Of course, they also have monsters. We'll create them later on.

Stats and Skills

Stats are broad capabilities, the kinds of things you're good at. Every kid has each of the five stats, although some kids are better at some stats than others. If you love sports, you probably have a good Feet stat. If you love math, you're probably all about the Brains stat.

Skills are more specialized things you actually know how to do. Not everybody has the same skills. The kid who loves sports probably has the P.E., Kicking, Dodging and Wind skills, among others, but might not have the Out-Think, Remember or Connive skills like the brainy mathlete.

Each stat and skill gets a rating in dice, which we abbreviate to "d". If you have three dice in Hands, we say you have Hands 3d. Four dice in Feet? Feet 4d. Same goes for skills: Two dice in Courage is Courage 2d.

Note that “Courage 2d” does not mean “Roll two dice and add them up to see what your Courage is.” It means you have a Courage skill rating of 2, representing two dice, which you roll whenever you need to be courageous.

Kids have the following stats: Feet, Guts, Hands, Brains and Face. **Each stat starts at 1 die, and you have 10 more stat dice to put where you like.** So you could have 3d in every single stat, or 4d in a couple of them and 2d in a couple of others, or whatever you like.

Under each stat, you’ve got some skills. **Each skill starts at zero, but you have 15 skill dice to put in whichever skills you like.**

However, no single stat or skill have more than five dice. Not for kids, anyway.

When you have to do something tricky or challenging, you roll dice equal to your STAT + SKILL to do it right. So if you want to climb a tree and you’re in a hurry, roll your Feet dice and your P.E. dice together—that’s Feet + P.E. If you have Feet 4d and P.E. 4d, you roll eight dice.

See **Relationships** (page 19) for ways to get more lovely dice.

We’ll talk about what the rolls mean in just a bit.

Feet

Moving your whole body without looking like a dork.

Dodging: Getting out of the way.

Kicking: Putting the sneaker where it’ll do the most good.

P.E.: Running, jumping, climbing trees.

Guts

How tough and dogged you are. Also, the most likely place someone’s going to punch you.

Courage: Standing up to bullies and Eldritch Horrors from Beyond Space and Time.

Wind: Health, breath, and fitness.

Wrestling: Grabbing hold and squeezing and not letting go till the other guy says you’re the boss of him.

Hands

Fine dexterity and movement, so you don’t pick your eye instead of your nose.

Blocking: Using a thing to stop a thing from hitting you in the thing.

Punching: Socking ’em in the chops.

Shop: Working with your hands.

Brains

How much of what you see and hear actually gets through your skull.

Notice: Spotting the forest *and* the trees, and the squirrels and the Bigfoots, too.

Out-Think: Solving problems with your smarts.

Remember: Book learnin’ and keeping up with details.

Character Creation Summary

We’ll describe most of this stuff in this chapter.

Step 1: Name and Stuff. Come up with a Name, an Age, your Favorite Thing, a Bad Thing You Did, and a Good Thing You Did. We’re not going to give you guidelines on these, because they can be just about anything as long as the GM says it’s OK. But this stuff should help you zoom in on your character a little.

Step 2: Stats. You have five stats that each start at 1 die, and you have 10 dice to divide up between them (up to 5d, or five dice, in any one stat).

Step 3: Skills. Your skills each start at 0, and you have 15 dice to divide up between them (up to 5d in any one).

Step 4: Relationships. You have six dice to divide up between your relationships (up to 5d in any one), and you get a special relationship with your monster called a Bond.

Step 5: Monster. See Monsters (page 38) for how to create your very own Unspeakable Fiend—I mean, Friend.



Face

How cool, clever, and sneaky you can be. Everyone loves a smart-aleck.

Charm: Winning friends and influencing teachers.

Connive: Lying, tricking and other vitally-deceptive kid skills.

Putdown: Ragging on the other guy's mom.

Rolling Dice

When you make a stat + skill roll, that's called

a **dice pool**: a pool of dice that you roll together to see what happens to your character.

Look for matching dice in the dice pool roll. If any dice come up with matching numbers, you did something right. If not, well, it's the effort that really matters, right?

So if you need to remember what the weird kid at the mall was wearing and you have 3d in Brains and 2d in Notice, you'd add them together and roll five dice. If two or more of those five dice roll matching numbers, you remember the weird kid's outfit.

Special and Unique Snowflakes

You've just got to be different and special, eh? Well, if there's something you want to be good at that doesn't fall under the normal skills, just ask the GM if you can make up a new one.

It's totally cool to have a kid with Mad L33T Hacking Skillz, or one who knows how to Skin a Buck. Maybe one who's Got a Learner's Permit and can sometimes swipe his Mom's keys would be useful in a game.

Or if you're trying to be totally goth, Dark Secrets of the Elder Gods might come in handy. Rather than writing "Mrs. Randy McNuttly" over and over on your Civics notebook, you can write the seventeen forbidden names of Shug-Ligo'wa the Wetter of Beds.

When to Roll and What to Roll

This is a tip for the GM. It's usually a good idea to **require a roll only if an action sounds really tricky**. If you think an ordinary kid could do it without too much trouble, don't bother asking for a roll, because it'll just annoy everyone if the roll fails.

Never roll more than 10 dice. If you have more than that in a dice pool for some reason, you can use the excess dice to offset circumstances that cause you to lose dice, but you can't actually roll more than 10.

Speed and Finesse: Width and Height

If any of the dice come up matching each other—a pair of fives, maybe, or three ones—you succeed. But how well do you succeed? That's where the roll's width and height come in.

The number of dice that come up with the same value is called the **WIDTH** of the roll. If you roll three fives, for instance, that's a width of three.

The value of the dice that match each other is called the **HEIGHT** of the roll. So with those three fives, the height is five.

We abbreviate rolls as **WIDTH x HEIGHT** ("width by height"), so three fives

are 3x5. A pair of eights would be 2x8. No, that's not multiplication. It just means "three by five" or "two by eight." It means "three fives" or "two eights." We also call a group of matching dice a **set**.

Width usually indicates speed and sometimes (for physical actions like fighting) raw power. Height usually indicates quality, accuracy and finesse.

So if one player rolls 3x5 and the other rolls 2x8, the player with the width 3 would go first, but the player with the height 8 would act with more accuracy.

Which is more important, width or height? That depends on the circumstances. If you're in a race at a track meet, width is most important because width means speed. Whoever gets the widest roll wins.

But if you're in a race across a junk yard, height is important, too, because the GM will probably say that if your roll's height is too low you trip over some garbage.

Width and height are each other's tiebreakers. If height is the same, use width as the tiebreaker. If width is the same, use height as the tiebreaker. If they're both the same, use the total number of dice in the dice pools as the tiebreaker. If those are the same, too, it's up to the GM.

How Well Do I Need To Roll?

When you want to do something hard and nobody's actively opposing you, just roll your dice and see if you get a match. You need to figure out how many dice you have to roll, then get on the same page with the GM and other players about what a success gets you, and what width (speed/power) and height (quality/control) mean in this context.

Usually, all you need to do is get a pair of dice that match. If it's a pair of sevens, congratulations! You succeed! If it's a pair of ones, congratulations! You still succeed! But the guy with the sevens looked better doing it.

If a task is particularly challenging, the GM might decide that you *must* roll a certain minimum height before you can succeed. A tough challenge might require height 3; a *really* tough challenge might require height 5; a *crazy* tough challenge might require height 7 or even higher. This minimum height is the action's **difficulty**.

EXAMPLE: There's a kid who's trying hard to finish his math homework so he can get permission to go to his friend's house because his friend's cool pet monster is planning to eat the school bully's skanky pet monster. The GM says he needs to succeed at a Brains + Remember roll to finish the homework in time. Without a roll, he says, the kid will finish the homework but it will take a while. The kid has Brains 3d (that's three dice) and Remember 2d (that's two dice), so he rolls 5d (five dice). They come up 5, 3, 3, 3 and 1—that's 3x3! Not only does he finish the homework quickly, the extra wide roll indicates it goes extra fast. The GM says the kid has time to scarf down a sandwich before leaving.

How Tough is Too Tough?

Not sure what difficulty to give a task? Here are some guidelines.

If you require a roll at all, that means it's something that an average kid probably couldn't do without a whole lot of practice. And that's without any difficulty rating.

If something's **particularly tough** even if you're good at it, assign a difficulty of 1, 2 or 3.

If it's **really hard** even if you're good at it, make it a difficulty of 4, 5 or 6, or just say they lose a die from the dice pool before rolling.

If it's **amazingly freaking hard**, like darn near impossible, even for someone who's good at it, give it a difficulty of 7 through 10, or say they lose two dice before rolling.

Don't require a minimum width greater than 2 unless it has to happen so fast that even an expert couldn't pull it off without a ton of blind luck.

Character Creation Example

I start with an image of a kid with hair in his eyes, a stocking cap, and a leather jacket too big for him. The jacket belonged to his brother Peter, who got killed in Iraq. The kid is 12, and his name is Benny McAlyster.

Benny's Favorite Thing is monster trucks. He has a huge poster of Grave Digger over his bed. One day, he wants to drive monster trucks himself.

Once he helped beat up a kid he was friends with because he wanted the class bully to like him. But Benny's basically a good kid. He helped take care of his grandma when she got Alzheimer's and had to move in with his family.

Benny is a quick thinker but is socially awkward. He's awesome at PlayStation but sucks at sports. In a pinch, though, he's learned to be brave, and in a fight he grabs hold and won't let go.

Last year he found a giant talking crocodile in the bathtub, and has since become fast friends with the monster he calls Mr. Crocker.

Stats & Skills

Feet 1 (Dodging +2).

Guts 4 (Courage +2, Wrestling +2).

Hands 4 (Blocking +1, Punching +1).

Brains 4 (Out-Think +4, Remember +1, Notice +1).

Face 2 (Connive +1).

Relationships

Mom and Dad 2, **Gran-Gran** 2, **Peter McAlyster** 2, **Mr. Crocker**.

Opposition

When another character is actively trying to stop you doing the thing you want to do, it works nearly the same as usual. You say what you want to happen, and they say what they want to happen. You figure out your dice pools, and then you roll. Whoever rolls the best wins.

Usually you're after a better height. If it's a tie, use width as the tiebreaker. If it's still a tie, use your dice pools as a tiebreaker.

In some situations width is most important. This happens anytime you're going for sheer speed or power rather than skill or finesse. In this case, the best width wins, with height and dice pool (in that order) as the tiebreakers.

EXAMPLE: Down the street, the homework kid's friend Jimmy has the school bully, Big Fred, in his front yard. Big Fred wants to scare Jimmy so Jimmy'll go inside crying and won't remember to call out his pet monster for help, because Big Fred is secretly worried Jimmy's monster really could eat his own monster if it wanted to. Big Fred cracks his knuckles menacingly and tells Jimmy to vanish or he's going to get pulverized.

The GM says Big Fred needs to roll Hands + Punching to show how dangerous he is, and Jimmy needs to roll Guts + Courage to keep his cool. Whoever rolls highest wins. Big Fred rolls his seven dice worth of Hands + Pummeling and comes up with 3x5 and 2x2. Jimmy rolls his six dice worth of Guts + Courage and comes up with 2x6.

If speed had been crucial, Big Fred's width of three would have won. But height was the goal here, so Jimmy wins because his 2x6 is higher than Big Fred's 3x5. Jimmy gulps but stands tall and says, "Oh yeah? Maybe my buddy Tindalos the Eviscerator will have something to say about that!" Then Fred blinks, because even though he doesn't know what eviscerating is, he can guess it's not fun.

Which Set Do I Use?

If you roll more than one set of matching dice, you get to choose which one to keep. If you're under time pressure, pick the wide one—the set with more matching dice. If you just need a quality result, pick the tall one—the set with the highest number showing on the dice. Choose wisely, because the other set is lost. (Well, there are some exceptions to this, but we'll get into that in **Conflicts**, page 24.)

Botching It

If you fail to roll any matching dice and **all the dice are 5 or less**, you didn't just fail—you failed *hard*. This is called *botching it*.

When you botch it, something extra special bad happens. This is always purely up to the GM and his wicked imagination, and it always depends on the circumstances. The more important or dangerous the task, the worse the circumstances are for botching it.

EXAMPLE: Let's say you're jumping from a classroom trailer onto the roof of the school (kids, DO NOT try this in real life!). You roll Feet + P.E., because P.E. is the skill for jumping. The GM says that even if you fail to roll any matching dice, you probably can catch yourself on the edge and try another roll to pull up safely. But if you botch it, you just plain don't jump far enough and get to smack pavement. Good luck!

Relationships

It's wired in—well, wired into most people—to form ties with others. Channels of emotional reciprocity. Empathy. Anticipation. Even isolated malcontents have relationships of a sort.

Monsters really love this about humans—especially kids—because to a monster, a relationship is like a chocolate-and-meth milkshake. It energizes them, makes them powerful, feeds them up nice and plump. Monsters eat relationships.

A relationship is dice pool that describes a personal attachment to something or someone, like “Dad 3,” with three dice, or “Jenny 2” with two dice, or “My Blankie 5” with five dice. You can have a relationship with anything, as long as you can imagine just how that relationship might work.

You have six dice of relationships when you start out, and also have a special kind of relationship with your monster, called a **bond**. See page 39 for more on monster bonds.

Adding Relationship Dice

Kids really benefit from relationships, because if motivated by one they can use the relationship score to bulk out their generally puny dice pools. Relationships give you confidence and strength.

If a relationship would somehow improve your odds of success, you can add some or all of your relationship dice to your dice pool before rolling. If you're in a fight, you'll probably hit a lot harder when someone is ragging on your Mom (4d).

How do you know whether a Relationship should give you bonus dice? Well, it's pretty much up to you and the GM. I mean, if someone is ragging on your mom, that's easy. Bring in those Mom dice. But maybe you're taking a really hard test at school, and you want to use your Mom dice. The GM isn't sure, but you say, “Well, maybe Mom told me this morning that she really had faith in me and knew I could do great on this test.” The GM says that sounds like a Mom thing to say, so you get the bonus dice. Thanks, Mom!

There's a risk, though. When you put your heart on your sleeve, someone's going to knock it off, kick dirt on it, and then shove it down your throat. **If you use relationship dice and still fail, the relationship suffers for it.**



Relationship Shock

If, even with the relationship dice added in, you still fail a roll, then your relationship takes a Shock. Each Shock reduces your relationship by one die.

Relationship Shock indicates tension, resentment or something else. It colors how you interact with the object of your relationship, and how he/she/it interacts with you. A relationship that's been Shocked is tense, and everyone involved knows it.

You can get dice back in a Shocked relationship, but it takes some work. It takes Quality Time.

Quality Time

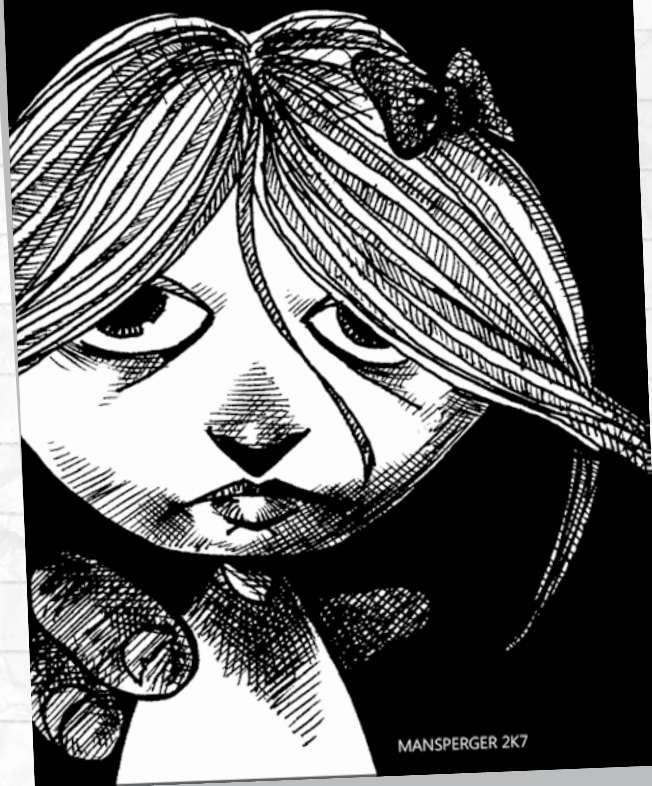
You have to take active steps to make things better with a Shocked relationship. Do you think your Mom is going to apologize to *you* for how bad you did on that test, after you used your Mom relationship dice and still blew it? Ha! It's all on you, the player, to make it OK again.

You can call for a scene where you can address problems in your relationships whenever you like during the game, or seize the opportunity if an appropriate scene happens to pop up. The GM needs to try and work the scene into any big plot he has going on.

Quality Time requires a dice roll with a difficulty equal to $4+X$, where X is the number of Shocked dice that have been lost in that relationship. That means if you have three Shocked dice, you roll at difficulty 7: Your roll's height must be 7 or higher to succeed.

If your Quality Time roll succeeds, your relationship gains width in dice back—so if you roll a $2x5$, you get back two relationship dice. But you can't increase the relationship beyond what it was before you messed it up. To do that you need character advancement (see page 23).

So how do you do Quality Time if you have a relationship with an inanimate object? An organization? An ideal? Someone who doesn't even know you like them? Well, sometimes by just getting involved and working to support the thing; other times, by being super-creepy.



After all, a stalker can have some QT with the object of his obsession by going through their trash or watching them with binoculars.

Relationships don't have to be healthy.

Which Roll?

The stat and skill you use for Quality Time depends on the relationship and the actions you take to try and heal it. Throwing the ball around with Dad might require a Feet + P.E. roll, while playing poker with your amiable drunk uncle might be Face + Connive. You might even get your monster to help, but there are risks; see page 50.

The only restriction is that you can't use the same stat + skill pool twice in a row when using Quality Time. Each attempt to recover dice in the relationship requires a different stat + skill.

Opposed Quality Time

Sometimes someone or something is actively trying to keep you from fixing the relationship. Maybe your no-good stepsister wants Dad all to herself and tries to pin the blame on you for a broken car windshield, or the meanest kid in school tries to grab and steal your blankie before you and it can get away for some Quality Time.

When a roll faces opposition, the enemy rolls against your Quality Time roll—the stepsister rolls Face + Connive, maybe, or the mean kid rolls Guts + Wrestling. Compare the heights of your rolls. If they win, you fail.

In this case, the dice pool that opposes you gets bonus dice equal to the number of Shocked dice in your relationship. The upside in this case is that you get the un-Shocked dice in the relationship as a bonus to your own roll.

Don't Forget Your Squamous Friend

Monsters love their kids, and they love it that their kids are loved by others . . . but sometimes they get jealous.

Monsters tend to complicate Quality Time if they're feeling neglected. They can't really help it. They're like two-year-olds sometimes, and no matter how much you tell them eating bark is icky, they'll keep doing it anyway. A monster left alone too long is a bored monster, and a bored monster sometimes tags along on your father-son fishing trip and plays Jaws in the creek behind your Dad's back.

Duuuh-da. Duuuh-da. Duuuh-da-duh-da-duh-da-duh-da-duh-da. . .

Sometimes it can be as easy to deal with as explaining things to your monsters, and assuring him that if you hang out with your people-friends it doesn't make him any less your *best* friend. The GM gets to decide how your monster interferes.

Other times, you have to resort to shenanigans to get the room you need to mend your relationships.

For the GM, monsters make Quality Time *interesting*. A monster won't *always* interfere, and there are times when there are bigger things going on in the game than dealing with relationship stuff, but sometimes spending effort to detail Quality Time can be rewarding—especially when Yog'So-Soft is lumbering around upstairs kicking things in a temper.

Relationships in Crisis

A relationship that's Shocked down to zero dice is in real Crisis, and you need to do something about it immediately or it'll go south fast, causing the relationship to become permanently weakened.

Handling a Crisis is more involved than just a little Quality Time, and generally it's the center of several scenes during one session, or spread out across several sessions.

To knock a relationship out of Crisis, you have to accumulate a total width on related Quality Time rolls equal to the full value of the relationship. That gets you one die back and your relationship is no longer in Crisis.

So if your relationship has 5d and it's been Shocked down to zero, you need to make enough successful Quality Time rolls to rack up five width to get back one die and get it out of Crisis.

After you recover that first die, you can then regular use Quality Time to build it back up to its original value (but no higher).

You can make as many rolls as you want to try and fix things, but be extra careful: **Each failed Quality Time roll during an attempt to restore a relationship in Crisis permanently knocks a die off that relationship.**

When a die has been lost permanently, even Quality Time isn't enough to fix the damaged relationship. The only way to restore these lost dice is with hard-won character advancement (page 23).

Relationships and Monsters

Remember how I said monsters eat relationships? That wasn't a metaphor.

You can "loan" any relationship—other than the one with your monster—to your monster if you want, letting the creature add those dice to its pools.

This lets your monster kick more butt and take more names, but there's a risk: If your monster gets clobbered, so do the relationship dice you loaned it, resulting in a Shocked relationship. If you let your monster suck on the silly straw of your psyche this way, you can expect it to come back at you as personal trouble, family problems, and/or emotional isolation.

Worse, if your monster gets PWZN3D during the battle, the winning monster might decide to sink its hooks into your soul and use your own relationships later on to help it fight better.



On the upside, your monster can do the same thing to other kids. Sigh. Children can be so cruel.

See page 24 for details on conflicts, monsters, and the horrible things you can do to people you beat up.

Group Creation

Here's an option to help a group of player characters get quickly intermeshed with each other's lives. When you create characters, hold back two relationship dice until everyone's character is created and started out.

Now, have everyone look over the other characters' relationships and pick one or two to link to their own characters by assigning those last two relationship dice to those same things. For instance, two characters can both have relationships with the same parent or toy.

These dice can also be assigned directly to relationships with the other characters.

Character Advancement

Growing up is hard to do, but kids get bigger and monsters get gnarlier. That's reflected in **Experience Points**.

You earn Experience Points by doing awesome things, like kicking butt and solving problems. The GM will dole these out if he likes you.

Usually you get from one to three Experience Points every game session—one for the game itself and another one or two bonus points for playing well.

Playing your character's personality believably, doing things that are disadvantageous just because they fit our character's attitudes, and making the game more interesting and fun for everybody else are good ways to get bonus experience points.

One Experience Point will buy you a skill die. Two will buy you a relationship die. Three will buy you a stat die.

You can also spend five Experience Points to give your monster a new die on one of its monster hit locations, which can be added to a pool or spent on a new Quality or Extra. We'll talk about all that stuff in **Monsters**, page 38.

If something dramatic happens—like falling in love or finding an ancient master to train you in kung fu—then you can spend Experience Points during play. The way you spend them has to relate directly to the dramatic thing that's happening. You don't get to spend Experience Points to buy up your kung fu just because you fall in love. Unless you fell in love with a kung fu expert, I guess.

Otherwise you spend them during down time, between games, and then write about it in your "What I Did During Summer Vacation" essay.

"You have to whisper. We're not supposed to be here."

"I am whispering. Wait . . . is whispering the quiet one?"

"Yes!"

"Sorry. I don't understand why we're here."

"We have to steal back my journal from Becky before she reads it and realizes I have a crush on her."

"I don't get it. You were just going on for hours about how to tell her you like her. Now she'll find out."

"No! She can't know . . . not this way. It would be weird."

"Sneaking into her house while her family is at church is pretty weird, if you ask me. I'm not human, but still . . . pretty weird."

"Just quit yakking and find the journal. Oh God, I hope she hasn't read it yet. . . ."

"Well, considering how busy she and her dinosaur have been trying to kill you these past few days—"

"Yeah."

"How come you're so hot for a girl who's your sworn mortal enemy?"

"Won't say."

"Come on. How come? Is it her devious intellect? Her manipulative charm? Her murderous vengeance?"

"No."

"What then?"

"I like her freckles."

"That's precious. I thought she was molting or something, but—wait. Did you hear that?"

"No. What did it sound like?"

"A little like a nine-ton rackasaurus walking tippy-toes behind us."



CONFLICTS

Arguing and fighting. Attacking, defending and running away. It's going to happen. You're going to say the wrong thing, or someone else is, and then everything is going to go pear-shaped. In fact, pear-in-a-blender shaped.

When just getting along just doesn't work, you're going to have to put the hurt down on someone and keep them from putting the hurt down on you. Conflicts can be verbal or physical, but they're all about kids or monsters hurting each other. That's why it's usually best to stay out of them altogether. But this is a game, and in game sometimes it's most fun just to throw down.

For kids, a conflict is really just one kid's stat + skill roll opposed by another kid's stat + skill roll. Whoever rolls best wins; see **Opposition** on page 18. But there's a lot at stake in conflicts, so let's take a look at them in a little more detail.

Can't You Just Get Along?

Sometimes, you might want to force someone else to do something, or they might be trying to force you to do something. Say, a teacher is trying to make you sit down and shut up in class using her Face + Put the Fear of an "F" Into the Little

Too Hard! Too Hard!

In the conflict rules you can see why we call it the One-Roll Engine. Each character rolls only once to figure out whether they succeeded, how well they succeeded, and where they succeeded in messing with the other guy. And on top of that, everybody in the conflict rolls at the same time, in the “Roll” phase of that round—look, it’s one big roll!

But if all that declaring and rolling and resolving at the same time is too much work, here’s an option.

This version breaks each round up into two phases: Declare and Roll.

1) Declare: Same as in the official rules. Each character declares his or her or its actions in order of Brains + Out-Thinking.

2) Roll: Each character rolls separately and they resolve their actions in order of dice pool size. The highest dice pool rolls first and resolves its effects, followed by the next highest, and so on. (If anyone has the Wicked Fast quality on a weapon or monster—we’ll explain later—add it to the dice pool just to see who goes first.)

Feeling Defensive?

Defensive actions (page 31) are the tricky exception to this version of the Roll phase.

If you’re dodging or blocking and that’s your only action, roll it whenever somebody else rolls a successful attack against you, even if your dice pool is way smaller than theirs.

If you’re defending as part of multiple actions (page 31), roll your pool either when your normal action comes up by dice pool size (and save your defending set for later, in case somebody hits you), or roll it as soon as somebody hits you (and save your non-defending match until your normal action comes up based on your dice pool size).

The width of a defensive action still matters. If an attack has greater width than your defense, it’s too fast and powerful for you, as usual. And your defense still must match or beat the height of the attack roll to spoil it.

Punks dice pool (yes, that’s a skill some teachers get), and you’re trying to convince her to let you go to the bathroom using Face + Connive. This is a pretty clear set of outcomes, and the dice can tell you explicitly who wins, who sits down, and who gets to go pee.

But what if you don’t like the result? What if you don’t like the result so much it totally makes your legs shake and your teeth clench? In that case, you don’t have to take the result dictated by the dice—you can escalate the disagreement into a conflict.

The easiest example of a conflict is a fight: fists flying, people rolling around, screaming, biting, pulling hair. But a nasty argument could be run as a full-blown conflict, too, using the Putdown skill like a fist to hurt, and the Connive skill like a hammer-lock to stall and immobilize.

In conflicts, the order in which you decide what to do and the order in which things happen are really important. Width and height both play a big part. If you get in a jab or putdown before your victim can think of what to do or say, you’ll get the upper hand. Or foot. Or verbal contretemps. Or whatever.

The big danger of a conflict is that it can mess you up. Even if it’s a screaming match with your parents, you can walk away damaged for a while.

There’s a lot at stake in conflicts. That’s why they get a whole chapter to themselves.

Avoiding Conflicts

Sometimes, the better part of valor is screaming like a little girl until a teacher comes over and breaks things up. Here’s a note to write on your hand: *conflicts hurt*. Sometimes really, really bad.

Sometimes you can avoid a full-blown conflict just by taking a different course of action. Perhaps rather than bust the janitor in the head with a fire extinguisher, you ought to apologize for being in the school after hours and then sneak back in as soon as he’s out of sight. Or, rather than trading insults with the bully you can just knuckle under and agree that yeah, he is the boss of you.

But sometimes, keeping your skin intact (if not your dignity) requires more effort, and perhaps some dice-rolling. The GM could call for a roll to see if you can avoid getting into a serious conflict. If you’re trying to avoid the fight, then pick your stat and skill based on how you want to resist the looming throwdown.

Charming your way out of a bad situation would be Face + Charm. Getting someone to listen to reason might be Brains + Out-Think. If a troublemaker is ragging on you and trying to get you to throw the first punch, then perhaps you’ll need to roll Guts + Courage to keep from busting him good right in the nose. This kind of thing is always up to the GM to decide.

If words fail, then there’s always running away. Extracting yourself from a threatening situation can be as simply as legging it (and rolling Feet + P.E. to

outpace your foes, or Feet + Dodge to weave and evade them in the narrow aisles of the library), or it might involve coming up with a reasonable excuse why you can't, just this minute, stick around and have a fight—that's Face + Connive.

Sometimes running away can itself turn into a conflict—it's pretty easy to get beaten up running willy-nilly through the woods at night—but if your enemies don't have a strong enough reason to chase you this hard (or you roll really awesome), then no worries.

But no matter how much you try and make your mom proud by staying out of trouble, and not getting into fights, there's going to come a time when you're going to have to hurt somebody else—or when you just *really want* to hurt someone.

Conflict Rounds

In the game, conflict is resolved in **rounds**. Each round lasts two or three seconds, long enough for everybody involved to do at least one thing. It's kind of like a boxing round, only really, really short.

Each round of conflict is broken up into three phases. It works like this:

Phase 1) Declare: Everybody says what they want to do in order of lowest Brains + Out-Thinking pool to highest. What they declare gives all characters their dice pools. To do two or more things at once, drop one die per extra thing, and hope for more than one match. If this uses more than one stat+skill combo, then use the lowest dice pool before dropping dice—this is called attempting **multiple actions**, and as you can tell it's *hard*. If you need more dice now, you can tap a relationship and throw those dice as well.

Phase 2) Roll: Roll dice and identify matches. If you roll more than one set of matching dice, choose now which to use.

Phase 3) Resolve: From highest width to lowest, resolve the results. Attacks either inflict damage or impose a condition on the other guy (such as holding him immobile). **If you take damage before you resolve your action, you lose a die from your best set.** If this breaks the set so it's no longer a match, your action fails.

Turn to **A Conflict Example** on page 36 if you want to see all this in action.

Damage: Shocks and Scars

Damage is kind of like the Shock that relationships can take, but it hurts your stats instead of your relationship. Damage comes in two flavors: Shocking and Scarring.



MANSPERGER 2K7

Shock damage messes you up temporarily. It hurts, but you get over it pretty quickly.

Scar damage is more serious. Physically-scarring attacks make you bleed or break your bones, and you'll wind up in the hospital if you don't wind up dead. Emotionally-scarring attacks leave you a wreck for a long time. Usually it's better to run away than take scars which will permanently mess you up.

Of course, sometimes the mean guy with the chainsaw and the mask made out of puppies won't give you that choice.

Attacks in *Monsters and Other Childish Things* inflict width minus 1 (width - 1) in damage. So if your attack rolls a width 2, you do one point of damage. Width 3 means two damage. And so on.

Sticks, Stones and Words

In *Monsters and Other Childish Things*, sometimes you face direct, physical attacks and sometimes you suffer emotional attacks. When the biggest, stupidest guy in class slings a bean-bag at your face, that's a physical attack. When he gets all the other kids in class to laugh at the swollen lump it made out of your nose, that's an emotional attack.

Either kind of attack can do damage.

Words

Words hurt. Anybody that says different has never been singled out by some grotesquely overgrown 13-year-old with the start of a mustache to be mocked in front of other kids until their face burned and the tears came. Sometimes, words hurt worse than getting kicked in the knee. Getting beaten up causes physical pain and makes you feel powerless, but at least it makes a certain sense on a rational level. Getting beaten up is just physics with brass knuckles. When someone tears you open with words, it makes you question everything you believe about yourself, makes you deal with your own fears and inadequacies. It can leave you with a sick feeling in your guts, with shaking hands and stumbling feet. For kids, most of the time hurting words are the major source of damage.

In a conflict, you can attack with your Putdown skill as easily as your fists by tearing someone apart verbally. This causes damage just like a physical attack. The major difference is what this damage *means*, and the kind of first aid you'll need. Emotional damage requires commiseration with people you trust—people who'll tell you that you're all right and that your nose doesn't look like a toucan's beak.

Emotional attacks always inflict Shock damage unless you have some kind of serious edge that makes it a Scarring attack. A terribly dirty secret you can slam on the victim does Scar damage. So can a particularly vicious putdown from someone with whom you have relationship dice.

What About Grownups?

A large part of growing up is developing emotional resilience. Kids are far more vulnerable than adults in every way—that's why they take just as much damage from verbal abuse as from physical danger. Adults are generally a little tougher. Not always, but generally.

In most circumstances, **adults don't take damage from mere words**. But when a particular adult is particularly vulnerable, words hurt just as much as they always did.

When a particular character is that vulnerable is pretty much up to the GM, but relationships are the biggie. An adult is *always* vulnerable to emotional damage from relationships.

How does this work in the game? Well, let's say your character's Dad has a relationship with you. If your buddy Timmy calls your Dad a fat, lazy slob, and means it, that'll probably make Dad a bit unhappy but it won't cause real damage. But if *you* call Dad that, it's an attack and he takes damage, because he has relationship dice with you.

Of course, you can have relationships with all kinds of things. If Dad has relationship dice with his job, and the boss rakes him over the coals and threatens to fire him—yep, that's damage.

When ripping on someone, having friends around to laugh at them can really make it sting more. If the attack happens in front of a small group (three or four kids) it does +1 damage. If it's a big group (a dozen kids or so) it does +2 damage. If it's a huge group (two dozen kids or more) it does +3 damage.

If the attack happens in front of a group and the group is already hostile to the target, that's another +1 damage.

There's one more twisty twist to hurtful words and emotional damage: **When you get hurt emotionally, your monster gets hurt physically.** And there's a really good chance that *he won't like this at all*. See page 40 for more information on how **Love Hurts**.

Sticks and Stones

Of course, while words hurt, getting hit in the face by a folding chair isn't anything to sneeze at. Especially if it breaks your nose. Then there's no sneezing at all.

Beating people up is a time-honored way of settling conflicts among kids, and most of the time it's done with bare hands. Sometimes things get serious, though, and people stop hitting other people with their hands and feet, and start hitting people with other things.

Using a real weapon—hitting someone in the head with a branch or a backpack full of books—gives you a bonus to damage. Generally this tops out at around +3—let's say +1 for a bag of books, +2 for a really stout stick, +3 for a lead pipe.

Dangerous things like knives, guns, lead pipes, protractor needles and whatnot can both increase your damage *and* turn that damage into Scarring instead of Shocking.

But for the most part, fights between kids aren't too mad-crazy-lethal. After all, why have a monster if not to festoon the room with the entrails of your enemies? Pity the fool that brings a knife to a gunfight or a gun to a monsterfight.

Hit 'Location'

Each stat links to a general hit location, indicated by the height of an attack roll.

Feet: Height 1 or 2.

Guts: Height 3 through 6.

Hands: Height 7 or 8.

Brains: Height 9.

Face: Height 10.

Reduce your dice in that stat by the width of the attack roll minus one (**width - 1**). Just subtract the damage directly from the stat score. So a two-die hit to the Hands subtracts two dice from your Hands score, reducing your dice pool for all Hands-related activities. If you're using the Permanent Record at the end of this book, just mark through your current stat value (in pencil!) with a single slash ("/") for a Shock or an "X" for a Scar.

Hurt Means Hurt

Remember, in *Monsters and Other Childish Things*, physical threats and ugly words alike cause damage!

Things That Shock

Being really really scared.

Being punched and kicked.

Falling down stairs.

Being really told off by a teacher in front of the class.

Non-monster attacks against monsters (up to and including nukes).

Monster attacks against monsters and their kids.

Things That Scar

Being terrified out of your mind.

Being shot or stabbed.

Falling through a plate glass window.

Being ritually and publicly tormented and mocked by a teacher for months.

Monster attacks against everyone except monsters and their kids.

Oh, and if you want to make a **called shot** against a specific location—maybe you really want to take that bully's Hands score down a little so he doesn't punch as hard—that's simple. Just drop a die from your dice pool, and set a second die to the exact location you want to hit. Roll the rest and look for a match.

Let's say you're after that bully's Hands stat. Hands are hit location 7 and 8, so you drop a die from your dice pool and set one of the remaining dice to either 7 or 8, your choice. Now roll the rest. If you wind up with a match at height 7 or 8, you hurt him in the Hands.

Playing the Hurt

When you take a hit in a conflict and lose dice from a stat, you and the GM need to decide how it happened and how to play it out.

Getting hit in the "Hands" means your manual dexterity has been hurt in some way. That could mean a bruising punch in the arm, or it could mean that the other guy embarrassed or frightened you so badly that you're shaky and weak, or self-conscious and clumsy.

A "hit" to your Brains leaves you rattled and confused. And so on.

This flexibility is supposed to encourage you to diversify your character a bit. Each stat has a skill under it which is useful in a scrap. If your Feet get knocked out from under you, then it's Handy to be good at Punching.

Losing All Your Stat Dice

If a stat is reduced to zero dice, then any remaining damage rolls up or down into an adjacent hit location (the attacker's choice). So if you reduce the bully's Hands to zero and you do another point of damage to hit location 7, you can choose whether he takes that point of damage to his Guts (the location just below Hands) or his Brains (the location just above Hands).

If a stat is reduced to zero dice by any kind of damage, you can still use skills associated with that stat. But if you take too much damage, you might just freak out from the trauma. See below.

Remember how Scarring damage is bad? Well, it is. If you run out of dice from a stat due to Scarring damage—even emotional Scarring damage from particularly ugly words—you lose consciousness or suffer something equivalent. Maybe it means you're out cold, or maybe it means you're huddled up in a little ball, staring into space, waiting for the numbness to come. Either way, you can't take any actions and you will die unless you get some help soon. See **Recovering From Damage**, page 31.

If you run out of *all dice from every stat* due to Shock damage, or a mix of Shock and Scars, you're likewise out of the fight and useless for the rest of the scene, either out cold or too traumatized to do anything but whimper.

Freaking Out

When **any three of your stats** get reduced to zero by Shock damage—or when even a single stat is reduced to zero by Scarring damage—you have to make a Guts + Courage roll. If that fails, you immediately and automatically do one of three things: You completely freak out and start yelling and hitting everyone who gets in your way; or you run for it; or you curl up into a helpless little ball and wait for the bad people to go away. Your choice.

If you want to do something else, like fighting, while making this roll to avoid freaking out, it counts as multiple actions.

Incidentally, normal folks—people who don't have pet monsters—have to make the freakout roll *any time they see a monster attack*, whether or not it's attacking them. Usually they only have to make the roll the first time they see the monster attack in that encounter. At the GM's discretion, some norms might see enough monster violence that the roll isn't required for them anymore.



Recovering from Damage

All but one die of Shock damage returns to every stat after the scene is over. The remaining die lost to Shock returns after you have at least an hour or two to rest, recover and catch your breath.

Scarring damage does not recover *at all* until you get professional attention. If you're well cared for, you heal one die a week. However, one of the dice lost to Scarring does not recover at all—it's just gone. You can get it back only by character advancement (page 23).

Worse, if your stat gets knocked down to 0 dice by nothing but Scars, it is permanently weakened. This reduces the maximum possible value of that stat, even with character advancement, by one die.

For example, if a single Scarring attack took you down to 0 Hands, then the most you can ever have in Hands from then on would be 4 rather than 5.

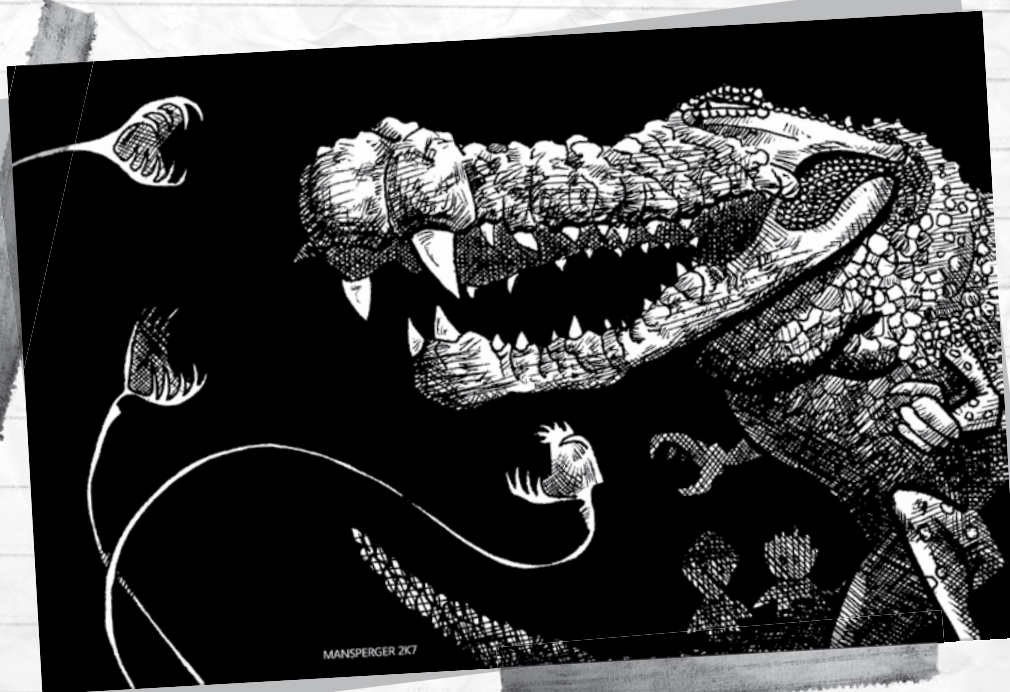
Dodging and Defending

Every attack roll assumes that the target doesn't want to get hit. The other guy is blocking, ducking, generally trying to not be hurt. That's why you have to roll to hit.

But if you're desperate—and for some reason you can't just turn and run—you can devote an entire action to avoiding attacks.

Roll the dice pool that you're using to defend yourself. Usually it's Feet + Dodging, but it might be Guts + Wrestling if you're in a wrestling match, or whatever else is appropriate.

If your roll succeeds, **each die in the defense action's set can neutralize or “gobble” any attack die from a set that has an equal or lower width and height.** If the attack set no longer has matching dice, it misses.



Let's take that apart. First off, look at your defense roll's width. Is it at least as wide as the attack you're trying to avoid? If not, the attack goes before you can duck.

If your width is at least as wide as the attack roll, then look at your roll's height. If your defense roll's width and height both match or beat the attacker's width and height, then every die of your set "gobbles" up a die in the attacker's set.

So if your Feet+Dodging roll is 2x9 and the other guy's Hands+Punching roll is 2x7, you can use one of your two nines to neutralize one of his sevens. A 1x7 is not a match, so his punch swings wide.

Even better, you can divide your defense dice among multiple sets this way, so a good defense roll can sometimes protect you from two or more good attack rolls.

How does this work with non-physical conflicts? If instead of trying bash your noodle in, the other guy is making fun of your new crop of acne? Well, it's identical, but you'd use different skills to evade emotional attacks. Most often, you'll use Guts+Courage to just screw up your resolve and deal with it. "Don't let what the mean boys say get to you, Son." Other times a witty comeback might be the best defense, and Brains + Out-Thinking are the stat and skill to roll. Be as creative with your defenses as you are with your attacks, and you can come up with some interesting combinations.

The Flinch

If the width of your defense roll is equal to or greater than the attacker but your roll's height isn't good enough, your defense was fast but not quite skillful enough—you get a flinch. A flinch lets you change the location the other guy hits, shifting it up or down a number of steps based on the difference in the width.

So if you roll a 4x7 and the other guy rolls a 2x9, you can't totally stop his attack but you can shift the location up or down by two steps. Instead of taking the damage to Brains you can take it to Hands, Guts or Head, whichever you prefer.

This gives you some options; you can't avoid the punch, but you can decide how you get hurt.

Cutting and Running

How do you know when a fight is over? It is over when you give up or when you can't go on. You can quit a fight any time you like, but **the other guy gets a free attack** on you if you turn your back on him to make a run for it.

To run away, you have to make a Feet + Dodge roll, taking any additional damage from your opponent's free attack before you leg it. If you fail the roll, you take the hit and you're still in the fight whether you like it or not.

Great, Now I'm On Fire

Getting hurt sucks, but some ways of getting hurt suck worse. Many things can affect how bad something hurts and how long it takes to deal with it. These extras can be applied to something damaging. When you read a bit further in, you'll see that they can also be applied to some of the nasty things monsters can do.

Aiming

If your attack has Aiming, if you concentrate for a few rounds you get a bonus to hit. Each level of Aiming lets you wait for one round and then get one bonus die for your roll. So with Aiming 3, you can aim for three rounds and then on the fourth round get three bonus dice to your roll.

Area

Some things don't just hurt you—they hurt you, the guy next to you, his dog, the car passing on the street, and the pavement. Things that explode or burst or blow open really big have Area. Area is measured in dice, but they aren't rolled like regular dice. First, though, if an attack with Area hits, then figure the damage for it normally. If you need to know how big the BOOM is, figure that each Area die covers a five-foot radius around the main target. So five Area dice mean about a 25-foot radius.

Everyone caught in the blast rolls the Area dice. Each Area die indicates a hit location. Each victim takes 1 Shock to each location indicated by the Area dice.

If you aren't the main target of the Area attack, you can try to dive for cover with a Feet + Dodge roll. If you beat the height of the main attack with your roll, reduce the number of Area dice by your width. Remember, you have to declare the Feet + Dodge roll just like any other action.

Locked and Loaded

What do you do if you find a gun? DON'T TOUCH! LEAVE IT ALONE! TELL AN ADULT!

Admittedly, guns seem a little silly when your friend Aumakua bit through an armored car last week, but some people love them. In some games guns, knives, and pointy sticks might come up fairly often, so here's a rundown on some basic weapons and the sort of damage and extras they have.

Where it says something like "Damage W – 1 Scars," the "W" stands for width. So it means the damage is width minus one, and it's in Scars.

If a weapon is Gnarly, that's already built into its damage listing. Don't add it again.

Where it says something like "6 attacks," it means you can attack six times with the weapon before it runs out of ammunition. (It does *not* mean you get six attacks per round!)

The number of attacks for some of these weapons may look a little weird. That's because they include the number of extra bullets you fire using a Spray weapon such as a machine gun. The Army Gun can fire six bursts of bullets, so it gets six attacks, but each attack has several bullets in it. And that's about as gun-nutty as we're going to get in this game.

Pistols

Cute Little Toy-Looking Gun:
Damage W–1 Scars. Wicked Fast 1. 6 attacks.

Tough-Looking Cop Gun: Damage W Scars. Gnarly 1. 12 attacks.

Big Honkin' Revolver: Damage W+1 Scars. Gnarly 2. 6 attacks.

Rifles

Deer Rifle: Damage: W+2 Scars. Aiming 3. Gnarly 3. 6 attacks.

Burn

Burn attacks are the hurt that keeps on hurting. The location hit by an attack with Burn is *on fire* . . . or possibly being eaten by acid or a swarm of flesh-munching ants. Whatever, it's the sort of thing that doesn't quit. You take the normal damage from the attack, but then you take another point of Shock at the end of every round until you put out the fire. Really nasty Burn attacks might to Scars rather than Shocks.

If you stop, drop and roll (doing nothing but trying to put out the fire), you can put it out with a Guts + Courage roll of difficulty 6. If not, you still have to make a Guts + Courage roll, and if it fails you can't do anything except run around yelling about how you're on fire.

Gnarly

An attack with this extra isn't more accurate or anything, but it packs more punch. Each level of Gnarly adds 1 to the damage (which is normally width – 1).

Spray

A spray attack is actually a whole lot of attacks that happen at the same time but get resolved in a single roll. Machine guns are Spray weapons. So are shotguns, because of all the little pellets they fire. Each level of Spray gives you a bonus die to your attack roll. Even better, if there's more than one potential target standing next to each other and you roll more than one set, you can either divide them up between the targets or have them all hit one target.

Spray attacks are scary. If someone launches one your way, you have to make an immediate Guts + Courage roll. If it fails, your next action has to be running for cover whether you like it or not.

Wicked Fast

Wicked fast attacks are just that: *fast*. Add the attack's Wicked Fast levels to width when figuring out the order in which things happen, but not for damage or anything else.

Damage From Other Stuff

Getting punched, bit, shot, or stomped on isn't the only thing that can hurt you. Sometimes, just being in the wrong place at the wrong time will do it. Like being in a car when it runs into a wall at 65 mph. Or being on the bottom of the pool when you run out of breath. Or being halfway between the roof and the ground when gravity remembers it doesn't like you one bit for what you said about its mother.

Falling Down

For every five feet you fall, you take one Area die in damage. Falls of less than 20 feet do Shocks, while falls of more than 20 feet do Scars (unless you're landing in water or on a trampoline—then it's all Shocks). You can make a Feet + Sports roll to absorb some of this force by landing right. Each point of width on a successful roll knocks one die out of the damage you take, and if you want, you can take the rest of the damage to your Feet rather than anywhere else.

Crashes

If you're in a vehicle that crashes (or, say, on a drunken monster's back when he plows into building) the damage is based on how fast you were going. Every 10 mph of speed means you take one Area die in damage. If you're not strapped in, the damage is Scars. If you're strapped in and stuff, then you take one die of damage every 20 mph instead, and it's Shock damage.

Bad Sushi

When you eat or drink something poisonous it usually affects your Guts. Poisons have **Potency** and they have an **Interval**. Many poisons do Shock damage, but the really bad ones do Scarring damage. It's up to the GM.

The **interval** is how often you take damage. A really nasty poison might have an interval of one round, meaning you take damage every single round. A mild case of food poisoning might have an interval of one hour.

You get a Guts + Wind roll to try and shrug the poison off. If you make the roll, you take no damage—but you have to roll again every time the interval comes up.

Poison's **potency** is how dangerous it is. The potency rating is the number of successful rolls you have to make to stop taking damage from the poison. So if the bad lunchmeat has an interval of one hour and potency 3, you take one Shock per hour until you've made three rolls to shrug it off. The successful shrug-it-off rolls don't have to come right after each other.

If poison reduces your Guts stat to zero, it moves on to your other stats, starting at hit location 10 (Face) and working its way downward.

Finding Out You're Adopted

Kids with monsters can laugh at Elder Things all night long, but they still take a hurting when normal bad things happen to them. A death in the family, a shocking revelation about friends, or a betrayal of trust—that kind of thing is always bad news. Make a Guts + Courage roll against a dice pool based on how shocking the thing is—the GM gets to decide how many dice it's worth. If there's a relationship involved, then *add those dice to the opposing dice pool*. Success, and you deal. Failure, and you take width – 1 damage.

Double-Barrelled **Sawed-Off**

Shotgun: Damage W+1 Scars.

Gnarly 2. Spray 1. 2 attacks.

Army Gun: Damage W+2 Scars.

Aiming 2. Gnarly 3. Spray 2. 6 attacks.

Pointy Things

Kitchen Knife: Damage W-1 Scars.

Butterfly Knife: Damage W Scars.

Gnarly 1. Wicked Fast 1.

Older Brother's Fake But Sharp

Katana: Damage W+1 Scars.

Gnarly 2.

Thumpy Things

Big Stick: Damage W Shocks.

Gnarly 1.

Baseball Bat: Damage W+1 Shocks.

Gnarly 2.

Baseball Bat That's On Fire: Damage

W+1 Shocks. Burn. Gnarly 2.

Explodey Things

Bazooka: Damage W+4 Scars. Area

6. Gnarly 5.

Grenade: Damage W+2 Scars. Area

3. Gnarly 3.

Propane Tank That's On Fire:

Damage W+1 Scars. Area 2.

Burn. Gnarly 2.

A Conflict Example

Benny has been trying to find out who spray-painted “coward” on his brother’s gravestone—that’s the brother who got killed in Iraq, remember—and who’s been spreading rumors at school that he got shot in the back because he was running away.

After putting the pieces together, he discovers it’s a kid named Tommy, the brother of the girl Benny’s been crushing on all year.

Benny spots Tommy at the Pizzarama bowling alley. He says, “Why’d you do that to my brother’s grave? That’s so not cool!” And Tommy answers, “Because—hey, it’s Principal Anders.” And Benny says, “What? Where?” And Tommy says, “Punch!”

The fight is on, and both their monsters spring into action, tangling up as the boys roll around on the floor.

Round 1

First, everyone declares:

Benny’s Brains + Out-Thinking is 8.

Tommy’s Brains + Out-Thinking is 4.

Tommy has to declare his actions first, then his monster Flytrap Joe, then Benny, and then Benny’s monster Mr. Crocker. They declare these actions:

Tommy: “I’m going to rag on his dead brother some more, attacking with Face + Putdown. Flytrap Joe’s going to wrap Mr. Crocker up in his awesome seven-dice Strangling Vines.”

Benny: “I’m going to grab Tommy’s head and make him shut his stupid mouth with a Guts + Wrestling attack. Mr. Crocker’s going to bounce out of the way of the vines with an eight-dice defensive Bouncy Gait action.”

Next, everyone rolls:

Tommy rolls eight dice, resulting in a 3x8.

Benny rolls six dice, resulting in a 2x7.

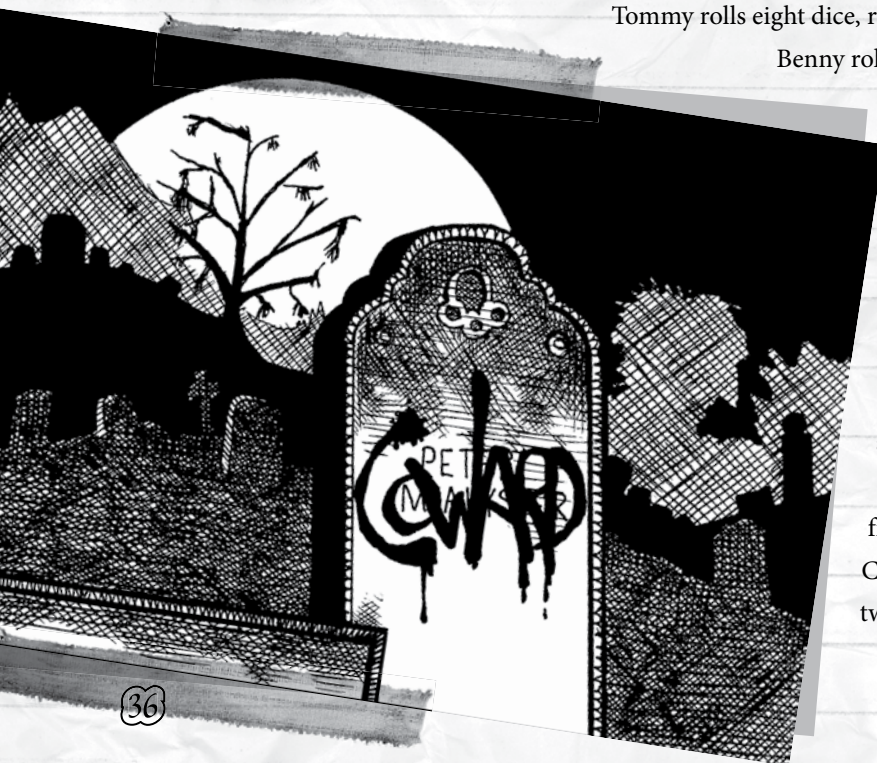
Flytrap Joe rolls six dice, setting one more to 10 before rolling the rest (he has a special monster quality that lets him do this), but he still doesn’t get a match.

Mr. Crocker rolls eight dice, getting 3x6.

Finally, resolution:

Tommy’s insults hit home hard, making Benny feel sick and shamed, and inflicting 2 Shock damage against his Guts (taking it down to 2).

Since Benny took emotional damage he loses a die from his set, which breaks it. His attack fails. Plus, Mr. Crocker takes the same damage as Benny (see page 40), two Shock to hit location 8, his Beady Eyes.



Feeling Benny's pain takes a die out of Mr. Crocker's defensive move, but it's still nice and fast at 2x6—and Flytrap's attack misses the bouncing crocodile anyway. The GM says the vines wrap around a pinball machine and crush it instead.

Round 2

Everyone declares:

Tommy: "I'm going to keep on until he starts to cry, so I'm attacking with Face + Putdown again. Flytrap Joe's going to try and take a bite out of Mr. Crocker with his Flytrap Jaws, rolling eight dice."

Benny: "I'm going to add my relationship with my brother to my pool, and make a called shot with Hands + Punching to sock Tommy in the jaw. I drop a die, set another to 10 to hit his Face, and then roll the other six hoping for a 10."

"Oh, and I'll give Mr. Crocker my relationship with Mom and Dad to jack him up, because they loved my brother, too. He's going to bite the motherlovin' crap out of Flytrap with his Hungry Jaws."

Everyone rolls:

Tommy rolls eight dice again, resulting in a 2x3.

Benny rolls six dice, resulting in a 2x10! With the pre-set 10, this is now 3x10.

Flytrap Joe rolls eight dice, getting 2x5.

Mr. Crocker rolls six dice, setting one to 7 before rolling the rest, and rolls 2x7, for 3x7 total. And Crocker's Hungry Jaws are so wicked fast they get +2 width to see who goes first, so it goes on width 5 instead of width 3!

Resolution:

Mr. Crocker snaps his Hungry Jaws like lightning as the Flytrap tries to bite, and shows the vegetable what *real* biting is all about. He bites Joe real bad. In addition to being fast, Crocker's Hungry Jaws do +1 damage, so with his width of three he smiles and swallows three dice worth of Flytrap Jaws. That damage makes Flytrap Joe lose a die from his 2x5 set, so it becomes a miss.

Benny's 3x10 hits Tommy like a bowling ball to the head. Whack! Tommy takes two points of Shock damage to his precious Face and loses a die from his own set, causing it to fail.

"Your bother was a SMACK groogmnop!"

The big fight continues.

"I'm gonna bite his face off!"

"Calm down! We'll figure this out, we'll find a way—"

"Kid, you got to realize something. Sometimes there just ain't no talking to be done, and no matter how much you want things to be nice and happy and peaceful and fun, sometimes you gotta take it hard and fast to the bad place, and do something you don't want to do. Something BAD to somebody else."

"You make it sound like it's something you regret."

"Hey, I never said that. I'm totally digging on getting my chompers around that scrawny snake and chomping down like he's a spicy Thai noodle."

"I think you're too into this. I'm just going to talk to Dan, and we can work something out."

"Working things out is for big sissy girls. Growing up is all about being a man, and according to TV, what men do when bad things are going down is to race around talking on their cellphones and beating up the bad guys until they find out where the bomb is hidden. But they only have 24 hours to do it, so they never pee."

"That's just TV! That's not what its like to be a man. Dad never does that stuff."

"And how much do you respect your old man? If he whacked more terrorists, you know you'd love him more. But he pees way too often. He'd be in the can when the bomb went off."

"You've taken this one to a strange place. Stranger than usual. Like, I didn't even know you liked Thai food."

"Spicy Thai noodles with basil is awesome. There's this dumpster I like to hang out in on Saturday nights around 2 in the morning. They toss the old noodles in around . . . hey, now who's getting off topic? Are we going over to Danny Boy's house for some payback or not? Nobody's got any business saying something like THAT to your sister, even if she is a big old bi—"

"Hey! All right, all right. Fine. Let's go kick some snake butt."

"And then, dumpster noodles!"



MONSTERS

They're big, they're scary, they're clawed, they're hairy, and they're sneaking up right behind yooooooooou.

Monsters.

It's what you've been wanting to hear about since you started reading this thing.

Why do monsters choose certain kids to be their best friends in the universe? Nobody knows. But it sure is fun. Usually.

The Ties That Bind

Kids and monsters have a special relationship called a **bond**. A bond doesn't have dice like a normal relationship—it just *is*. Your monster isn't just some monster you happen to be friends with. He's *your* monster. You are the only thing in the whole cosmos he has any true empathy for. He's a big slimy dork from beyond the aetheric frequency of ordinary matter, but he's always got your back, and he knows when you're upset and when you're in trouble.

Likewise, you have a sense about him—what he's feeling, whether he's hungry,

Monsters and Grownups

Monsters form emotional bonds with kids, not with grownups. The bond between a monster and a kid fades as the kid enters adulthood.

The reason for this is pretty simple. Kids are emotionally exposed in ways that adults have outgrown. Remember how adults are mostly immune to emotional damage (page 28)? That's because adults have learned to guard their feelings. They're not as exposed. An adult has outgrown the vulnerability that made him or her open to a connection with a monster.

If you do run into an adult who still has a monster friend, it's because that's one vulnerable, needy grownup—one who still takes damage from emotional attacks from anyone—with one protective, desperate monster. Watch your step.

and an inkling when he's somewhere doing something that'll get you in trouble. It's not enough psychic whammy for you to get there *before* he gets you in trouble, but enough to arrive at the big hilarious dramatic moment when he's slurping down the last of the suspicious and annoying foreign exchange student. "Oh . . . this is awkward. I didn't save any for you at all."

The GM can use this bond as a dramatic cue to move things along and add tension. If you're sitting in the middle of a really major test, and your mom has really been onto you about getting good grades, and you get a stomach-churning flash of your monster in pain—decisions, decisions.

Love Hurts

There's a downside to being best friends with a monster. You really, really love the big, smelly goober. And he really, really loves you. Yeah, he gets you in trouble, and your life sure has been complicated since he came along, but there's no denying it.

Kids and their monsters have a unique, powerful emotional bond. Any time you suffer emotional damage (see page 27), **your monster suffers an equal amount of physical damage to the same numeric location.** If you take two Shocks of emotional damage to hit location 7, your Hands stat, because Kendal Poemont mocks your clothing so much it leaves your hands shaking, then your monster Big Wolf takes two Shocks of damage to his own hit location 7. Same goes for Scars.

Monsters are protective of their kids because they love them. The fact that cruelty to their kids physically hurts the monster, too, just makes them mean about it.

There's a flip side to this deal: Kids suffer horrible emotional feedback when their monsters get chewed up physically. It's the reverse here, with the kid taking emotional damage to the equivalent location that a monster got chomped on. But it isn't quite as severe. When a monster's whole body part loses all its dice, **the monster's kid loses all remaining dice on the same hit location number.** This damage to the kid is always Shocks—but it still sucks to see your friend get messed up.

So if Mr. Crocker loses all the dice in his Swishy Tail (hit location 5), Benny loses all the dice in his Guts (hit location 5). If Benny started with 4d in Guts and already lost 2d, he'd lose the other 2d. If his Guts were perfectly healthy, he'd lose all 4d.

By the way, there's no infinite feedback loop of this pain; a monster doesn't take more damage when its kid suffers because it got stomped on.

Monster Basics

All monsters have some key things in common.

Monsters Aren't From Around Here

Monsters are from Somewhere Else, and don't really need to do things like eat and breathe and whatnot to survive. They sometimes pretend to do those things,



because kids expect them to, but they don't need it. They're as happy under a thousand feet of freezing seawater as they are lurking under your bed.

Monsters Look After Their Kids

Monsters love their kids—it's just that monster love isn't human love. Monsters just don't get it. They're sort of like the tiger from the old comic strip *Calvin and Hobbes*, if he were a fifty-mouthed ravenous blob with a thousand baleful eyes rather than an imaginary cartoon tiger.

Monsters listen to their kids, and they do what they say, and try to anticipate their kids' wants and needs. This leads to Trouble. The upside is that they always leap to protect their kids in a physical conflict. And if they're nearby, they can extend their environmental immunity to the kids, allowing them to survive just about anywhere reasonably well, if not super comfortably.

Monsters Are Good at Hiding

Almost all monsters have a knack for remaining present but unseen. Some can shrink, some can turn invisible, some project illusions, some are utterly innocuous until they reveal their powers, etc. While hiding, a monster can't use any of its powers or abilities—it has to reveal itself big and loud to do that—but it can hang out, ready to help.

My Monster Ain't Got No Legs!

So, you conjure up a really wicked awesome monster, and you really, really like him, and then you start playing and you say "Gigapus! Go get him!" And Gigapus says, "With what, dude? You forgot to get me legs."

Don't worry. If you neglect something basic like sense organs or legs, it doesn't mean your monster is blind or immobile. It just means that he's so bad at this kind of thing that he can't oppose anyone else who rolls dice to do it.

Gigapus can walk around, but if he ever needs to get somewhere fast and the pressure is on, and not getting there in time would be a *bad thing*, well, then he's going to blow it. If you don't give your monster a basic bit, it doesn't mean he lacks it entirely (unless you want him to), it just means he sucks at it.

Monsters Can't Die

... unless they get beaten (and eaten) by another monster, or something horrible happens to their kid. Monsters recover all damage they take from mundane sources at one die per round. They recover damage from other monsters at one die per day—although training and care can speed this up to the width of a Face + Charm roll per day.

Monsters Know Each Other

While monsters are good at hiding from people, they can spot each other easily (unless they have a special ability dedicated to hiding from other monsters), even when hiding. Kids get an inkling that there's something unnatural lurking about, but until their own unnatural buddy clues them in they won't know for sure where to look.

Nothing Can Stop a Monster . . .

... except another monster.

As SWAT teams and armies and hall monitors realized when they tried to mobilize against the monsters when they first appeared, the beasties go through troopers like a laser through a G.I. Joe's plastic torso. They ignore mundane armor, be it a bullet-resistant vest or six inches of composite tank hide. And mundane weapons are far less effective against them—they in effect have a free 5x10 defensive set against purely mundane assaults.

The exception to this is attacks by kids who are themselves bonded to other monsters. For some reason, this puts the kids on the same frequency as the monster (or whatever) and so the kid's attacks could possibly do the monster some real hurt.

But even then, the kid doesn't get any special bonus for mundane weaponry he might be hitting with, so most monsters aren't super worried about it.

Building Your Very Own Monster

Every monster has an Appearance, Hit Locations, a Personality, a Way to Hide, and a Favorite Thing.

Appearance and Hit Locations

Sketch your monster and circle all the important bits of its anatomy, and imagine what those bits do. Those bits are the monster's hit locations.

Like kids, monsters have 10 hit location numbers. But most monsters don't have the same hit locations as kids, or even the same number of hit locations.

You can decide how many hit locations your monster has, and which numbers

apply to each location. A single location can't have more than four hit numbers associated with it, and no monster can have fewer than four hit locations total. Otherwise it's up to you.

Each hit location number has five dice linked to it (that's fifty fat, happy dice, total). These dice are what you use to describe your monster and buy special abilities. So if one hit location has three numbers assigned to it (location numbers 3 through 5, for instance), it gets 15 dice.

Assign the 10 hit location numbers to the bits you circled on the sketch, and note the total dice for each body part.

A hit location's dice are rolled when the monster takes an action that uses that body part, and they're the way you track the monster's damage. They work just like a kid's stats. Instead of having stats and skills, a monster has hit locations.

Remember, you can't roll more than 10 dice in a single dice pool. So if your monster has more than two location numbers assigned to a body part—with five dice per location number, remember—then you'll probably want to spend the extra dice on something.

For example, a monster with Goo-Dripping Mandibles with locations 7-9 linked to it would have 15 dice. Since this is more than 10, at least 5 need to be spent on something else.

On what, you ask? Let's find out.

Monster Qualities

Each monster hit location—an eyestalk or a maw or a cluster of tentacles or a crab-like claw or whatever—starts with one special monster quality. A hit location can have additional qualities at a “cost” of one die each.

Attacks: The monster can use this location to attack, inflicting width – 1 in damage to the location indicated by the roll's height. This is Shock damage to other monsters, their kids, or any other miscellaneous ab-natural horror from beyond space and time. Against the remainder of the universe—the boring world of SWAT teams, toasters, goldfish, gang members, algebra tests, microwave burritos, and nuclear submarines—this damage is in Scars.

Defends: The monster can use this location to defend, just like a kid can dodge or block, using its roll to gobble dice from attacking sets. A monsters can use this ability to defend its kid if the kid is nearby. For a monster to defend both itself and its kid in the same round requires multiple actions.

Useful: The monster can use this location to do something really useful, like flying, tracking by scent, walking on walls, burrowing, possessing people's minds, phasing through matter, or, say, swallowing anything up to the size of a pony and vomiting it back up in perfect working order on command, even if the poor pony would really, really wish he were dead at that point.

Useful Bits in Conflicts

Useful bits can sometimes be used in conflicts, but there are limits on what they can accomplish. A Useful quality can't take an enemy completely out of the action, but it can limit his choices somewhat.

If you want a hit location that reduces a foe's dice pools, then buy it as an Attack quality and define it however you like. The Useful quality is for things which don't do damage, but can sometimes influence a conflict.

Here are some things a Useful bit can do to a foe in combat with a successful roll:

Stun

Temporarily paralyze one hit location for width – 1 rounds.

Distract

Allow the monster to escape combat without giving his foe a freebie attack.

Tangle

Restrict a foe's actions in some meaningful way for width – 1 rounds.

Hold

Keep a foe from escaping for width – 1 rounds.

Monster Extras

Dice can also be spent on the following extras, which enhance the effect of a monster bit. You can take an extra more than once. Extras cost one die per level, and work as follows:

Area: Each level of Area gives your monster attack an Area die of damage, and a five foot radius of effect per Area die (see **Area**, page 33). Each character inside that radius must roll the Area dice when you hit. Kerbloom! If Area applies to a Useful ability, it affects everyone in that radius.

Awesome: Taken once, this lets you set one of the monster's dice for this hit location to any value you like before you roll the rest. Taken twice, this lets you change one die to any value you like after you roll them all.

Burn: This is a classic. This attack sets stuff on fire. People freak out when they're on fire (see page 34), but other monsters are good at keeping it together. A monster just needs a successful action to put out its burning-on-fire bits. A human who is not busy freaking out can put out a fire by spending a whole round doing nothing else.

Gnarly: This part is especially harmful. Add one point per level of Gnarly to any damage it inflicts.

Sharing: This allows the monster's kid to use the hit location's ability as if it were his own. This sometimes leads to temporary physical transformations, and sometimes not. A kid can use this ability even if his monster is hidden, although the power is still pretty obvious to anyone who's looking closely or who makes a Brains + Notice roll to spot the weirdness.

Spray: This is like the Spray attack extra (page 34). When using this bit, your monster can use all multiple sets it rolls without needing to declare multiple actions. However, each action must be done with a hit location that has Spray. Unlike the weapon extra, Spray for a monster does not add extra dice, and no single location can have more than one level of Spray—you either have it or you don't.

Tough: This part of the monster is pretty tough. For each level of Tough, knock one point off any damage it suffers on this location, every time.

Wicked Fast: Wicked fast means your monster is faster at being wicked. Each level of Wicked Fast adds to the width of an action when figuring out the order in which things happen.

Faster, Bigger, Farther

Monsters can go *a lot* faster and are *a lot* stronger than humans. If you want to know exactly how fast your monster can go on his "Super-Slithery Body 6d" or how much mass he can dissolve with his "Caustic Barf Sac 8d," look it up on the **Monster Might** table.

Monster Might

Dice	Speed	Range	Size
1d	2 mph	10 yards	50 lbs
2d	4 mph	20 yards	100 lbs
3d	8 mph	40 yards	200 lbs
4d	16 mph	80 yards	400 lbs
5d	32 mph	160 yards	800 lbs
6d	64 mph	320 yards	1,600 lbs
7d	128 mph	640 yards	1.6 tons
8d	256 mph	1,280 yards	3.2 tons
9d	512 mph	1.5 miles	6.4 tons
10d	1,024 mph	3 miles	12.8 tons

Notes

Speed is how fast the monster can go. Each mph of speed equals one yard per round. So if your monster can fly 32 mph, it can fly 32 yards in a round.

Range is how far the monster's power or ranged attack can reach.

Size is how much weight the monster or its power can carry around. If you're curious, most elementary school kids count as 1d worth of size, most middle school kids count as 2d, and most high school kids count as 3d.

If too you're curious to wait, it's 64 miles per hour and 3.2 tons. A monster with these abilities could catch a speeding truck and then melt it into a pool of goo.

When a monster's dice pool could be used for more than one thing—if it can lift heavy things and move really fast—you can split the dice up. So with that Super-Slithery Body 6d, you could put all 6d into Speed, or if the monster needs to carry something heavy you could put 3d on Speed and 3d on Body, or you could put all 6d on Body and the monster will be able to carry around 800 pounds but only move at a walk.

Scoping Out Monsters

Your monster's appearance says a whole lot about what it can do, because all a monster's weird powers arise from some (usually obvious) bit of its anatomy.

When scoping out another monster, you (or your own critter, if it can see) can try to figure out important stuff about it—what its parts do and how powerful they are. You need to study the monster while it is unhidden for at least a minute outside of combat, or see it fight for at least a round.

Then you can make a Brains + Notice roll. With success, you learn the names of the other monster's body parts. You also learn something extra about the body part designated by the height of the roll. You learn that location's dice pool, and one quality or extra it possesses for each point of width beyond the first (the monster's player chooses which to reveal).

For example, if Monsquito has a Terrible Needle-Like Sucker Mouth with locations 8–10, then an observation roll with a success of 3x9 would reveal all the names of its body parts; about its Needle-Like Mouth, hit location 9, the roll reveals its dice pool and two of its qualities and extras. This kind of thing can let you scope out an enemy monster's powers and its soft vulnerable bits.

Personality

Nailing down what your monster acts like is as important as nailing down what it can do.

A monster is played sort of like a shared character between you and the GM. You get to describe the kinds of things it likes and likes to do, and you get to say what it does when using its powers on your command, but the GM “plays” it when the big beastly is interacting with you—or your teachers, loved ones, and pets.

Your monster's personality describes how it acts and reacts, and it serves as a handy role-playing guide for whoever is running the critter. Unlike kids, monsters don't really grow up or change. They get bigger and badder, but they retain more or less the same personality. Sometimes a kid outgrows his monster's company when his monster can't change along with him.

You Can't Hurt My Monster, He's a Ghost!

Not so fast there, sport. Even if your monster is basically incorporeal, it'll still have *something*—some kind of presence in the world—that other monsters can sink their otherworldly teeth into, and that it can use to interact with things.

Monsters can be pretty abstract. They aren't bound by earthly laws of biology, physics or fashion. They can wear white after Labor Day (and look *fabulous*), and they can be made of solidified music.

But other monsters can still go after it.

If your monster's weird state lets it walk through walls or evade attacks, then buy this as a Useful quality, and give the locations Defends or lots of the Tough extra to make them hard to hurt.

Motivating Your Monster

Getting a monster to act against its personality when the situation isn't dire can sometimes be tricky. A really lazy monster like Mr. Crocker would need to be convinced, bribed, or cajoled out of a big hot bath when Benny needs help with the weird ghost things that live in the basement.

Convincing a monster to get with the program and act against its personality requires a roll with Face + Charm, Putdown or Connive, depending on how you want to motivate your monster. We call this a **motivation roll**.

The big exception here is when a monster's kid is at risk. All monsters are protective of their kids, and none will sit by and let its kid get hurt, even if monster is ordinarily a big, angry jerk.

Of course, you don't need a roll at all to get your monster to act according to its personality. In fact, sometimes you need to roll to stop your eager beaver from acting out. Mr. Crocker just loves to eat people, and, well, that means his friend Benny has to watch him pretty close.

Consider how your monster's personality and your kid's personality interact. Even if they seem to be incompatible, remember that a monster friend is a friend for life. You may argue and bicker and fight, but your monster will still crawl through burning radioactive broken glass to protect you (but wait and hug him for it later, as he'll be on fire, radioactive, and covered in broken glass).

A Way to Hide

Your monster's way to hide is also a biggie. Almost all monsters can make themselves unseen or unnoticed, but the way your friend does it is unique in some way. It's going to matter when you need to call him up for assistance in a pinch.

Some monsters shrink, some go invisible, some slip into higher dimensional spaces, some—despite being great hulking demonic compost heaps—just seem totally normal when slumping down the hallway behind you.

While it's hidden, you can talk to your monster if it's close, and it can talk to you; but this is can be an express ticket to the counselor's office, since nobody else can hear what your monster is saying when you answer back out loud.

Hidden monsters can also affect things physically in minor ways. These are minor ways, nothing that would require rolling dice, and nothing dramatic enough to be perceived as more than coincidence by ordinary people watching it happen. A breeze blows a pencil off a desk. A flock of pigeons explode unexpectedly into flight.

The sticky moral issue here is that a hidden monster friend makes cheating on tests really, really easy. Your friend just needs to hang out by the smart kid and whisper his answers out to you.

Also, since monsters can spot each other even while hidden (unless they have a special power to hide from other monsters), then sometimes while you're

trying to study for an exam in the library or watch the big, loud, dumb summer explodeyfest at the local Cini-Mega-Plex, your monster is talking loudly to other monsters, and generally hamming it up and distracting you.

Some people—the crazy, the psychic, the stoned, the very young, the very old, the near-dead, and the chronically spacey—can see monsters even when they are hiding. Not all can see them clearly, or make sense of what they see, and seeing them tends to collapse all those people back down to the first type (crazy), but sometimes they see enough to make trouble.

They might think you're the sort of evil, occult-meddling punk that makes Jack Chick cry. Or they might think you've got a guardian angel or a faerie companion. Or they might figure it out and want to join the monster-friend club, even after you tell them you have no idea how they could get a monster of their very own.

Generally, if someone can spot your monster, it's going to lead to trouble.

Favorite Thing

Your monster's favorite thing is a huge motivator, and an endless source of fascination for the creature. Monsters, given their druthers, will indulge in their favorite things to excess, which can be funny ("Spiny-Cat! No more pie!"), tragic ("Now my mother is insane, too!"), or both ("Now my mother is insane for pie, too!").

If presented with a big, tempting opportunity to indulge its Favorite Thing, a monster will be hard-pressed to pass it up if there isn't something important it should be doing instead (and even then . . .). You or the GM needs to roll your Face + Putdown dice. If it succeeds, your monster feels properly chastened, wipes the digestive fluids off its maw, screws up its courage and continues on. Failure, and the beast wallows in excess until something snaps it out of its reverie. This can be bad if your enemies figure out what your monster likes and leave a trail of breadcrumbs (or pies, or corpses, or whatever) to a trap or distraction.

But there's a definite up side to your monster having a Favorite Thing. If you can promise your monster you'll indulge its Favorite Thing in good faith, then your monster will bust his hump for you—more than usual even.

If your monster is dogging it and wants to bail on a fight, then offering its Favorite Thing allows you to set one of the dice in your Face + Charm motivation roll to any value you like after rolling the rest.

That's an automatic set—and when you've got to keep your monster from eating the cop who told you to ride your bike with a helmet, or to keep fighting even after Chompy McBitey rips off its pincers and eats them, that's just what you need.

Of course, if you welsh on the deal and don't come up with your monster's Favorite Thing in sufficient quantities, he's going to feel jerked around—and rightly so, 'cause you'd be a jerk for reneging. Until you pay off bigtime, your monster is going to feel less inclined to take it to the mat for you, and so all your motivation rolls are made against a difficulty of 6.

A.P. Monster Building

Or, Getting the Most Out of Your Horror From Beyond.

Diversify, diversify, diversify. If you put all your monster's attacks in one location then when it takes a lickin' you're going to be in real trouble. Choose a couple of good attack bits, some good utility bits, that kind of thing.

Remember that you can't have more than 10 dice in any one location, so if you end up with more than 10 dice because of a particularly big bit (more than two hit numbers assigned to it) then you have to spend those extra dice on qualities and extras.

But keep in mind that hit location dice work just the same for your monster as stats for your kid—a hit location's dice pool takes damage as well as getting rolled. If you buy too many bells and whistles and spines and glands with a hit location's dice instead of leaving them as a dice pool, then the location will be easier to take out.

And don't neglect some Useful monster parts, things that will be an advantage outside of a monster brawl. If you're in a game that's going to last longer than just one or two battles, those Useful bits can be much more interesting than lots of Gnarly attacks and Wicked Fast defenses.

When Monsters Fight People

Monsters can mess people up really bad. Unless a kid specifically tells his monster to "Go easy!" monster attacks ignore armor and defenses and inflict Scarring damage of generally pretty graphic and horrible sorts. Players have to specifically say they want their monsters to do Shock rather than Scar damage, and if the kid's life is physically threatened, then a monster *won't listen*.

Monsters are also immune to Scarring damage from mundane sources—the only thing that can do this to a monster is another monster.

Otherwise, conflicts work as usual.

When Monsters Fight Monsters

When monsters go at it, it's much like when people do, except you use the monster's kid's Brains + Out-Thinking score to determine which monster declares action first. (Monsters generally suck at tactics and need their kids to yell advice to them.)

When monsters fight, there's a certain understanding, a definite sense of when the fight is done. When your monster makes the other one say he's the boss of it, the fight is over. The beaten monster is going to slink off, hide, or otherwise make itself scarce. Getting beaten ends the fight, and a monster won't keep beating on a defeated foe even if its kid screams for blood.

Now, that's not to say that *other things* might not keep chewing when the enemy goes down. But not the monster who just won.

My Monster Is a Giant Blob Of Goo!

If you can't put more than four of your 10 hit location numbers into a single monster part, how do you make monsters that are basically big homogeneous blobs, swarms of smaller creatures, swirly masses of evil fog, or vibrating cosmic strings?

Well, check out Mr. Whispers on page 79 for an idea how a monster without a typical body might be statted out. The trick is to make some distinctions in the beastie's capabilities, and to recognize that having multiple bits is an *advantage*.

If you've got all your hit locations lumped into one big blob, then it'll be a really amazingly awesome blob. Nobody will talk smack about your blob, because your monster's blob will be the *best* blob there is.

But when you put all your goo into one blob, you're taking a pretty big risk that another monster with Blizzard Lungs will prance up on its dainty cloven feet and spray your blob monster until he looks like a half-melted Popsicle, and moves half as fast as one, by messing with your single hit location.

Remember page 43, where we said how a Useful monster part can be used in combat? A Useful bit can't do your monster any damage, but it might be able to freeze a single location in place for awhile. Certainly long enough for the other monster's kid to snap a pic on his cellphone and then cheese it before your friend thaws out. And how embarrassing is that for King Blob?

Making the Other Monster Say 'Uncle'

Monsters don't like to keep fighting after they get really messed up. Each time one of a monster's locations is totally taken out (reduced to zero dice), the monster's kid has to make a Face + Charm roll to convince the monster to keep fighting. We call this a **motivation roll**. If the fight is a serious one—the monster is defending its kid, for example—then it'll keep fighting even without a motivation roll.

If the roll fails, the monster gives up and quits fighting. It has been defeated. See **Kicking Butt and Taking Names**, page 51.

Monsters that give in early are less messed up than those that keep fighting, but are usually sort of embarrassed about bailing out.

Putting the Smack Down

Totally wrecking the other monster is a harder way to win. If your monster totally beats down every single dice pool the other one's got, so it ends up with nothing to roll, it's completely KO'd. It's out cold, and all the motivation rolls in the world won't keep it going.

Beating the Snot Out of Monsters

Monsters can be really crazy tough and hard to hurt, but there's a good chance that even the most armored beast has a more vulnerable bit. Somewhere the armor is a bit thin, where X-ray eyes sounded cooler than layers of bony plate.

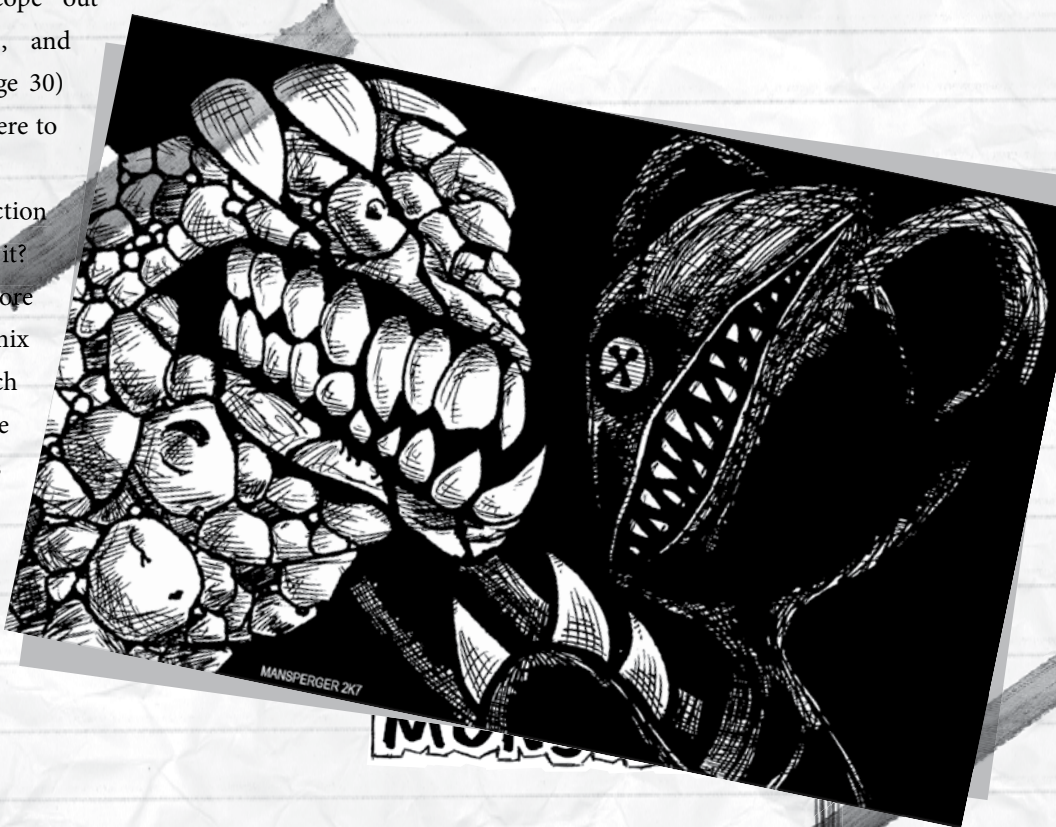
If a monster gets hit in a location that is totally wiped out, the damage rolls up or down into the next undamaged bit (attacker's choice, unless the monster has a successful Flinch action; see page 32).

And here's the kicker: damage that "rolls" to another location *ignores that location's defenses*. Just take the damage right out of that location's dice.

Kids with good eyes can scope out vulnerable spots (see page 45), and monsters can use called shots (page 30) to target them when they know where to bite.

Yeah. It makes taking defensive action seem like a purty good idea, doesn't it?

Of course, that adds one more tactical layer to the way monsters mix it up. Sometimes your beast can psych out an enemy by nipping it in the tender bits, making it waste actions defending when it would prefer to be going at it like a sack of wet Tasmanian devils and liquored-up snakes.



Running for It

If it looks like your monster is getting pasted, you can try legging it. Sometimes, discretion is the better part of not getting ground up into tiny, tiny chunks. Running for it isn't the same as getting beaten, and the other monster doesn't get the same bonuses as when it *kicks butt* (page 51). But your monster will still probably be embarrassed about it.

Getting your monster to leg it can be tough. First, it requires a motivation roll (page 46) to convince your monster to scam. Next, the other guy gets a free attack against which your monster can't take any defensive action. If the other monster doesn't want yours to get away and it has some ability to chase or catch, a success means your monster is stuck.

Yummy, Yummy Relationships

Kids can loan relationship dice to their monsters, adding those dice directly to the monster's dice pools.

Any damage the monster takes to any location while using such borrowed dice comes off these relationships first, before it hits a monster body location. The relationship dice last until they get knocked off.

Every relationship die that's lost from attacks on the monster is immediately Shocked.

In short-term play this won't be a big deal, and perhaps it should even be forbidden by the GM since it'll give characters with more relationships a serious edge. But in long-term play it generates lots of conflicts with a character's relationships.

This trouble in the Shocked relationships is always somehow directly related to the monster. For example, if you take a Shocked die in your relationship with your Mom, then maybe Mom stays furious that Jingle-Toes slashed up the carpet in your bedroom with his scythe-like talons.

Your Helpful Friend

Dealing with a Shocked relationship takes Quality Time, described on page 20. If you want, you can use your monster's help to deal with relationship trouble. Maybe you join your Mom taking her new puppy out for a walk, and use Mr. Crocker's ability to swallow anything whole and spit it back out alive to get the dog out of the way of a drunk driver—roll Mr. Crocker's dice pool to see if the Quality Time works.

But using your monster's abilities to help is risky and can backfire. Isn't it the big scaly jerk's fault you're in this mess to begin with? **If you get monster assistance on a Quality Time roll and it still fails, it permanently reduces the relationship by one die.** Failure when using a monster's help during a Crisis burns two dice.

Exactly how this happens is up to the GM, but it's never pretty.

EXAMPLE: You loaned dice from your relationship with your favorite hard-but-fair English teacher to your monster Angel Hair when she was fighting Fire-Goat and Maggie-Maggie Shiny-Smile, and those dice got Shocked when Angel Hair didn't do so well. You let Angel Hair try to help make things better with Quality Time, so you roll Angel Hair's dice—and it comes up without a match. The GM's going to have fun with this one. He says Angel Hair kidnaps the teacher, dangles her off the roof, and threatens to eat her soul unless she lets you retake the quiz. The teacher lets you retake the quiz, but you lose a relationship die permanently.

Kicking Butt and Taking Names

When your monster beats someone else's monster, you always get something for it.

If the other monster gave up—its kid couldn't convince it to keep fighting—then your monster takes a nasty bite out of the enemy monster. It inflicts a single Scar to any hit location of your choice. This is what you do when you **kick butt**.

Even better, your monster gets to keep the chomped-out die for himself. He can add it to any one of his own hit locations, spend it on an extra, or even gain a quality from the hit location of the monster that got chomped. Put a chomping on Mr. Crocker's big belly and your monster can gain the Useful quality that lets Crocker swallow things whole and spit them up sometimes alive. The chomped monster doesn't lose this quality, though, just the die that got Scarred.

Or your monster can give you the die, and overnight you get smarter, faster, stronger . . . better somehow. This is awesome, till you realize the only reason you are now faster on your feet is that your buddy psychically gave you a burst of digested monster essence and black gunk.

Because it's a Scar, it doesn't heal on its own (page 31)—the losing monster can only replace it when his kid spends experience points or by kicking some other monster's butt in turn.

When two monsters team up to kick butt on another monster, the two winners get to decide among themselves who gets to inflict the Scar, because there's only one Scar to be had. Deciding among themselves usually involves more monster fighting, unless a kid can make one of them back off with a motivation roll.

If you take out an enemy monster so thoroughly it doesn't have any dice left in three adjacent hit locations, then your monster takes a (metaphorical) bite out of that monster's kid in addition to the chunk it takes off the monster. It can swipe *all the dice from one of that kid's relationships*.

Note it on the monster's sheet, and use those stolen relationship dice any time you like to energize your monster. These pilfered relationships get used up pretty easily, though, and damage sustained by them in monster combat permanently reduces their score on your monster sheet.

The kid you swiped them from suffers, too, since his stolen relationship is in Crisis until your monster uses up one or more of its dice.

That's what you do when you **take names**.

Talking Smack

Monsters aren't vulnerable to people saying mean things to them, but in a big monster throwdown *the other kid isn't so tough*. If you want to mess with him, you can spoil his motivation rolls by *talking smack* and, through the bond he shares with his monster, hurt them both.

Roll your Face + Putdown to rag on his monster bad. Say stuff that would make a Space Vampire cry and inflict emotional damage that will be transmitted to his monster.

Or you can use your roll like a defensive roll to gobble the dice he's using to motivate his monster, shaking his confidence in his friend and making him less persuasive.

Yeah, it's a pretty jerky thing to do, but who's gonna call you a jerk? The pile of shredded scales and gore your monster leaves in the parking lot?

Monster Creation Example

Benny McAlyster's Monster is named Mr. Crocker. Mr. Crocker used to be a river god in ancient Egypt, but now he lives in Benny's bathtub most of the time. He has big jaws and a big appetite but is surprisingly nimble.

Name: Mr. Crocker

Appearance: A huge, fat, semi-bipedal crocodile who moves (when he moves) in a surprisingly fast bouncy gait, like gravity forgets about him sometimes.

Personality: Lazy, verbose, and indolent, with a slow Southern accent.

Way to Hide: He turns into a little green lizard.

Favorite Thing: Slowly eating people from feet to face.

Mr. Crocker's Bits and Bobs

Locations	Bit	Qualities	Dice	Extras
1-2	Terrible Claws	Attacks, Useful (opening locked things)	8	Tough x 1
3-4	Bouncy Legs	Defends, Useful (bouncy gait)	8	Tough x 1
5	Swishy Tail	Useful (swimming)	4	Tough x 1
6-7	Big Belly	Useful (swallow anything and puke it back up whole and sometimes alive)	8	Tough x 2
8	Beady Eyes	Useful (see invisible things)	5	None
9-10	Hungry Jaws	Attack	4	Awesome x 2, Gnarly x 1, Wicked Fast x 2, Tough x 1

What can Mr. Crocker do with these bits and bobs? Almost all his locations are Tough to one degree or another, so he usually takes less damage than normal when hit.

With his **Terrible Claws** he rolls eight dice for ripping stuff up or for opening things, like doors locked to keep Benny out.

His **Bouncy Gait** lets him run fast and, since it Defends, he can use it to gobble attacks. He really likes to gobble.

His **Swishy Tail** lets him swim with a four-die pool. That's not very fast, but he's lazy.

His **Big Belly** lets him swallow something whole, but since he doesn't have Attacks with it, he has to first grapple a foe with his Terrible Claws.

With his **Beady Eyes** he can see things that are invisible, like ghosts or farts.

With his **Hungry Jaws** he can make a devastating attack that gets +2 to width to make it happen fast and +1 to the damage it inflicts. And he can set one of his four Hungry Jaws dice to any number he wants before rolling the rest, which is just like making a called shot attack without a penalty. Ouch!



JANITOR'S CLOSET

So you've been tasked with the honor and duty of the GM. Good on you, you're one of the heroes of our hobby. It falls to you to shape the world that your game will encompass in broad strokes, and then to add the fine detail when you see the characters your players create. If you don't know what the heck I'm talking about, see page 162, **How to Run Roleplaying Games**.

As GM you'll be creating and managing any Big Plots going on, handling the role-playing for NPCs and extras and mooks and GMCs and Mary Sues, and arbitrating when needed. You might wear a Viking hat, but that's strictly a fashion statement.

GMing is all about the gentle art of making everyone think you're totally in control, on top of things, and were completely expecting the players to whack your awesome, über-nasty main bad guy in one round of combat. Rolling with the unexpected and then coming up with cool riffs on it is the Five-Fold Palm-Exploding Heart Technique of GMing.

Being willing to give in is also a huge thing—when you look into the dewy, hopeful eyes of your players, how could you be so heartless as to deny them anything? Sometimes *cool* must dominate *rule*. Put that on a T-shirt and pay me my money.

Running a Monsters Game

Just about every game of *Monsters* is about two things: **monster conflicts** and **relationships**. Sure, I know, the game is about both. But when you're setting up a game session, you need to decide which is most important.

If it's a short-term game, just you and a few friends and one game session, make it all about the fighting monsters. Use relationship dice to set up the action ("Did you hear what he said about your sister? Your monster is not happy about that."), but get to the action right quick and have fun. When you're done, save notes about relationship damage for later, when you need them again to set up the action.

A long-term game, where you're playing out the stories of characters over a long time, is all about the relationships. That means both the game-stat relationships that characters have with their families and monsters, and the ordinary relationships that they have with each other and with their schools and bullies and everything else.

Sure, there's going to be plenty of monster fighting—what else are you going to do with pet monsters?—but in a long-term game it serves to illuminate the relationships.

In each session of a long-term game, as GM you need to decide which relationships will get the main focus. Look at each character's relationship scores and start there. A relationship with lots of dice ought to feature regularly. A relationship with one die should come up occasionally.

Now introduce some external influence that illuminates the relationships, puts the relationships at risk, or puts the relationships into conflict with each other.

Maybe the kids have a spooky extradimensional thing in disguise for a new teacher, and they and their monsters just know there's something bad about her, but all the grownups think they're being ridiculous and won't lift a finger to help.

Or maybe the worst bully in school suddenly gets a new monster and wants to prove it's better than everyone else's, but the principal has banned monster fighting.

Usually you need only one external influence per game session. The players' relationships will do the rest.

Once you introduce the conflicts, it's the players' job to resolve them. As GM, all you need to do is ad-lib the NPCs.

Not easy enough for you? Fine. Try the **One-Roll Conflict Generator**, page 64.

Adventure Ingredients

Creating a *Monsters* adventure is really easy. Every set of *Monsters* characters comes with a whole collection of stories just waiting to play out. To come up with a few of your own, start with the characters' stats, skills, relationships, and monsters, and think of them in terms of the game's big, essential themes.

Let's take a look.

What Did You Do Today?

"I worked on my astronomy project."

"Oh, that sounds interesting."

"It was all right."

"Is it a group project?"

"No, just me and a partner. This . . . other kid."

"Someone I know? A friend?"

"Nobody you met. But yeah, a friend."

Parents, bless them. They're so much happier in the dark.

Relationships Make Stories

Every relationship has the potential for conflict. Potential conflict is *good*. The more times a character's personal stuff gets wrapped up in the adventure or the mystery, the more that character is going to be front and center and the more things matter to that player.

So start with the relationships. Take a relationship from one character and think of how it can conflict with another character's relationship.

Add Stats and Skills for Flavor

Stats and skills can give you the *why* and *how* for driving conflict, comedy, drama, dramady, dromedaries, and adventure. Take a look at the stats and skills on each character. It's a safe bet that they represent the kinds of things that player wants to do in the game.

If a character is loaded with stats and skills that are good for sports and action, make sure your story has some physical challenges where that character can shine. If a character is smart and brainy, the story ought to have some books and classroom scenes.

And remember, monsters like their kids to do well, but they also like attention. As the GM, it's your job to make sure the monsters come up with ways to "help" that are less than entirely helpful.

GM-Fu

If you're only running a short game—a one-shot or brief arc—then look first to monster fights, second to relationships conflict, and if you have time give childhood themes a nod.

Scads of fun can be had building monsters and fighting them in an imaginary monster arena, and relationships in conflict give you a grand excuse to put on a knock-down, drag-out grudge match. "Dude, did you hear what he said about your sister? He needs a good face-melting." Throw in a complication or two just to keep it from getting samey, but this will carry you easily through a couple of sessions of good monster-bashing fun.

If relationships get chewed up, keep some notes on how and why in case your one-shot turns into a long-term game, because all this social fallout will be tasty chicken-fried awesome when you're looking to drive play later on. In fact, for longer-term play relationships are the prime mover. They're going to get mauled and need TLC, they're going to get tangled up with other characters' relationships, they're going to be threatened. If you're stuck for ideas on moving things along, look to relationships. If you're still stuck, check out the **One-Roll Conflict Generator** on page 64 to whip up scads of trouble for your players.



Your New Fun

You can kick off a new story by introducing an outside complication into the game, something that stirs things up or changes the status quo. Maybe the principal bans all monsters and monster fights from school property, and knowing you'll get booted out if your monsters stands up for you gives the bullies some backbone again. You can use these outside elements to highlight your themes: The principal's zero-tolerance policy doesn't take into account how your monster totally saved the school from getting sucked into Realm of Dread, and you're powerless to convince him otherwise.

Once you've established situation, you can start pushing the conflicts. Generally a relationships with just one or two dice should only come up occasionally, but one with three or four dice should come up a whole lot. Those dice reflect just how much that relationship means to the character—and the more meaningful, the more motivating. Of course, the dice also represent how powerful that relationship is to the *player*, so she's going to want to keep them healthy if only for pure tactical pragmatism.

Every session, write on a sheet of paper the relationships you're going to focus on and work into things. If you spill Orange Crush on it, all the relationships caught in the spill are somehow thrown into conflict. A coffee-mug ring binds those relationships caught in it into a weird tangle. Pizza grease causes new friendships to form amongst the relationships. Or just draw lines between them and note on the lines what's going on.

Now, once you have your relationships sussed out, introduce some themes or events which illuminate the relationships you've selected. The principal has banned monsters and monster-fighting, but there's something, well, not right about the new math teacher. Nobody else seems to notice it, though, and a monster can't just be called out to go shake her upside down until the truth and all her pocket change fall out. See the theme? Even with a monster, powerlessness still plagues kids, and worse, nobody really believes the crazy things monster kids say.

NPCs On the Spot

If you need to ad-lib an NPC, don't be shy about just making one up on the spot. If you're going to need to roll some dice for him, then give him one stat based on how over-all tough he is, and make up a skill or two to cover what he does:

Gas'N'Gulp Clerk

General Clerkiness 3

- *Notice Shoplifting* +3
- *Spot Fake ID* +2
- *Shirk Work* +5

If you need to, track damage against his one stat. For more detailed pre-gen characters (and some heavy hitter types) see **Antagonists**, page 85, and **Everybody Else**, page 96.

Making It Matter:

Today We Will Write A Theme

More than many games out there, to get the most out of *Monsters* you really have to make things *matter* to the players and to their imagined characters. You can set your game anywhere and anywhen that kids can befriend monsters; frame the game as happening in a fantasy world, in a modern high school, in a secret school for young wizards, or on a long-lost colony world in a distant galaxy if you like.

As we said before, games of *Monsters and Other Childish Things* are going to be about two major things—relationship conflict and bitchin’ monster fights—but these things represent some powerful themes that pertain to childhood and growing into adolescence. If you’re trig to those themes, you can add some unexpected oomph to your games.

The world seen through a child’s eyes can be scary, wondrous, boring, or just plain confusing. Sometimes it’s like you can squint at it all day but never see the 3D sailboat in the swirly, noisy chaos. But kid’s aren’t overly concerned with *meaning*, most of the time. Their lives are more *immediate* than the lives of adults. A wait of half an hours seems like *forever*. And when you’re waiting for a new bike, Christmas is a thousand years off.

And then there’s the constant change that comes with growing up. Being treated differently by family. Shouldering new expectations. Becoming aware of a larger world.

Here are some of the themes you can use to drive and structure your *Monsters* game.

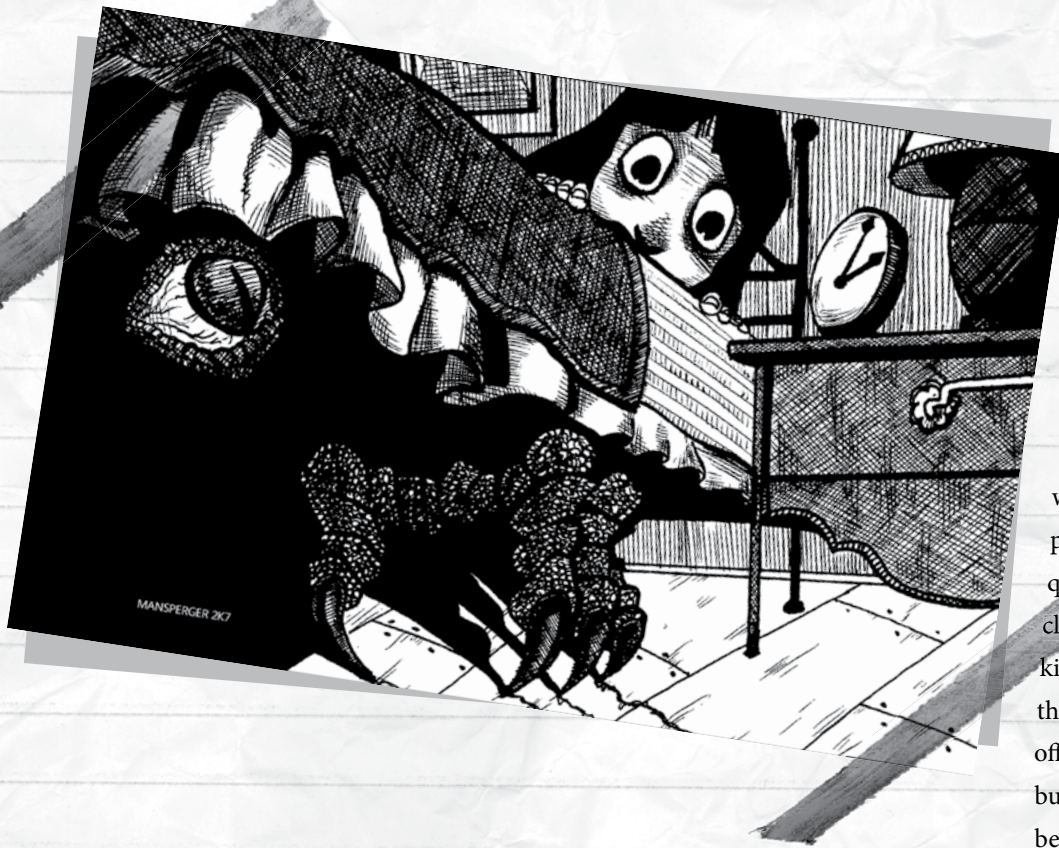
KIDS ARE POWERLESS in any real adult way, and sometimes that *rankles*. Most kids learn how to sway those with power over their lives—parents, teachers, truancy officers—with charm, lies, and looks of innocent blankness. But kids can’t really do much of anything (like drive, date, or stay home alone) until they’re teenagers, and teenagers have to deal with puberty, B.O., and school shootings.

Advertisers try and sell kids useless, artificially-colored sweet crap with seizure-inducing commercials because they know kids are good at nagging parents into indulging them. But that’s all kids are to companies—a revenue stream.

Churches see kids as unformed little blanks, waiting to be die-cast into new believers.

The law treats kids like little half-people, unless they do something really sensational and newsworthy, and then to get tough on these new “super-predators” they try them as adults.

Being a kid means being subject to the will of adults and authority figures everywhere. It means risking getting labeled a “bad kid” if you stand up for



yourself, mouth off or act up. Nails that stick up get hammered down.

Kids have to keep their shenanigans on the downlow, and this goes double for kids with monsters. Monsters make it worse, because a monster would happily assert its personhood to anyone who questioned it—possibly with claw, fang and acid-sac. Most kids get this one some level—that if they let their monster off the leash too much, if they buck the system too much or be their own people too much,

then all kinds of trouble will rain down, and it'll land in the laps of their loved ones.

Yet the temptation to let Mr. Knuckles go crazy in the principal's office is ever present. The adult world dumps on kids constantly—parents and authority figures issue edicts from on high which they expect kids to snap-to and obey without question. “Just because, that’s why!” So you basically present your players with some options. You hit them with just such a restriction or adult power-play, and then leave it to them to figure out how they are going to deal with it, but here’s the trick: You clue them in to the *consequences* of folding up or thrashing like a cat in a sack before they decide what to do rather than afterwards.

At least *eventually* you give them this heads up, because lets be honest, you make friends with a giant monster, and just a little bit at least, you’re going to *get yours back* from all those jerks who make your life heckish. I know I would, and at least in terms of actual years lived, I qualify as an adult.

So, letting them get away with some monstrous payback at first is cool. It would sort of suck never to let them assert themselves with their new power. But eventually, there has to be consequences if you’re interested in keeping the things from turning into the a total *Lord of the Flies*, kids-gone-feral kind of post-apocalypse thing. Not to say that letting things totally spiral out of control wouldn’t be cool . . . but if you want to keep balancing normal life against crazy monster antics as a major part of the game, then players should have good reasons to keep their monsters under wraps and just lump it when someone in power dumps on them.

The most potent way to do this is with relationships, as we discussed above. "You were doing so well this year! It'll break your Mom's heart if you get kicked out of *another* school. . . ." This shouldn't have to come up that often, and in all likelihood if your players dig their characters, they will be invested in keeping at least *some* peace.

THE BACK YARD IS FULL OF ADVENTURE just waiting for you to discover. Or so says Mom when she wants the kids out of the house for a while. They might never admit it out loud, but in a way she's right. There's crazy stuff going on all over. The town is full of secrets and hidden places. A lost history just waiting to be written.

There's the abandoned hospital on the edge of town. The old brick factory. The big corrugated metal pipes in the drainage culvert that lead . . . somewhere. There's the woods behind the school, and there's the park with its weird people and old men playing chess.

Kids get older, and digging in the sand, playing in the creek and riding bikes become less an end to themselves, and more an excuse to hang out with other kids. *People* start to become the big adventure—meeting them, impressing them, asking them out for dates (or imagining doing it). Making new relationships of your own. People also become scarier than anything they might find down the drainage pipe.

It's not like anything that lives in a pipe is going to be worse than a monster friend, anyhow.

Kids always know things that adults don't—secret places, weird people, unusual events. Keeping secrets from adults is almost instinctual. As you introduce outside complications into your sessions to jazz things up, work to establish the hidden world the kids are part of—and the strange subset of this world that kids with monsters are part of.

"What did you do today?"

"We found buried pirate treasure, but it was cursed, and then there were zombies, but Gnarlytoes ate them, and then we had ice-cream at Judy's house."

"It sounds like you were very busy today. I hope you have some room left after ice-cream for dinner."

"What are we having?"

"Tuna-noodle casserole."

"Wow. Super exciting."

Outside the big relationships, give your players the chance to get to know new characters, and form little-r relationships with them (perhaps upgrading them to major status with character development). Establish rivalries, hangouts and weird places. Watch the movie *Goonies* a couple of times and you'll see what I'm talking about. For kids with monsters, treasure hunts really do turn up treasure—and the demented outlaws looking for it. Yet, as weird as these adventures and encounters might be, for the most part the adult world remains ignorant of it, and what's more, despite ready evidence of *giant freaking monsters*, tend to blow it off as so much childhood imagination.

WHAT OTHER PEOPLE THINK really, really matters when you're a kid. Lots of kids would rather get socked in the gut than get laughed at in class. Humiliation leaves wounds that last for years, decades. Think hard about childhood, and you'll see what I'm saying—my face turns red when I think about some of the things that I did or said, or that were done to me, when I was 10 or 11 or 15. I can't remember what the physical pain felt like, but the emotional stuff is still with me.

Disappointing those who mean something to you *hurts*, and fear of that pain can be a powerful motivator to do unpleasant things. Approval and love are vital—driving, powerful and motivating—and this is reflected in the game in relationships.

When a character is driven by a relationship, they are better and more powerful because the people who love them believe in them. They can win! But when you are that invested in what other people think of you, it's far, far worse when those people hurt you or when you fail them. That's why you can lose relationship dice.

WHEN MOM SAYS IT DOESN'T MATTER WHAT PEOPLE THINK ABOUT YOU, she's lying to save your feelings. It matters. It matters a whole heck of a lot. Especially to kids. In *Monsters and Other Childish Things*, it matters so much it can actually hurt you as bad as being punched in the face. It'll erode your ability to do stuff, anyhow.

Being rejected causes *damage*—it shocks dice from stats. That's an immediate and powerful reason to curry favor with others, but there's always the chance you might pull off *being cool*, and genuinely not give a pickled fig what people say about you. Or, being a total sociopath can help too.

Even without the threat of damage, social consequences both within and without the context of Relationships is a powerful theme to play with. Peer pressure, the desire to belong, the need to be accepted—this stuff is primal, and even grownups are never free of it. It can be as simple as opening a session with one of the cool kids saying something like, "Hey, you're Susy aren't you? Cool shoes." Oh, the temptation to join the "it" crowd.

SCHOOL IS A MICROCOSM of the whole of human society. It's a Skinner box, except the pigeon gets shocked randomly or for being too smart. It's a pressure-cooker that sometimes explodes. And it's where kids get shipped for eight or more hours a day. Home school? Not you, kid.

School seems antithetical to the very nature of kids. Right when they're at their most active, curious, exploitative, and open, they get crammed into a class, made to sit still, made to pay attention longer than your brain can focus, and then judged harshly on all aspects of their existence—performance, clothes, hair, accent, tastes in music, movies and pencil erasers. Bring the wrong kind of eraser, and you're out. But get the wrong kind of alphabet soup in your report card, and you're in for it at home.

Hey kid! Stop acting like a kid! Perhaps it's training for the Cube World that awaits so many—desk, stapler, and low fake walls. That's the sort of place the parents might work, and they come home washed gray by it. But that's fine, because kids know they're going to be firemen, rock stars, or perhaps ninja astronauts. Their monsters are totally for the last one. No caveman could stand against a ninja-astronaut.

As they get older and move into junior high and then high school, a thick armor of sarcasm and contempt protects them like a monster's thick armor of scales and bony plates. If they don't care, then failure or rejection don't matter. But they *do* care. Deep inside. They can't help it. And it *hurts*.

And school is where it all comes together—where you have pretty much everything you need all in one place. You have the authority of adults, tangled relationships, crushing social opinion. Schools even have their secrets, their hidden corners, their mysteries. The pressure is on in school—to fit in, to achieve, to get good grades, to play sports. Parents *care* about what goes down at school, and the dreaded Parent-Teacher Conference awaits those who rock the boat.

Whether your setting is one with open monsters or secret monsters, having a big fire-breathing pal isn't going to make things easier for kids. School assignments, especially group projects and field trips, make great leads and complications. New students bring mystery and possible friendship. A favorite teacher's secret threatens to destroy her . . . can her career be saved?

CH-CH-CH-CHAAAAANGES. While time is weird for kids—summer vacation seems to last forever, but so does a time-out in the corner—things are changing crazy fast, and from year to year there's no telling what's coming next.

They'll be playing with your Action Jones and the J-Force toys one week with the kids down the street, and the next they'll get sneered at by the same kids for "still playing with toys." They're getting taller and their bodies are changing shape. Their voice might start to sound funny one day, and then they have hair *where they didn't have hair before*.

" 'When I was a child I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.' "

"You're 13. And a girl."

"It's a quote. From the Bible."

"Which color?"

"What?"

"Which color bible? There's the Black Bible of Over'ourden. There's the Crimson Bible That Was Written A'fire. There's the Squamous Bible. There's the Baker's Bible, which is fantastic I might add. Wonderful recipe for scones."

"No, the *Bible*. The one about God and Jesus and whatnot."

"Skip it. Predictable ending. Flat characters. Let's bake scones instead."

"No, I'm really worried about this. Like, what happens when I'm grown up, and I'm a doctor and I'm married and stuff? I won't have time for mysteries or fighting evil anymore. I mean, how many grownups are friends with monsters?"

"Other than the President?"

"I'm serious."

"We'll always be friends."

"Yeah?"

"I *promise*."

"So, like, you know how looking at a girl makes you feel weird and hot?"

"By 'weird and hot' do you mean 'bored and hungry'?"

"No."

"Then I don't know what you mean."

"Well, like my brother was saying about my voice changing—"

"I heard that. I was hiding in your backpack."

"So, is it true what he said about . . . you know . . . *being with a girl*?"

"I don't think so. He didn't say anything about an ovipositor or about the need to escape the mating chamber before the girl awakens from her stupor and cracks open your braincase and scoops out the goo inside to feed the larvae."

"Ew. Don't ever say the word 'larvae' again."

"They look just like mac 'n' cheese, only they wiggle more."

"Dude, I'm eating here. Can't you see me eating?"

"Are you going to finish your mac 'n' cheese?"

"No way. Not now."

"Can I have it?"

"Go to town."

"Yummy!"

They might be lucky enough to have an older sibling who can clue them in . . . unless he's an idiot (or just a cruel jerk) who fills their head with crazy notions. At some point, they'll probably going to get *the Talk* from the 'rents. *The Talk* always feels like death, for everyone involved.

But at least the 'rents are human. If a kid asks his monster to clarify the weird stuff he keeps hearing at school, it's usually way more confusing.

EMOTIONAL BLACKMAIL is all good, as far as a *Monsters* GM is concerned. Relationships are lovely hooks, and can sometimes be used to directly motivate players to do something or not do something. If you want to make things *really* matter, to make a player chose between some immediate goal and harmony in his relationships (such tasty, tasty drama), then you can warn them that they're risking a Shock to their relationships if they're acting strongly counter to it.

Use this technique sparingly, and always make it the player's choice to accept the Shock or change the action rather than inflicting it punitively after the fact. If they swipe their Dad's classic '66 Corvette because they have to chase down the government spooks who monsternapped their friend, then the player has to make a choice: keep Dad's trust or go after his scaly buddy. It might be possible, if he drives fast, and gets the car and his friend home without getting caught (or having a wreck), to do *both*. Possible . . . but really, really hard.

I DON'T EVEN KNOW YOU ANYMORE, MAN. So might your friends say when growing up catches you out. Friends grow apart, parents become human, old toys are forgotten. Will relationships weather the storms of childhood, puberty, acne, and sullen, awkward teenage angst? And how will a monster handle a kid's changing growing personality? A monster who can't understand that his kid doesn't want to run and frolic and have crazy adventures anymore might cause trouble when what the kid really wants is good grades and a date with Wendy Blume.

Grade Level

You can change the flavor of your *Monsters and Other Childish Things* games pretty dramatically by dialing the starting ages of the player characters up or down. A game with 10-year-old protagonists is going to have a distinctly different feel and set of themes than one featuring 15-year-olds. Grade level can be used to tune your campaign to suit, as it'll give you a fair idea about character priorities, interests, and themes.

The grade levels are **elementary school**, **junior high** and **high school**. Grade level here means what kind of school the characters are in, not their actual grade—elementary school kids can range from kindergarten to fifth grade.

Elementary School

Age Range: 4 to 10.

Themes: The wonder of childhood. The secret lives of children. The trials and terrors adults have forgotten. Dealing with the inherent injustice of the world. Learning loyalty. Experiencing the consequences of your actions for the first time. Balancing the hunger for the approval of parental figures with the budding desire for independence.

Interests: Faddish collectible games and toys. Novelty candy. Animals. Being liked. First crush. Exploring the world.

Pressures and Problems: Gradually start to realize that the parents are people—flawed, imperfect, and mortal. Be a “good kid,” which usually means being quiet and polite to adults. Please the parents. Be liked. Experience the first pushes of peer pressure to conform, follow fashion, go with the group. Experience the first pain of ostracism and social awkwardness. Experience “Tween” marketing that tries to get kids to act older and buy the props and symbols of mass-consumer “maturity”. Figure out likes and dislikes.

Junior High

Age Range: 10 to 15.

Themes: Power and fear. Transformation of the body, the voice, the consciousness. The Drama of Self begins in earnest. Teen narcissism wars with childlike collective identity. Sexual awakenings. Letting go—willingly or not—of toys and childish things . . . some childish things, anyhow. Conflict with parents and authority. The quest for identity, belonging, and peer approval. Drugs, which are, of course, bad.

Interests: Sex—from early curiosity to flirting to the kind of thing that they talk about being so scary in Health class. Competition for its own sake rather than as a vehicle to gain parental approval. Fashion. The social circus, with its dramas, betrayals, and weekly swing between grand triumphs and crushing tragedies. Cellphones, ringtones, and morebettermgadgets. The symbols of social position.

Pressures and Problems: Hair where you didn’t have hair before. Puberty in all its dignity-destroying wonder and mystery. Conflict with parents over freedom, choice, clothes, music, whatever you got. Sex, and all the issues (internal and external) it brings. Late bloomers and early bloomers start to stand out. Socioeconomic differences and backgrounds really start to tell. Cliques start to become harder to drift between; kids self-organize along tribal lines, and start to persecute the outsider. Adolescent bodies start to smell bad.

High School

Age Range: 15 to 18.

Themes: The Future begins to loom, hanging like a fist over everything. School seems much more serious and consequence-heavy. It is do-or-die time for making

your future. Violence looms as a real issue, as does sex in the actual rather than the possible. Identity is still fluid but starting to solidify. The Drama of Self is coming to a close for most, but the last act is a doozy. Drugs, parties, loud music, beer, driving too fast. Teen risk-taking gets a good showing. Belonging to something, somewhere. The existential search for meaning takes on a more adult cast. Big Issues like religion start to crop up.

Interests: All the fashion and gadgets and social shenanigans of junior high, but dialed to 11. Fitting in . . . while being different . . . in acceptable ways. Body piercing, tattoos, smoking, drinking, sex, music, cars and driving, MySpace. Perhaps a budding social consciousness in there as well, somewhere. Maybe.

Pressures and Problems: Achievement achievement achievement. Acquiring sexual experience—or at least being able to pretend. Balancing school, work, personal drama, family, friends, and drama. Did I say drama already? Well, drama. If there's sex going on, then all the problems and consequences of it. If there's drugs and rock'n'roll going on, then all the problems and consequences associated with that as well. SATs. College applications. Decide who you are and who you'll be *right effing now*.

One-Roll Conflict Generator

Here are some tools that really do put the “one roll” in “One-Roll Engine”. Throw dice, add a little creative interpretation and you're ready for fun.

To generate interpersonal conflict on the fly, pick one relationship from each kid involved, add the dice together and roll them as a single pool. You can add a kid's monster bond score just like a regular relationship if you want the monster to be involved in the conflict.

Don't roll Shocked dice. Instead set them to any value you like, after rolling the un-Shocked dice. That ensures some interesting situations.

To make things even more worrying, Shocked dice are like blood in the water for monsters. If a character has a Shocked relationship involved in the conflict, then his or her monster will get involved somehow. Oh sure, he says he's only trying to help, but. . . .

Unlike normal dice pools, you can roll as many dice as you like to set up really complex situations involving lots of characters.

Each set you roll—taking into account the Shocked dice—defines some kind of entanglement between one or more of the characters. Height and width determine the nature and the severity of the entanglement.

If you roll multiple sets are rolled, then you have more than one overlapping entanglement. If you roll no sets, well, slap another relationship into that pool and try again.

Entanglement Severity

Width determines the severity of the entanglement and the maximum number of characters tied up in it.

Width 2: Casual. A minor motivation fuels the entanglement. This might be more interesting than harmful, but it could lead to risky behavior over the long term. (A minor rivalry leads to bad feelings and unkind words, or a budding romance has a chance to progress at a civil and relaxed pace.)

Width 3: Intense. A pretty major motivation fuels the entanglement. This could lead to interpersonal conflicts or risky behavior in the short term. What's at stake here is a relatively minor change of the terms of a relationship. Mom and Dad 4 could end up Mom 2 and Dad 2 after a divorce. (A rivalry sparks public spectacles, arguments and minor violence, or a passionate affair involves sneaking around and deception.)

Width 4: Driving. An intense and immediate motivation fuels the entanglement. This could lead rapidly to conflicts, risk-taking and life-changing consequences. What's at stake here is a radical redefinition of a relationship; Mom and Dad 4 could become Mom 1 and Dad Who Lives In Another State Since the Divorce 3. (A rivalry leads to bitter arguments, lawsuits, property damage, and serious violence, or a mad illicit affair is pursued without thought to consequence or exposure.)

Width 5: Psycho. An overwhelming motivation fuels this entanglement, which eclipses everything else and turns characters monomaniacal and irrational. What's at stake here is the relationship being not just redefined but damaged or destroyed outright. (A rivalry burns beyond all reason—anything goes—or an affair of Shakespearean proportions leads to rack and ruin, where logic, reason, and consequence do nothing to slow the headlong plunge.)

Nature of the Entanglement

Height determines the nature of the entanglement—exactly what the conflict is all about. Tailor the results to your characters' backgrounds and relationships.

Height 1: Bad Blood.

Height 2: Politics.

Height 3: Religion.

Height 4: Competition.

Height 5: Recreation.

Height 6: Crime.

Height 7: Academics.

Height 8: Friendship.

Height 9: Work or chores.

Height 10: Romance.

Who Is Involved?

Sometimes the results can be hard to decipher. Here are some guidelines.

Select for maximum conflict. If entangling two characters will put a couple of monster-controlling adolescents into a collision course of chaos and disaster, then that's the way to go.

Select for maximum cringe. If you see no easy conflicts, go for the most disturbing and cringe-inducing combinations. Got a height of 10? Entangle one character's monster romantically with another character's grandma. On the Internet, every dude looks like Brad Pitt.

Invent context. If you end up with a work entanglement but there's no clear work-related connection between the characters, make one up on the spot and use it to enrich the social setting. Maybe one character just got a job mowing the other character's lawn.

Don't forget the monsters. Remember that Shocked relationships lure monsters into an entanglement, and they have a tendency to make things—well, if not worse, then at best more complicated.

Revealing the Entanglements

When you've mapped out the entanglements, the next step is to clue the players in. This calls for a simple scene that reveals the entanglements, at least in part, and foreshadows the possible consequences of failing to resolve it.

Dad comes home from his new job and says, "D--- that Mike McAlyster! I'm going to fire his a-- if he doesn't straighten up!" Problem is, one of your best friends is Benny McAlyster, Mike's son. . . .

Resolving the Entanglement

At this point, the Generator's work is done: Deal with the tangled mess of lives and loves through normal roleplaying. But here are some guidelines on how to pace these conflicts and what they might mean to a character personally.

Width in Scenes: An entanglement requires at least as many scenes to resolve as its width.

Bring the Drama: A player can choose to Bring the Drama, resolving an entanglement in a single cathartic scene. One of his relationships must be involved in the conflict. Bringing the Drama immediately Shocks a number of the relationship's dice equal to the width of the entanglement.

Monsters Get Obsessive: A monster is harder to control when told to act against an entanglement's driving issue. If that's what you're doing, all rolls to motivate the monster lose dice equal to the width of the entanglement.

Bring the EXP: Successfully resolving an entanglement can count as Quality Time, and resolving particularly wide entanglements without really bad things happening, or resorting to Bringing the Drama, should be worth a point or two of bonus Experience Points.

Example

Things are slow for my players, so I decide to stoke the fire with gasoline. They are playing three of the pregenerated characters from pages 74 to 84. I select one relationship from each character for my conflict pool:

Tommy Mezlowski: Mom 2 (shocked to 0), Flytrap Joe.

Madison Kate Sinclair-Stevenson: Parental Units 2 (Shocked to 1), Yog'So-Soft.

Ralph "Dog" Jones: Carlita the Maternal Prostitute 1, Mister Whispers.

That adds up to five dice, but since Tommy's relationship with his Mom is currently Shocked down to 0, and Madison's relationship with her folks is Shocked down to 1, I hold those three dice back before I roll the rest.

The roll comes up 2x10, 9, 7 and 6. I now set one of the reserved dice to 10 (romance), one to 7 (academic) and the other to 6 (crime).

Yowza! With the three Shocked dice, that comes out to 3x10, 2x7, an 2x6, for three entanglements. And both Flytrap Joe and Yog'So-Soft are somehow involved.

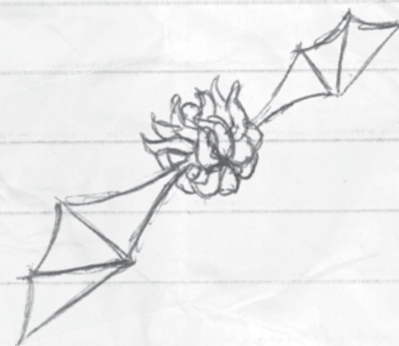
3x10, an intense romantic entanglement: We'll say Yog'So-Soft has been surfing the Internet, and struck up an online romance with Tommy's Mom. Things are getting hot and heavy in the chatroom, and the text logs are getting more and more scandalous.

To make things more complicated, Mister Whispers has done what he does best: learned the secret. Yog'So-Soft has no idea how humans are supposed to behave in these situations, so he's been copying and pasting text from other people's sexy chats and using someone's picture he found on MySpace as his own.

When asked to meet in public, he'll go along with it because, well, it's what people do when they're in love, right?

2x7, a casual academic entanglement: Madison's Parental Units were quite suspicious of Tommy's last prize-winning science project, an experiment involving a rare species of large Venus flytrap (wink-wink, nudge nudge). They think Tommy didn't do his own work, and so robbed Madison of her transcript-building science-fair win. They have hired a private investigator to investigate Tommy, thinking that if the flytrap were an endangered species, then Tommy's project would be disqualified. Problem is, poking into Flytrap Joe's business is likely to make you the endangered species.

2x6, a casual criminal entanglement: This one is pretty basic. Madison's father (one half of her Parental Units) has been seeing Carlita the Maternal Prostitute for years and paying for her illegal services with company money. He's kept it on the downlow, but now it's come to the attention of the kids (the player characters). Something must be done!



One-Roll Monster Generator

To generate your very own random monster, roll 10 dice and check these tables.

Phase 1: Bits and Bobs

Each rolled die is worth five monster dice on one hit location number. A single, unmatched die gets you some kind of weedy body part with only five dice assigned. Look up the height of the die on the lists below.

For sets wider than width 4, reduce to width to 4 but add a die to another set, or make a new one from loose dice.

Once you have your body parts and know their stats and how many hit location numbers they occupy, arrange them on the 1-10 hit location scale. (Tactical tip: It is smart to give smaller weaker body parts low hit numbers so they are easier to protect with defensive actions.)

Cumulative Effects: If a monster body part indicates that each increase in width is “cumulative,” it includes the functions of the previous widths, and can, if you want, include the previous rank’s color as well. So if you have width 3, it also includes the effects and powers of widths 2 and 1.

If it’s not described as cumulative, you get the one ability listed for that exact width; if you have width 3, you have the ability for width 3. Or you could have the abilities for width 2 and width 1 by splitting the three dice up.

Missing Bits: If you find your monster lacks some basic function—you get no sense organs or legs, for example—you can assume your monster can see and hear OK and walk around as needed, but it can’t do these things well enough to beat a character or monster that has body parts or a skill dedicated doing them. A monster with no body parts dedicated to locomotion, for example, couldn’t outrun someone with the P.E. skill or a monster with hundreds of legs.

Height 1: Limbs of Locomotion

These are cumulative.

1x1: Shambling (4d; Defends, Useful [shamble along]).

2x1: Scuttling (+2d; Defends, Useful [dash from hiding place to hiding place], Wicked Fast 1).

3x1: Bounding (+2d; Useful [jump really high], Awesome x1, Wicked Fast x1).

4x1: Stomping (+2d; Attacks, Gnarly x1, Awesome x1).

Height 2: Limbs of Manipulation

These are cumulative.

1x2: Grasping (5d; Useful [manually dexterous]).

2x2: Catching (+1d; Defends, Useful [grapple and hold], Wicked Fast x1).

3x2: Slashing (+2d; Attacks, Gnarly x2, Awesome x1).

4x2: Crushing (+2d; Useful [break stuff really well] Gnarly x1, Awesome x1).

Height 3: Weird Appendages

These are not cumulative. Each entry stands alone with the listed traits.

1x3: Feelers (5d; Useful [sensing in the dark]).

2x3: Eye Stalks (6d; Useful [all-around sight]; Defends; Wicked Fast x3).

3x3: Pseudopodia and Goo (8d; Useful [ooze under doors and such], Useful [engulf things and hold them inside], Defends, Awesome x2, Tough x1, Area x2).

4x3: Brain-Sucking Proboscis (10d; Attacks, Useful [suck minds], Useful [inject memories], Awesome x2; Gnarly x3; Wicked Fast x3).

Height 4: Body Segments

These are not cumulative. Each entry stands alone with the listed traits.

1x4: Thin, Elongated Body (3d, Defends, Awesome x2).

2x4: Wasplike Thorax And Bulbous Abdomen (6d, Attacks [stinger], Useful [spinnerets and web-glands], Useful [ovipositor for implanting mind-controlling larvae], Awesome x2).

3x4: Huge, Barrel-Thick Torso (8d, Attacks [ear-splitting bellow], Area x3, Tough x4).

4x4: Vast Serpentine Coils (10d, Attacks, Defends, Useful [crushing constrictions], Useful [hypnotic writhing], Area x1, Spray, Tough x3, Gnarly x2).

Height 5: Uncanny Modes Of Movement

These are not cumulative. Each entry stands alone with the listed traits.

1x5: Burrowing Claws (3d, Useful [tunnel], Awesome x2).

2x5: Great Cloaklike Wings (6d, Useful [fly], Defends, Wicked Fast x3).

3x5: Phase-Shifting Quantum Voice-Box (8d, Useful [walk through walls], Defends, Awesome x2, Wicked Fast x3, Sharing).

4x5: Space-Warping Fractal Cilia (10d, Defends, Useful [fold, spindle and mutilate space], Useful [right place, right time], Awesome x2, Wicked Fast x5, Sharing).

Height 6: Integument

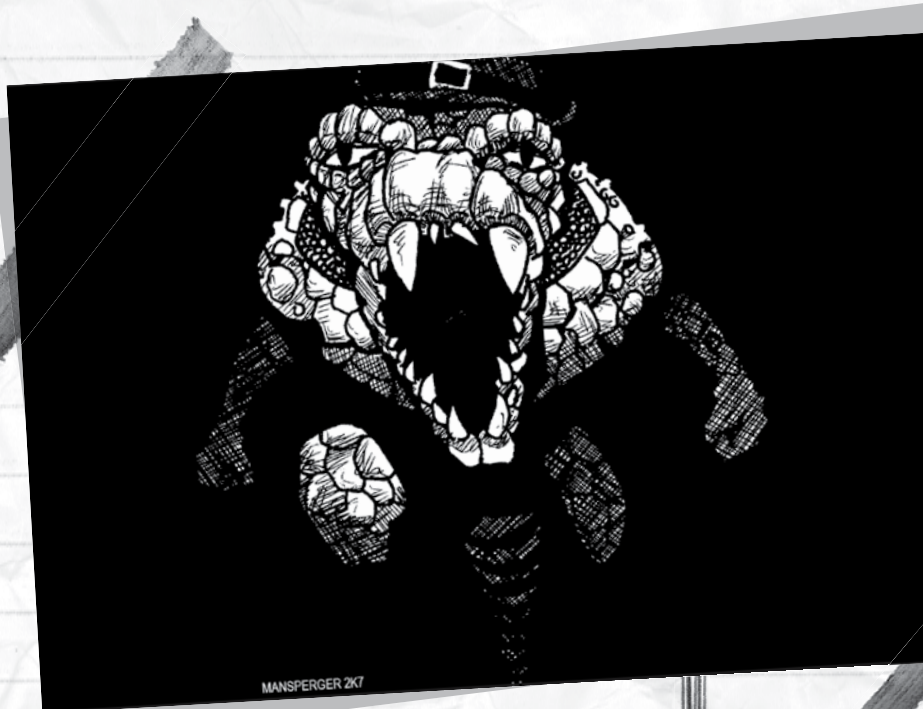
These are cumulative.

1x6: Oily Skin (4d, Defends, Tough x1).

2x6: Bony Plates (+2d, Wicked Fast x1, Tough x2).

3x6: Spiny Exoskeleton (+2d, Attacks, Awesome x1, Tough x1).

4x6: Invulnerable Carapace (+2d, Awesome +1, Tough x2).



Height 7: Body Weapons

These are not cumulative. Each entry stands alone with the listed traits.

1x7: Poison Glands (3d, Attacks, Awesome x2).

2x7: Fiery Gullet (6d, Attacks, Burn 1, Gnarly x1, Wicked Fast x2).

3x7: Wicked Spines (8d, Defends, Attacks, Gnarly x3, Wicked Fast x3).

4x7: Entropy-Projecting Evil Eye (10d, Attacks, Useful [paralyze], Useful [bring misfortune and ruin], Gnarly x4, Spray, Wicked Fast x2, Sharing).

Height 8: Viscera and Organs

These are not cumulative. Each entry stands alone with the listed traits.

1x8: Scent Glands (3d, Useful [targets marked by scent can be tracked anywhere], Awesome x2).

2x8: Black Wrathful Heart (8d, Attacks, Useful [resist pity, remorse, and other weak emotions], Sharing).

3x8: Infernal Guts (10d, Attacks [acid spew], Useful [eat anything and it's gone], Burn x2, Tough x2).

4x8: Throbbing External Brain (10d, Attacks [psychic energy bolt], Defends [psychic force field], Useful [out-think anyone and everyone], Useful [spot weaknesses], Gnarly x1, Spray, Wicked Fast x5).

Height 9: Mouth Parts

These are cumulative.

1x9: Big, Savage Teeth (4d, Attacks, Gnarly x1).

2x9: Fanged Grin (+2d, Wicked Fast x2, Gnarly x1).

3x9: Dripping Maw (+2d, Useful [swallow whole], Awesome x1, Gnarly x1).

4x9: Terrible Mandibles (+2d, Awesome +1, Wicked Fast x1, Gnarly x1).

Height 10: Sense Organs

These are not cumulative. Each entry stands alone with the listed traits.

1x10: Knowing Nose (2d, Useful [tracking], Useful [smell lies], Awesome x2).

2x10: Serpentine Tongue (8d, Useful [taste the air], Useful [wicked lies], Sharing).

3x10: Keen Ears (8d, Useful [hear really really well], Defends, Wicked Fast x4, Awesome x2).

4x10: Mesmeric Hypno-Eyes (10d, Attacks [illusory pain and injury], Useful [see in the dark], Useful [see into minds], Useful [impose hypnotic domination], Awesome x2, Wicked Fast x4, Gnarly x2).

Phase Two: Everything Else

Now, pick any four of the dice you rolled and consult the following tables to get your monster's other characteristics.

Appearance

- 1: Reptilian** (burn one die from dice pools for Gnarly x1 in each location that has an Attack quality).
- 2: Insectoid** (burn one die from all dice pools for Wicked Fast x1 to each body part).
- 3: Dinosauroid** (combine one or two loose dice to form a Swishing Tail location that has 3 or 8 dice, Attacks, Awesome x1, and Tough x1).
- 4: Non-Euclidean** (burn one die from all locations to add Sharing to all body parts. If a part already has Sharing, add a Useful quality describing a new form of reality-warping movement).
- 5: Elemental** (burn one die from all locations to add 1 level of the Burn extra).
- 6: Industrial** (burn one die from all locations to add Tough x1 to each).
- 7: Inside Out** (combine up to two loose dice to form a Gross, Pulsing Mass of Glistening Tubes and Meat which has 3 or 8 dice and a stomach-turning Useful quality with Area x2).
- 8: Vegetable** (burn one die from each location to add Tough x1 to each).
- 9: Chthonic Mass of Tentacles** (combine up to two loose dice into a single location to form Writhing Mane of Tendrils which has 3 or 8 dice and is Useful [open gateways to the elder realms], Attacks, and has Area 1).
- 10: Freakish Mish-Mash of All of the Above** (burn one die from each location to add the extra or quality of your choice).

Personality

- 1: Morose** (reduce any Wicked Fast the monster has in any of its body parts by 1, adding instead a level of Tough).
- 2: Emo** (burn one die from the monster's largest location, adding a Useful [inspire extreme emotions] quality).
- 3: Giddy** (reduce any Tough the monster has in all its body parts by 1, adding instead a level of Wicked Fast).
- 4: Thoughtful** (burn one die from the monster's largest location adding a Useful [extra brain for tricky thinking] quality).
- 5: Sneaky** (burn one die from the monster's largest location, adding Useful [crazy hard to spot when he's hiding]).
- 6: Furious** (burn one die from each body part that has the Attacks quality and add Spray. If the part already has Spray, add a level of Gnarly instead).
- 7: Lazy** (reduce any Wicked Fast the monster has in any of its body parts by 1, adding a level of Awesome instead; if the monster already had two ranks of Awesome, then add a level of Tough instead).
- 8: Helpful** (burn one die from the monster's largest body part, adding the Sharing extra; if the monster already Shares this bit, then add Sharing to the next biggest one; if they're all already Shared, then add Wicked Fast to the biggest one so it can Share faster).

9: Gregarious (burn one die from the monster's largest body part, adding Useful [sweet and persuasive voice]).

10: Hyperactive (convert 1 level of Tough from any body part with this extra into a Spray, and convert the rest into Wicked Fast).

Favorite Thing

- 1: Eating (something specific, or eating in general).
- 2: Sleeping.
- 3: Stalking.
- 4: Dreaming.
- 5: Being worshiped.
- 6: Doing favors.
- 7: Secrets.
- 8: Certain emotions.
- 9: Certain smells.
- 10: Sundering reality until it hemorrhages chaos and terror.

Way to Hide

- 1: Wear an innocuous costume.
- 2: Lurk in the closet, crawlspace, or under the bed.
- 3: Burrow or sink underground.
- 4: Hide in plain sight.
- 5: Shrink down really small.
- 6: Turn invisible.
- 7: Hide in mirrors.
- 8: Retreat to your mind and dreams.
- 9: Transform into something normal and inanimate.
- 10: Turn into a seemingly-normal kid.

Example

I decide to summon a random monster for my kid. I roll my 10 dice and get 10, 2x8, 2x6, 3x4, 2 and 1.

Phase One: Bits and Bobs

For my monster's body plan, this roll gives me six hit locations: three with only a single hit number and five monster dice each, two with two hit numbers and 10 monster dice each, and one with three hit numbers and 15 monster dice. I consult the charts and find my monster friend has the following body parts of note:

1x10 gets her a Knowing Nose. That sounds like the head, so I assign this to hit location 10.

2x8 gets her a Black Wrathful Heart. I assign this to hit locations 6–7.

2x6 gets her Bony Plates. I assign this to hit locations 4–5.

3x4 gets her a Huge, Barrel-Thick Torso. I assign this to hit locations 8–9.

1x2 gets her skinny little Grasping Limbs. I assign this to hit location 2.

1x1 gets her Shambling Legs. I assign this to hit location 1.

So she's this huge thick torso with bony plates, skinny arms and legs, and a little squint-eyed head with flaring nostrils. I think that sounds sort of turtle-shaped. But before I commit to an appearance I must move on to Phase Two.

Phase Two: Everything Else

I take my loose dice—10, 2 and 1—and consult the *phase two* tables. Since I only have three loose dice, I'll reuse one of them.

For Appearance I'll use the 1 for *reptilian* to stick with the turtle theme.

For Personality, I'll use the 2 for *emo*, because if a giant emo demon-turtle is wrong then I don't want to be right.

For Favorite Thing, I'll use the 2 again for *sleeping*. All that intensity is hard to maintain.

For Way to Hide, I'll use the 10. My sleepy emo demon-turtle can turn into a normal-looking emo girl that everyone thinks is my kid's mooney, weepy, short-tempered drama-queen girlfriend.

I'll call her *Oni-kame-chan*, and her foes fear her terrible battle-cry and her power to warp and intensify emotions. Here are her hit locations and their stats, taking into account her appearance and personality modifiers:

1: Knowing Nose (2d, Useful [tracking], Useful [smell lies], Awesome 2).

2: Shambling Little Legs (4d; Defends, Useful [shamble along]).

3: Stumpy Grasping Arms (5d; Useful [manually dexterous]).

4–5: Bony Plates (6d, Defends, Tough 3, Wicked Fast 1).

6–7: Black Wrathful Heart (7d, Attacks, Useful [resist pity, remorse, and other weak emotions], Gnarly, Sharing).

8–10: Huge Barrel-Thick Torso (6d, Attack [ear-splitting bellow], Useful [inspire overwhelming emotions], Area 3, Tough 5).



BEING SOMEBODY

These characters are complete and ready to play in your very own *Monsters* game, either as NPCs or as the players' own characters. Remember, you can also find Benny McAlyster on page 18 and Mr. Crocker on page 52.

Lucy Awai

Born in Hawaii on the big island to two ethnically well-blended parents—a bit Chinese, a bit Caucasian, a bit native Hawaiian, a bit African—Lucy is going to be a stunner when she's older. Right now, she's cute as a button.

Very much the tomboy, she was swimming and surfing when she was right out of diapers, and she loves the sea. After nearly drowning when she got rolled under the chop, she met Aumakua, a huge, scarred old shark god. Aumakua was tired of the ocean and wanted to explore the dryworld. Lucy agreed, and the shark saved her life.

Soon after, Aumakua got to explore the *really* dry world when Lucy's Mom got a transfer to the continental U.S., in a landlocked state where kids thought water deep enough for swimming always smelled like chlorine.

No surf. No sand. Hardly any sun. Her slang was all wrong. He skin and features too hard to categorize. And the skills that won her acclaim back home, now pretty much useless. Everybody thinks she's weird. And she is. And she's getting weirder.

She dreams of the sea, and in her dreams she surfs while Aumakua circles around her, and when she wakes up she's soaked with brine, and there is seaweed and shells and sometimes lost Spanish gold tangled up in the sheets.

Sometimes she remembers things that haven't happened yet.

Aumakua can come to her during the day, too, swimming in the air as if it were water, cutting left and right, jaws unhinging, black inhuman eyes folding shut as sawblade teeth shear closed.

Stats and Skills

Feet 5 (Dodging +1, Kicking +1, P.E. +3).

Guts 3 (Courage +1, Wind +2, Wrestling +0).

Hands 2 (Blocking +0, Punching +0, Shop +0).

Brains 2 (Out-Think +3, Remember +1, Notice +1).

Face 3 (Charm +2, Connive +0, Putdown +0).

Relationships

Mom and Dad 3, Crush (a boy she hasn't met yet but saw in a vision) 3, Aumakua.

Lucy's Monster: Aumakua

Appearance: Aumakua is a huge Megalithic protoshark, like a megalodon with more scars and personality. He's huge and he swims through the air in deceptively lazy curves, but he's lighting fast. His coal-black little eyes betray an intelligence and awareness his mundane cousins lack. He's not a shark, he's a shark god.

Personality: Imperious, arrogant and self-righteous, but doting and indulgent where Lucy is concerned. Aumakua can deny her nothing. For some reason he speaks with what Lucy imagines to be an upper-crust English accent.

Way to Hide: Aumakua can swim seas as vast as the whole ocean or as tiny as a single drop of sweat. He shrinks down to whatever scale he needs to fit into a local puddle, a bottle of water, a drop of condensation on the side of a Coke can, or the moisture in the corner of your eye. If you look close, you can see him swimming around in there.

Favorite Thing: To reveal his terrible majesty to quivering mortals, and elicit the primal worship of fear from them. Lucy keeps this in check the best she can.

Bits and Bobs

Locations 1-2: Dorsal Fin (6 dice, Useful [inspire primal terror], Tough x1, Awesome x2, Sharing).

Locations 3-4: Fins and Tail (8 dice, Defends, Useful [swim in air or water], Tough x1).

Locations 5-6: Coal-Black Eyes (6 dice, Useful [find the gates to the Dream Sea], Useful [see the reflections of the future], Useful [bring lost things back from the sea], Awesome x1, Sharing).

Locations 7-10: Great and Terrible Jaws (10 dice, Attacks, Useful [steal dreams], Awesome x2, Gnarly x4, Tough x3).

Notes

Aumakua is a pretty simple beast. He's got gigantic jaws that can horribly, horribly bite people. He's got a powerful tail that lets him swim through water or air at over 250 miles per hour. Seeing his dorsal fin cutting in the classic pattern triggers the crazies in people.

But he's got some tricky abilities, too. He can find gates to the Dream Sea, the primal realm where sleepers go when they dream. He can see there, in the reflections of the sun on the water, flashes of the future. And if he catches a sleeper in the Dream Sea he can eat their dreams and know them inside and out.

Even weirder, Lucy shares his ability to enter the Dream Sea while she sleeps, and can remain lucid there. She too can see reflections of the future. She too can bring lost things back from the sea—lost gold, lost socks, lost children, lost souls.

And when she's in a bad mood, Lucy too can inspire the primal terror of the deep, of dog-paddling in the ocean and seeing the great terrible fin slashing the water, closer and closer.

Daniel Jackstone

Dan Jackstone is a handsome kid. He's got a smile like a million bucks. He listens to the coolest music. He wears the coolest clothing. He's cool to people who aren't even popular. Nobody dares cut him out socially—he's got so many friends, making an enemy of Daniel Jackstone means cutting yourself out. Dan wouldn't have to do anything, either. People would just start thinking you were a jerk for dissing Dan.

Even the teachers like Dan. His grades aren't the best, and perhaps he isn't in class as often as he ought to be, but he tries so hard, and he's such a polite young man—he just needs extra attention, and sometimes just a nudge to the old gradebook to keep him in B's. No harm in it. Daniel Jackstone is a good kid.

It's true. Dan is a good kid. But his monster isn't. His monster wants Dan to be powerful, to be president one day. Dan's monster is Snaketongue, and he lives in mirrors, peeking out when Dan looks in and whispering advice.

Dan only sort of realizes that Snaketongue is part of the reason he's so popular. The monster looks out from the reflections cast in Dan's eyes, influencing people, hacking their minds, laying out the whammy. Dan's terrified of what will happen if people find out about Snaketongue—find out he's been messing with everyone's head. Snaketongue isn't all that scared about it, himself. If anyone starts to get wise, he's more than able to slither out of his mirrored lair and reveal his school bus-sized serpentine horror. If they aren't totally crackers after that, he'll just eat them and be done with it.

So Dan smiles, and if his smile is getting brittle around the edges, nobody says so.

Stats and Skills

Feet 3 (Dodging +1, Kicking +1, P.E. +1).

Guts 3 (Courage +1, Wind +1, Wrestling +1).

Hands 3 (Blocking +1, Punching +1, Shop +1).

Brains 2 (Out-Think +1, Remember +1, Notice +1).

Face 4 (Charm +1, Connive +1, Putdown +1).

Relationships

Dad 2, Circle of Hangers-On 1, Lacrosse Team 1, Older Brother 2, Snaketongue.

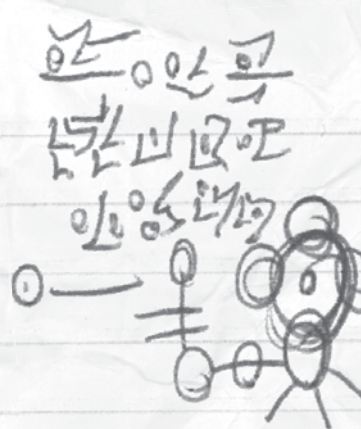
Daniel's Monster: Snaketongue

Appearance: Snaketongue is an impossibly long serpent, coiling, rippling, and striking. His scales are iridescent and hypnotic and fascinating. His fangs are like icepicks dripping venom. His voice is rhythmic, sonorous, and utterly, utterly mesmerizing.

Personality: Clever and conniving, manipulative and ingratiating. He'll charm and compliment when it serves his ends, and cajole and insult when aggression works better. He's a sneaky, lying jerk who only wants the best for Daniel—the best, of course, being wealth, power, and people fawning over him.

Way to Hide: Snaketongue slips in and out of mirrors and reflective surfaces, lurking just around the corner, crawling around behind reflected objects, and generally being creepy. When he wants to help Daniel out, he'll hide in the reflections in Dan's eyes, circling and enchanting.

Favorite Thing: To see Daniel lauded as great and basking in the reflected glory of Daniel's acclaim. It doesn't matter if it's earned or not; all that matters is how much people like him and how well they treat him.



Bits and Bobs

Locations 1-3: Hypnotic Scintillating Scales (6 dice, Useful [inspire affection and fascination], Area x3, Tough x3, Awesome x2, Sharing).

Locations 4-6: Great Rippling Coils (9 dice, Attacks, Defends, Spray, Useful [crawl and slither], Tough x3).

Location 7: Golden Eyes (2 dice, Useful [see a person's true self], Awesome x2, Sharing).

Locations 8-9: Poison Fangs (5 dice, Attacks, Useful [poison that makes a person act out of character], Burning, Wicked Fast x3).

Location 10: Forked Tongue (2 dice, Useful [lie with perfection], Awesome x2, Sharing).

Notes

Snaketongue is a tricky beast. He prefers to act from hiding, using his Hypnotic Scales, Golden Eyes and Forked Tongue to further Dan's popularity. These three abilities are powerful. With them, Daniel can make people like him *really* easily. He can see what others are really like inside *really* easily. And he can tell people things they'll almost always believe—especially if they already like him, and he knows what they're really like.

All this is starting to make Dan contemptuous of normal people.

When Snaketongue comes out of the mirror, he's pretty dangerous. His rippling coils let him crawl and slither at literally hundreds of miles per hour. He can wrap foes up in them or wriggle away from attacks. His large body sections are pretty tough, too.

His poison bite is *fast*, and those he bites (or who drink his poison, say in a spiked drink) act completely out of character—popular kids act like dorks, bullies cry and run away, strict teachers kick back and let their students go crazy.

Ralph 'Dog' Jones

Ralph won't tell you why he's living on the street, or where he's from, or what his real last name is. He doesn't even like being called "Ralph." Instead, he likes the nickname he got from the squatters he used to hang out with. They called him Dog, sort of making fun of him, but he liked it. If anybody asks, he says his name is "Dog Jones."

He's not living with other people right now. He's got his own squat in an abandoned Victorian in a pretty bad part of town, but he doesn't have any trouble with the neighbors. He's got a rep. They say, "Don't mess with Dog. Somebody's looking out for him. He's a good kid. If you're nice to him, someone looks out for you too, sometimes."

That's because Dog is friends with Mister Whispers, and Mister Whispers is everywhere.

Mister Whispers is a swarm of rats—big, sleek, red-eyed rats. Rats that make cats wish they were tigers, and make tigers glad they live in Asia. Dog knows what's going on in his adopted neighborhood because Mister Whispers lives up to his name. He listens and he whispers to Dog.

Dog's moral compass finds north every time, but he doesn't have much sense of the geography. Bad things happen to bad people in Dog's neighborhood. And even worse than bad people, bad monsters really tick him off. Monsters are for helping people and learning secrets and scrounging for day-old donuts, not for hurting innocent people.

Stats and Skills

Feet 4 (Dodging +2, Kicking +1, P.E. +3).

Guts 4 (Courage +2, Wind +1, Wrestling +0).

Hands 2 (Blocking +0, Punching +0, Shop +1).

Brains 2 (Out-Think +2, Remember +0, Notice +1).

Face 2 (Charm +0, Connive +2, Putdown +0).

Relationships

Leftie (a genial old wino) 1, Carlita (a maternal prostitute) 1, The Neighborhood 3, Officer Wilson 1, Mister Whispers.

Dog's Monster: Mister Whispers

Appearance: Mister Whispers is a swarm of rats—big, dangerous, red-eyed rats. His voice is a chorus of tiny rat-whispers.

Personality: Mister Whispers is subtle, quiet and watchful. He speaks with economy and tends to say just the right thing to reassure Dog. Mister Whispers lacks complex motivations. He thinks very like an ordinary rat in many ways, if all those individual rat brains added up to a lot of raw intelligence. He doesn't understand human society at all, but can interpret it from an animalistic point of view that is sometime disturbingly accurate.

Way to Hide: Mister Whispers is in the walls, under the floor-boards, peeking out from manhole covers and storm drains. He's always waiting, ready to swarm out if Dog needs him. He's always lurking and listening.

Favorite Thing: Secrets. Mister Whispers loves listening to secrets and watching secret things. He shares these only with Dog.

Bits and Bobs

Locations 1-3: Rats! (10 dice, Useful [sneak and hide, even from other monsters], Tough x3, Awesome x2).

Locations 4-6: More Rats! (10 dice, Defends, Useful [knows lots of secrets and can find out more], Tough x4).

Locations 7-8: Hundreds of Fangs and Claws (5 dice, Attacks, Useful [gnawing things all up], Area x2, Burning, Wicked Fast x1).

Location 9: Maddening Voice (3 dice, Useful [drive people mad with whispering from the shadows], Awesome x2).

Location 10: Knowing Noses (3 dice, Useful [scrounge useful stuff from trash], Awesome x2).

Notes

Unlike most monsters, Mister Whispers isn't a single solid thing but a swarming mass of rats acting under the direction of one will. Mister Whispers is awesomely good at hiding, even from other monsters. Few monsters are able to spot him, and humans don't have a chance. If they see a rat or two, that's exactly what they'll assume they are—just ordinary rats.

He's got six hit locations blocked off to cover these wild swarms, and they are both hard to hurt (Tough) and they can take lots of damage (10 dice pools). With More Rats!, Mister Whispers can take powerful defensive actions as well as knowing lots of secrets and learning more.

When he attacks he swarms up, binding up an opponent's movements or biting horribly. Hundreds of rat jaws can make short work of things Mister Whispers wants to destroy—up to 1,600 pounds at a time. He can gnaw a house down in a matter of minutes if he wants.

When he whispers at people from the shadows, he can drive them mad. He does this when he wants to drive bad people out of the neighborhood.

And he's great at finding things in the trash and refuse of society—nothing new or shiny, but serviceable and solid. A decent bicycle, a bag of bagels, a working computer a few years old. Dog lives pretty well on things Mister Whispers can sniff out.

Tommy Mezlowski

Tommy is a moody kid. He's quiet, but not shy—rather, he stew in his own juices, then acts in an impulsive explosion. He's skinny, and his eyes are shadowed and dark like his Mom's. His Dad cut out when he was young, and it was just him, his Mom and his sister.

Tommy dresses neat. He's a Wal-Mart preppie: not much style, but he's tidy in a way most kids aren't. His clothes might be cheap, but they're clean and unwrinkled. He's got the style sense of a pine tree—he wears the same outfit regardless of the season.

Tommy always looks out for his sister, and sometimes he gets overprotective. Sometimes Flytrap Joe gets involved. Tommy met Flytrap Joe when he won third place in the school science fair for his lemon-juice battery. The prize was a tiny

Venus flytrap in a pot covered with a plastic dome. Tommy really liked it, and caught flies for it to eat. After munching one, the flytrap said, "The green ones are tastier." It grew and grew and grew and grew until Tommy had to plant it in the yard. Flytrap Joe's roots are infinite fractals worming their way not into soil, but into the fabric of reality. He can pop up anywhere, a skill Tommy appreciates when, after brooding, he has one of his manic fits of action.

Stats and Skills

Feet 2 (Dodging +1, Kicking +0, P.E. +0).

Guts 2 (Courage +2; Wind +0 Wrestling +0).

Hands 4 (Blocking +0, Punching +1, Shop +0).

Brains 3 (Out-Think +1; Remember +2; Notice +0).

Face 4 (Charm +2, Connive +2, Putdown +4).

Relationships

Mom 3, Little Sister 3, Flytrap Joe.

Tommy's Monster: Flytrap Joe

Appearance: Flytrap Joe is a disturbing mass of giant flytrap mouths, leaves and lashing vines. His fractal roots extend through higher dimensional spaces, and so he can pop up anywhere.

Personality: Itching to help. Flytrap Joe wants to help so bad he sometimes goes way, way overboard. He talks like a third-rate mobster, and calls Tommy "Boss."

Way to Hide: Flytrap Joe's roots extend everywhere, so he's always waiting to pop up right when Tommy needs him, springing up out of the ground.



Favorite Thing: Eating insects—the bigger the better. If he can't get insects, then neighborhood dogs and cats tend to go missing.

Bits and Bobs

Locations 1-3: Tangled Mass of Plant Bits (10 dice, Defends, Tough x5).

Locations 4-5: Strangling Vines (7 dice, Attacks, Defends, Useful [grabbing and holding and breaking and choking], Awesome x1).

Locations 6-7: Flytrap Jaws (8 dice, Attacks, Gnarly x2).

Location 8: Glossy Leaves (3d, Useful [echo sense], Awesome x2).

Locations 9-10: Fractal Roots (6 dice, Defends, Useful [transport people and stuff], Useful [can't be snuck up on], Awesome x2).

Notes

With his Tangled Mass of Plant Bits, Flytrap Joe has one large hit location (1-3) which is darned near impossible to hurt (the Tough x5), and he can use its really big dice pool for active defensive actions, just swamping attacks in his writhing leaves and mouths and tendrils.

With his Strangling Vines he can hoist sixteen hundred pounds out to a range of 640 yards, plus he can use them to deflect attacks, hurt people, or tangle enemies up like a grappling attack. This is Awesome, too, so he can set one die to any value desired before rolling the rest.

His Flytrap Jaws are seriously bad news. He attacks with eight dice and inflicts +2 damage. That's a minimum of 3 damage with any hit. Brutal.

His Glossy Leaves sense vibrations in the air, letting him sense his surroundings like a bat, "seeing" in all directions—and he's double-Awesome with this, meaning he can set one of his dice to any value desired after rolling them.

Finally, his fractal roots extend everywhere, and he can slip into the ground, and pop up anywhere he likes. If he swallows people and stuff, he can bring them along with him, and he does this really reliably too.

The experience of being eaten and then popping out of a seedpod somewhere else is disturbing if you're not as used to it as Tommy is. If needed, he can pop into the ground and pop up during combat, using his roots to defend.

Madison Kate Sinclair-Stevenson

Madison is a very busy girl. She is in the school jazz band (clarinet). She plays soccer in a competitive private league. She takes advanced placement classes. She volunteers at local homeless shelters. She runs for student government. She helps decorate the school during Spirit Week. She takes private tutoring during the weekends to help keep her ahead of the academic competition. She sings in the church choir. She takes karate.

She also sees three therapists, takes four mood-altering drugs and a prescription antacid, and secretly wishes a monster would come and eat her parents.

Her parents are lovely people who've firmly convinced themselves that Madison Kate loves her busy schedule and numerous achievements, and wouldn't quit anything given the chance. Not that they give her the chance.

The problem with Madison Kate's secret wish is that monsters are real, and her friend Yog'So-Soft would be happy to do the deed if Madison Kate ever voices it aloud.

Madison isn't sure who she really is. So far, she's been defined by the expectations she fulfills and the achievements she wins—but Yog'So-Soft has this way of asking questions that makes her stop and think, "What do I really want?"

Stats and Skills

Feet 3 (Dodging +1, Kicking +1, P.E. +1).

Guts 3 (Courage +1, Wind +1, Wrestling +0).

Hands 3 (Blocking +2, Punching +2, Shop +0).

Brains 3 (Out-Think +1, Remember +2, Notice +1).

Face 3 (Charm +2, Connive +0, Putdown +0).

Relationships

The Parental Units 2, Tutor 2, Coach 2, Yog'So-Soft.

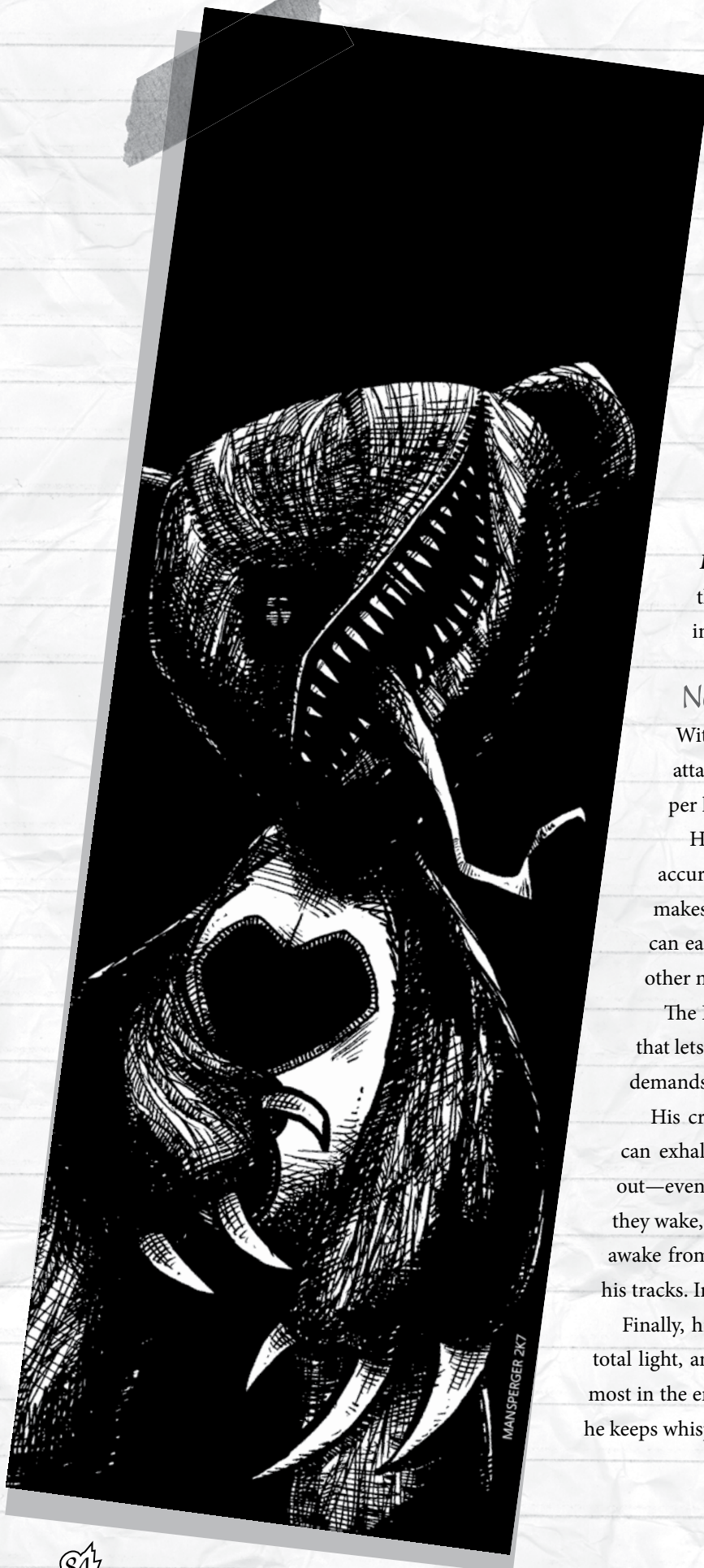
Madison Kate's Monster: Yog'So-Soft

Appearance: Yog is like a nightmare teddy bear grown to enormous size, clawed, shambling, with a fanged vertical mouth where the seams of its face split open. On his belly you can still see the cute felt heart, splattered and blackened by unspeakable drippings.

Personality: Quiet and wise. Madison and Yog'So-Soft are almost of one mind, their bond is so strong. Yog was dormant in Madison's teddy for so long, when it awakened to its true nature they were already intimately linked. Yog offers quiet advice, and Socratically encourages Madison to find herself.

Way to Hide: Yog'So-Soft turns back into Madison's tattered old teddy bear, and she hides him in her bookbag.

Favorite Thing: When Madison stands up for herself and does something she likes for her own reasons. Yog'So-Soft can't tell when these things are right or wrong, so he has a habit of encouraging her to act out on her anger, because it's easiest to get some original thought that way.



Bits and Bobs

Locations 1-2: Shambling Legs (8 dice, Defends, Useful [shambling quite fast], Tough x1).

Locations 3-4: Slashing Talons (4 dice, Attacks, Useful [rip open mystical doors, seals and barriers], Gnarly x2, Awesome x2, Wicked Fast x1).

Locations 5-6: Tummy with Stained Felt Heart (6 dice, Useful (manipulate emotions), Awesome x2, Tough x2).

Locations 7-8: Vertical Maw (7 dice, Attacks, Useful [exhale sleepy-dust that knocks people out], Gnarly x2).

Locations 9-10: Glassy Eyes (7 dice, Useful [see in the dark], Useful [see what people want the most in the world], Awesome x2).

Notes

With his Shambling Legs Yog can dodge and evade attacks, and, if needed, shuffle at, oh, about 250 miles per hour.

His Slashing Talons are seriously dangerous—fast, accurate, and really damaging. But the small dice pool makes them vulnerable. Outside of combat, the claws can easily shred magical barriers, cages, walls, locks, or other mystical obstructions.

The Felt Heart sewn to his tummy can project a beam that lets him manipulate emotions really well. Resisting it demands a Guts + Courage roll.

His creepy Vertical Maw can bite foes horribly, or he can exhale a cloud of sleepy-dust that can knock people out—even crowds of normal people, quite easily. When they wake, they can't distinguish the last half hour they were awake from weird dreams, which Yog'So-Soft uses to cover his tracks. In combat this can stun; see page 43.

Finally, his Glassy Eyes see as well in total darkness as in total light, and if he squints he can see what someone wants most in the entire world. He still can't see this in Madison, but he keeps whispering questions, and keeps squinting at her.



ANTAGONISTS

Or, When Bad People Happen to Good Things.

When the Monster Under the Bed is your best friend, and the Thing That Goes Bump In the Night lives next door with your pal Jenny, what is there to scare you? Well mister, there's plenty.

Drugs, for example. Drugs will hunt you down, shave your head while you sleep and sell your hair on eBay. Drugs will beat you up and tell everyone you peed your pants. Drugs are bad. Compared to drugs, the other things out there might seem pretty tame, but you just watch out.

These antagonists are suitable for any grade level. Just remember, for the most grownups, like monsters, don't take damage from emotional attacks (see page 28).

The Creepy Guy

Quote: "You kids want beer? I can get you totally awesome weed. You can come to my place, and we can hang out. I got a van, I'll give you a lift."

POV: The Creepy Guy used to go to your school. You sort of remember him from way back. He was one of the first kids to get a monster, back when people hadn't

gotten used to it yet. He had some trouble adjusting, and you're pretty sure he dropped out. But you keep seeing him around, talking to other kids and trying to make friends with them. It's kind of sad, because he's old and still trying to hang out with kids. Sometimes, the cops who guard the school ask him to move back from school property twenty paces, and sometimes he listens.

Your monster says he's still got his monster friend, but you haven't seen it in a while. You figure that it must be pretty big by now, cause he's like so old, you know? Practically 18. But, you know, he could totally buy cigarettes for you if he wanted.

The Real Deal: The Creepy Guy is what you get if you grow up with a monster friend and forget how to relate to other humans. He's weird. He's twitchy. He drives a white van, and he sells weed to kids in the hopes of being friends with them. He's been in trouble with the cops, but he's got a monster, and he seems fairly harmless, so Johnny Law looks the other way most of the time.

But the Creepy Guy is a stewing cauldron of resentment, rage, and anger. He's started to hate his monster and himself, and wants to be a normal kid again, but now he's a young man. If some kids are nice to him, he'll latch onto them, and give them drugs, smokes, beer, and a place to hang out without parents, rules, or consequences—but if they rebuke his creepy kid-crush, he'll freak his crap out, and turn on them psycho-stalker-style. It can only end one way: A total throwdown with the Creepy Guy's really humongous monster.

Modus Operandi: The Creepy Guy hangs around like the proverbial Bad Influence, offering good times with the only price being his somewhat twitchy company. He's skinny, tall, greasy, and he doesn't blink enough. If his offers are rebuked, he'll sometimes flip out and make a scene, or stalk the kids he's interested in being friends with. He might offer to “show them something cool” which turns out to be his monster, a huge, old, scarred up, maudlin thing that just wants the Creepy Guy to be happy. If anyone takes him up on his offer, he gets too friendly—and if he's rejected then, he'll flip out and get violent. Monsters come out. Buildings burn.

Even though the Creepy Guy is grown up, he still takes emotional damage just like a kid (see page 28).

Grade Level

Elementary School: At this grade level, the Creepy Guy has a real kidnapper vibe—the van, the hanging around outside school grounds, the general air of icky. Play up or play down this aspect, based on the seriousness of your game's tone.

Junior High: Here he's more like the drug dealers from the commercials, hanging around, offering kids a free taste so they can sass back to him about how they don't need his dope. There's still a bit of the kidnapper vibe, though.

High School: Here, the Creepy Guy might be someone the characters knew before he dropped out and got so strange. He's an example of what can happen if you lose your hold on humanity. There but for the grace of Grond goes thee.

Stats and Skills

Feet 2 (P.E. +2, Kicking +2, Dodge +3).

Guts 4 (Wind +2, Courage +4, Wrestling +4).

Hands 2 (Shop +0 Punching +2, Blocking +4, Drive +4).

Brains 1 (Out-Think +1 , Remember +0, Notice +1).

Face 4 (Charm +1, Putdown +2, Connive +5, Score Contraband +5).

Relationships

Bugnutz. That's it.

If you're nice to him, he'll try and develop a couple of relationship dice with you. Every time someone is nice to the Creepy Guy he gets a die in his relationship with them. And until this relationship gets mauled down to nothing by Shocks and Scars, he won't leave them alone. He'll lavish Quality Time on the victim of his obsession, but mostly he's just trying too hard.

Creepy Guy's Monster: Bugnutz

Quote: "Are you going to eat that? BUUUUUUUUUURP!"

Appearance: Bugnutz is a giant, fat insect-thing the size of a garbage truck. Like the queen from *Aliens* if it were a dude and drank too much beer and slept in its own sick last night.

Personality: Bugnutz, for all his huge terrifying grossness, is really worried about his friend Creepy Guy. He remembers when Creepy Guy was a happy kid getting into crazy adventures, and so full of delicious swirly wonderful emotions. Now Bugnutz just wants Creepy Guy to be happy. If that means snatching some people up and making them be friends with him, then so be it.

Way to Hide: Bugnutz turns into a tiny insect that looks suspiciously like a louse in Creepy Guy's greasy hair.

Favorite Thing: Seeing the Creepy Guy happy.

Bits and Bobs

Location 1-2: Lots of Scuttling Legs (8 dice, Defend, Attack, Tough x1).

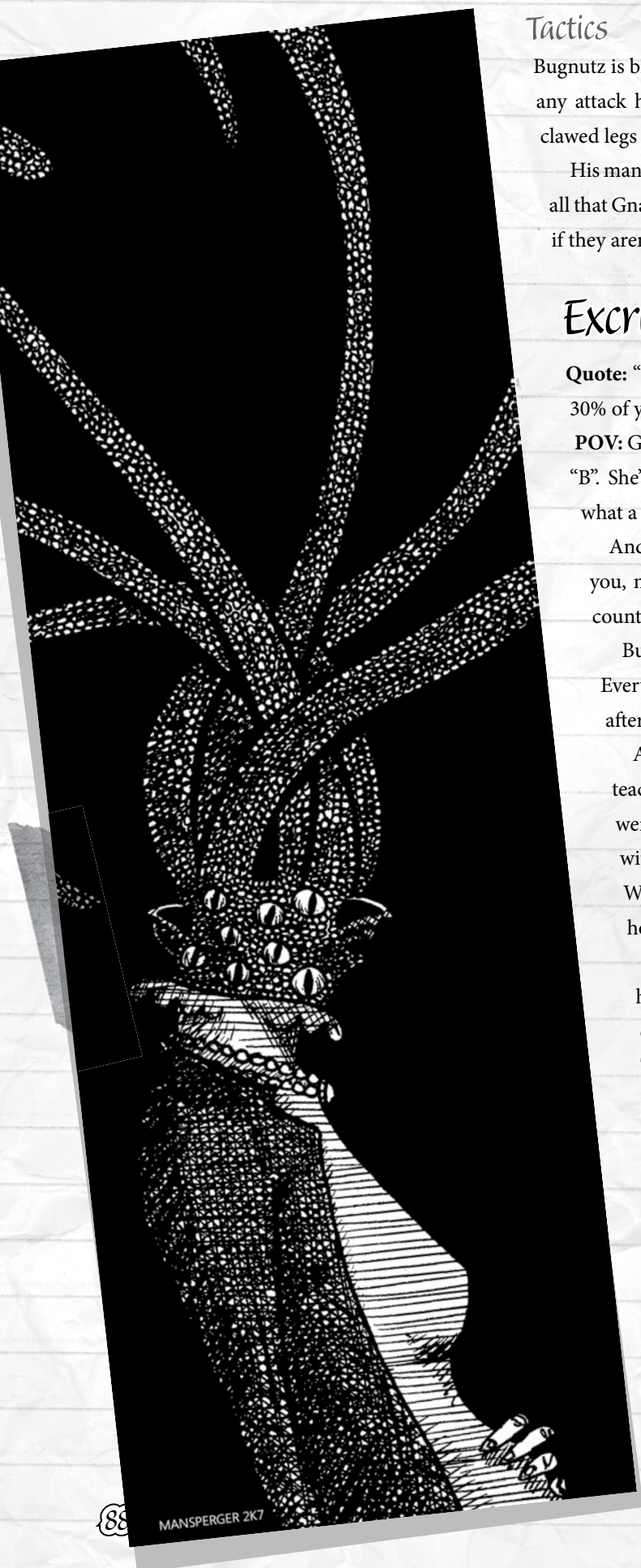
Locations 3-5: Invulnerable Carapace (10 dice, Defend, Tough x5).

Location 6: Great Buzzing Wings (6 dice, Useful [fly around], Tough x1).

Location 7-8: Huge Effing Mandibles (6 dice, Attack, Awesome x2, Gnarly x2, Tough x1).

Location 9: Vast Drooling Maw (6 dice, Useful [vomit up useful mundane things from . . . somewhere]).

Location 10: Too Many Eyes (6 dice, Useful [hypnotic gaze]).



Tactics

Bugnutz is big but fights cagey. He uses his invulnerable carapace to block any attack he can see coming, and alternates between attacks with his clawed legs and his great chomping mandibles.

His mandibles are brutal with the two levels of Awesome they pack and all that Gnarly. He does a minimum of 3 damage with them automatically if they aren't blocked or evaded somehow.

Excruciator

Quote: "Students, close your books for a pop quiz. This will count for 30% of your grade, and those failing must stay after class."

POV: God, the new math teacher is a witch—the kind that starts with "B". She's the queen of witches. She makes other witches say, "God, what a witch."

And she has it in for you. Like, personally. Every day, she rides you, makes cracks about your work, says things like, "Oh, are we counting on our fingers today?"

But it isn't just what she says, but how she says it, you know? Everyone laughs at you, and you feel horrible, like a worm. And after class, you're always tired, like you had to run a mile in P.E.

And it never quits. Your folks don't believe you. At the parent-teacher conference, she was all smiles and made it out like you were having trouble, but making progress. Your parents nodded with her, and exchanged knowing glances in your direction. When they weren't looking, she smiled at you, and you knew how the mouse feels when the cat winks at him.

You're convinced she's a monster. Nobody could be that horrible. But your monster, he's pretty sure she's just a regular old witch. He did offer to eat her face off, but . . . well. . .

The Real Deal: The Excruciator may answer to "Ms. Applecart," but she's really a hideous extradimensional horror from beyond space and time. And not the nice sort, either.

Excruciators feed on the pain of those arrogant enough to court the powers of the Gulfs of Darkness and the Vast Abyss. They creep through the cracks in spacetime, wiggling past physics, creeping under chemistry, and finally treading across geography, seeking humans with minds open to the Otherworld—kids with monsters being numero uno on the menu.

They are also attracted to psychics, crazy people, little

yappy dogs, and others with open minds who bark at things which aren't really there. But the biggest treats are kids with monsters.

Modus Operandi: Excruciators feed on pain and especially humiliation. They seek positions of authority over kids as teachers, principals and relatives. They find people in those roles, hollow them out and they wear them like suits, but they don't let them die. Inside a living flesh-suit, the hideous reality of the Excruciator is hidden from kid and monster alike.

The only thing that will drive an Excruciator out of its suit is defiance. If a kid can defend against an Excruciator's emotional attacks with nothing but Face and Brains actions, he can make it lose its cool and emerge.

Grade Level

An Excruciator is pretty much the same regardless of grade level; just the kinds of things it uses to humiliate its victims would change. Also, the degree of sick cruelty the thing will employ should vary based on the tone of the game.

Stats and Skills in Human Flesh Suit

Feet 4 (P.E. +2, Kicking +2, Dodge +3, Walk Like a Ghost +4).

Guts 5 (Wind +5, Courage +5, Wrestling +5).

Hands 3 (Shop +0 Punching +1, Blocking +1, Hit Without Leaving a Mark +4).

Brains 4 (Out-Think +3, Remember +5, Notice +2, Spot Your Weakness +4).

Face 4 (Charm +4, Putdown +6, Connive +4, Menace +3).

Relationships

Nothing. Excruciators don't have relationships. They are pure narcissists who see every other thing in the universe as something to eat, something to ignore, or something to read while sitting on the crapper.

When they wear a human skin and pretend to be human, they don't really know what they are doing—it's all the reflexive action of their vast and horrible minds. Like making a turkey call or something. The hunter doesn't really speak turkey, but he can fool the dumb birds.

When an Excruciator inflicts damage to a kid with its Putdown skill, it feeds on the essence of that kid. It needs to inflict at least five dice worth of damage a week this way to survive, but who settles for just surviving?

Excruciator's Monstrous Form

Appearance: A mass of horrible slimy tentacles, eyes, more tentacles, and mouths. It can squeeze through tiny openings, it can see your worst secret, and it can grab you and bite you all over.

Personality: Hungry. Hateful. Cruel. The Excruciator doesn't really eat flesh, but

it likes to inflict pain and terror. If it can't eat delicious humiliation, it will settle for base pants-pooping terror.

Way to Hide: Inside a hollowed-out but still-living human skinsuit.

Favorite Thing: Consuming the soul-essence of human children.

Bits and Bobs

Locations 1-3: Tentacles! (10 dice, Useful [squeeze through tiny openings], Useful [hollow out human and live inside], Useful [taste the air and track like a snake], Awesome x2).

Locations 4-6: God, More Tentacles! (8 dice, Attacks, Defends, Area x2, Gnarly x1, Wicked Fast x3).

Location 7: Eyes? At Least It Isn't More Tentacles. . . (5 dice, Useful [see darkest secret]).

Locations 8-10: Mouths . . . Acid-Drooling Mouths (9 dice, Attacks, Burning, Gnarly x3, Wicked Fast x2).

Mad Science Teacher

Quote: "Day 17, 23:00. Subject remains alert despite repeated amputations of dorsal pseudopodia and fin-like structures. Level of aggression remains unchecked, and administration of high doses of tranquilizer only serve to anger subject. On last amputation, subject said, "When I get outta here, Doc, I'm gonna eat your expletive deleted face off."

"Recommended course of action: Continue schedule of amputations, and add microwave bombardment to the stress-panel to measure cortical hormone response."

POV: You know the new science teacher? There's something off about him. Like, you get that he really loves the science, but when he talks about it . . . it's like he really *loves* the science. He makes it sort of icky.

He got hired after Mr. Humphries got crushed in that freak forklift accident—or at least they said it was a freak forklift accident. You heard it looked more like he got stomped on by something with really big square feet. And you know all about big things that stomp people.

Once, you caught the new science teacher laughing maniacally in his classroom during a thunderstorm, and when he saw you he looked flustered and said, "That Steve Colbert is one funny man, eh? Eh?" But you saw through the window the huge shape hulking off into the lightning-lit distance.

The Real Deal: The Mad Science Teacher is a real Mad Scientist—complete with Brotron the Robot as his servant and assistant. The Mad Science Teacher wants to study monsters and learn the secrets their flesh may conceal. He wants to do this by cutting them up and running experiments on them, and his stainless steel pal

Brotron is perfectly willing to assist with beating them into submission. He has a secret lab hidden somewhere, with electrified cages containing several captured monsters.

Modus Operandi: The Mad Science Teacher watches and observes, and when he identifies kids with monsters, he sends out Brotron in a fairly unconvincing rubber monster suit to pick a fight with them. If Brotron subdues the monster, he drives up really fast in his big van, Brotron tosses the other monster in the back and runs off, and then the Mad Science Teacher drives off. So far he's snatched several monsters, and he's looking for more. A prison break might make a fun "monsters only" game session as the PCs' monster friends—played as primary characters by the players—try to bust out of his lab.

Grade Level

The Mad Science Teacher fits neatly into any grade level, and operates almost unchanged in all of them. He'll seem cornier to older kids, but since he's more focused on their monsters than he is on the kids, he'll deal with them as an unfortunate nuisance regardless of their age.

Stats and Skills

Feet 2 (P.E. +2, Kicking +0, Dodge +3).

Guts 4 (Wind +1, Courage +4, Wrestling +1, Fearlessly Peer Into Things Man Was Not Meant To Know +5).

Hands 4 (Shop +3 Punching +0, Blocking +0, A Surgeon's Touch +4, Build Mad Science Devices +4).

Brains 5 (Out-Think +5, Remember +5, Notice +1, *SCIENCE!* 5).

Face 2 (Charm+1, Putdown +1, Connive +1).

Relationships

All-Consuming Love of *SCIENCE!* 3.

Mad Science Teacher's Robot: Brotron

Quote: "Beep! Beep! Danger, Master! Danger! Brotron Activating Defensive Systems!"

Appearance: A ten-foot tall metal man made of polished stainless steel, with big, crackling, luminous eyes, a speaker grill for a mouth, and crushing pincer-hands. He's a veritable Swiss army knife of useful tools, many of obvious use in improvisational surgery.

Personality: Like a servile robot from 1950s sci-fi, but with a hint of sarcasm in everything it says. The Mad Science Teacher is constantly fiddling with his linguatron to fix this.

Way to Hide: The Mad Science Teacher dresses him up in disguises, but Brotron can't hide—he's a big honkin' robot. I mean, he can hunker down in the bushes, but still. Big honkin' robot.

Favorite Thing: Sweet, sweet electricity.

Bits and Bobs

Locations 1-2: Stomping Steel Legs (8 dice, Defend, Useful [magnetically sticking to metal], Tough x2).

Locations 3-4: Crushing Pincer Arms (8 dice, Attack, Useful [picking stuff up and whatnot], Tough x2).

Locations 5-7: Shiny Metal Torso (8 dice, Useful [detect and track monsters], Tough x5, Awesome x2).

Locations 8-9: Retractable Utility Units (6 dice, Attack, Useful [car repair and surgery on the go], Tough x2, Awesome x2).

Location 10: Great Domed Head (4 dice, Useful [stun beam*], Awesome x2, Tough x2).

* Brotron's stun beam knocks the targeted hit location completely out of commission for minutes outside of combat, or rounds in combat, equal to width - 1. After this time the location returns to full function, having suffered no real damage.

M.I.B.

Quote: "If you will please step away from the B.E.M., Agent Grey and Agent Blue have some questions for you."

POV: Did you see the antenna-van out in front of the school again today? You walk past it and your cell totally drops five bars, and if you're talking you get bumped. Do they think we don't notice? Five white guys in black suits and mirror shades, hanging around outside the school fence taking pictures with a big camera. But did you notice how much alike they look? And they always seem to talk in that same voice. And what's with the rubber gloves all the time? Creeeepy.

You saw that one talking to the vice principle the other day, and the old guy was loosening his tie like it was hot in his office. When he saw you, he slammed the door, but he sure didn't look happy. They called you in for a talk with one of them one time—Agent Beige or something—and he asked all kinds of questions about stupid things like if you'd seen lights in the sky or bought any weird pills from guys with heavy Russian accents. Your monster got bored and snuck under the table towards the guy's legs, and something in his pocket started beeping like the world's most annoying ringtone, and he just stood up, and said, "Thank you for your cooperation. All Good Americans assist the authorities in their inquiries." You could hear the capitals when he said "Good Americans".

You would have written it off as one more weird thing in a weird world, then you heard that Katie Smith had gone missing, and you never saw her or her monster Juggle-Puss again.

The Real Deal: The Monster Investigation Bureau is a just the latest incarnation of the American Military-Industrial Complex's unified occult intelligence task force. In the 1950s they chased flying saucers and locked aliens in freezers. In the '60s and '70s they ran MKULTRA's ugly stepsister, and fought a covert astral war with the commies to keep America free, and military budgets *vast*. In the '80s it was all subliminal programming via big-budget action movies. In the '90s their budgets got cut hard, and lots of them went to work in the private sector, hunting the supernatural for corporate America.

Now, in the new millennium, they work in a public-private partnership to discover marketable and weaponizable applications for the phenomena of Adolescent Psycho-Temporal Phase Bridging. They hunt Biological Extraterrestrial Merchandise (B.E.M.s) for their newly-privatized masters.

Not all are cut from the same creepy clone cloth, but individuality and personality are frowned upon. A tie in a non-regulation color is sometimes enough to get a M.I.B. sent back to Arkansas for a brain-scrubbing and a year riding a register at Home Office's first retail establishment.

Modus Operandi: M.I.B. agents lurk and stalk and monitor from the periphery, and you might start to think they were a big joke, until someone you know vanishes, monster and all. They fight the bureaucracy of their own organization as much as your monster, but when they decide to move on you, they do so with terrifying speed and efficiency—and they have decades' worth of weird technology stolen from ancient prehuman civilizations and from alien would-be invaders.

M.I.B.s carry protective gear that gives them the same benefits that kids get when in combat with monsters, detectors that let them perceive monsters even when they're hiding, and tasers, guns (for mundane threats) and other strange-tech devices for dealing with—and hurting—monsters.



Grade Level

Elementary School: M.I.B. agents have real trouble dealing with kids this young. They're unpredictable. They're ill-mannered. They don't get the whole Men In Black mythology, and they don't know to be properly afraid. M.I.B.s have difficulty knowing how to talk to kids in elementary school. These kids have the easiest time flustering M.I.B.s and getting them to break their conditioning.

Junior High: In junior high, most kids have a good idea about the government and about Big Evil Conspiracies. Or rather, they have seen enough TV and looked at enough kooky Internet sites to get entirely the wrong idea. But they have an idea on the subject nonetheless. M.I.B.s will lean on them pretty hard, hoping to impress on them their authority before they get into high school and become insolent little jerks.

High School: High schoolers are the most likely to be openly defiant of M.I.B.s, the ones who'll know to ask for proof of their authority, who'll defy their orders, and who'll be most interested in exposing them on the Internet or by passing around an incriminating cellphone video. They're also the most likely to be treated as adults by the M.I.B.s, which includes being "disappeared."

Stats and Skills

Feet 3 (P.E. +3, Kicking +3, Dodge +3).

Guts 3 (Wind +3, Courage +3, Wrestling +3, Preternatural Cool +3).

Hands 3 (Shop +3, Punching +3, Blocking +3, Regulation Shooting Posture +3).

Brains 3 (Out-Think +3, Remember +3, Notice +3, Spot Weirdness +3, Strange Tech +3).

Face 3 (Charm +3, Putdown +3, Connive +3).

Relationships

Every M.I.B. has just two relationships: America 3, Home Office 3.

A Wizard (Wannabe)

Quote: "By the Ancient Signs and the Words Writ Upon the Scrolls of the Ebon Binding, I Abjure Thee, Beast! I Bind Thee. . . Hang on . . . I Bind . . . I. . . Wait, let me start again. Don't go!"

POV: The librarian always stares at you. Well, not at *you*, exactly. At your backpack, where your monster hides. He seems to somehow know what's in there, and the other day after he started his "no bookbags in the library" policy, you caught him poking around in your backpack when you came to get it. He had some lame excuse about a missing book, but you knew what he was doing—he was trying to get your monster. When you checked your bag out later your monster said, "That guy smelled funny. Bad funny. Pauly Shore funny. I don't like him."

The Real Deal: Some adults are sensitive to monsters and their comings and

goings. It isn't a super-healthy thing to be able to do—it tends to make people crazy. Sometimes Crazy and Opportunity align, and someone gets their hands on some Terrible and Ancient Lore.

See, adults have been trying to get a handle on monsters for a long time, and some old cats figured out how to basically confiscate a monster from a kid, break the bond, and make the monster a slave. It isn't easy, but it's the ultimate goal of all Wizards to get their own demonic servant and impose occult bondage upon it. The dangerous ones aren't satisfied with only one monster and one broken-hearted kid.

Modus Operandi: A Wizard seeks to accumulate lore, trying to piece together a complete working copy of the Rite of Adoption, while monitoring and cataloging local monsters. A Wizard who manages to complete the Rite has his own monstrous servant—a sad, pathetic thing pining for its kid but bound by magical chains to obey the Wizard. A Wizard with a monster is a serious concern.

A Wizard—even one without a monster—is treated like a kid with a monster friend for the purposes of monster attacks. His protective mojo keeps him from being ripped to chutney by the monsters he covets.

A Wizard must sacrifice some of his relationships when he captures and bonds with a monster. Each two dice he sacrifices gives him relationship with the monster. Unlike the true-blue relationships with Kids have with monsters, his is weaker. It gets 1 die for each 2 sacrificed, and can be Shocked and broken like a normal relationship. Something a kid might have to do if his monster gets monsternapped.

Grade Level

A Wizard doesn't change that much as grade level increases, but he might be less inclined towards “you pesky kids!” outrage and more inclined towards “Join me, and we can rule the galaxy together!” offers of alliance and power with older kids. Of course, he might also be more inclined to use violence against an older kid than a younger one, and more inclined to use bribes, deception, and promises of candy against a younger one.

Stats and Skills

Feet 2 (P.E. +1, Kicking +1, Dodge +2, Ethereal Transposition +4*).

Guts 5 (Wind +0, Courage +5, Wrestling +0, Meditation of Thoth +4*).

Hands 3 (Shop +0 Punching +1, Blocking +3, Signs of Warding and Shielding +4*).

Brains 4 (Out-Think +2, Remember +4, Notice +2, Lens of the Other World +4*).

Face 2 (Charm +2, Putdown +2, Connive +2, Word of Power and Authority +4*).

* These skills represent the Wizard's mystical lore. They work like regular skills, but against monsters and other unnatural things.

Relationships

Wife 2, Chow-Chow the Poodle 3, The Library 2.



EVERYBODY ELSE

These are the sportos, the motorheads, geeks, sluts, bloods, wastoids, dweebies, d---heads—the people who may or may not think you’re a righteous dude. Remember what we said about grownups and emotional damage on page 28.

Administrator

POV: Some admins like to play the Big Man, some are buddy-buddy with you, some punch the clock until retirement. All know more about what you’re up to than they let on. How come, do you suppose?

Real Deal: Administrators in schools with reported monster activity are a tough breed of dedicated educator, usually moved in to keep a lid on things. They’ll let a certain amount of crap slide to keep the greater peace, but they can always push you back harder than you can push them—up to the point where your monster eats them, of course.

Grade Level

Any. Someone has to run the school.



Stats and Skills

Feet 2 (P.E. +2 , Kicking +1, Dodge +1).

Guts 4 (Wind +2, Courage +2, Wrestling +2).

Hands 3 (Shop +1 Punching +1, Blocking +3).

Brains 4 (Out-Think +4 , Remember +4, Notice +4, Run a School +4).

Face 4 (Charm +3, Putdown +2 , Connive +2, Respect My Authority +3).

Relationships

The School 4.

Bully

POV: Some bullies hit you and take your stuff, the thugs of the playground. Others say things that make you wish they would punch you instead. Whether they hit with words or fists, some kids just like pushing other kids around.

Real Deal: Any normal kid willing to pick on a kid with a monster has to be stupid, crazy, or has to have something up his sleeve.

Grade Level

Bullies are ever-present. Their tactics will likely change with different grades, as physical intimidation seems more harmless when it's little kids doing the pushing and giving the swirlies.

As the grade level increases, the violence will be less frequent, but more severe when it happens.

Stats and Skills

Feet 4 (P.E. +2, Kicking +2, Dodge +2).

Guts 4 (Wind +2, Courage +0, Wrestling +2).

Hands 3 (Shop +1, Punching +4, Blocking +3).

Brains 2 (Out-Think +2, Remember +1, Notice +3).

Face 2 (Charm +0, Putdown +5, Connive +4).

Relationships

Gang of Cronies and Yes-Men 2.

Cop

POV: Cops always seem to show up after something bad happens. It would be awesome if, just once, they'd show up before. It's fun to talk smack about cops, but when they show up, it's hard to mouth off. Your parents are grownups, but there's something about the cops who come to your school when there's trouble—they're to normal grownups what your parents are to you.

Real Deal: Cops are the front line in dealing with the chaos that monsters can unleash—and the cops who deal with it a lot develop a pretty good set of survival instincts when faced with the horrible realities of the supernatural: Stare it down, make it blink first, put the fear of authority into it. Cops who survive this beat get good at this. It's possible to imagine a kid and his monster growing up to be a cop—sort of like a K-9 unit, but with more teeth.

Grade Level

Pretty much any grade level will see cops; the main difference is how they treat kids who get into trouble. Younger kids are more likely to get some compassion, older kids aren't going to get any slack (especially if they're mouthy).

Stats and Skills

Feet 4 (P.E. +3, Kicking +2, Dodge +4).

Guts 4 (Wind +2, Courage +4, Wrestling +2, Stare Down the Horrors of Hell +4).

Hands 3 (Shop +1, Punching +4, Blocking +3, Stick and Pistol +3).

Brains 4 (Out-Think +3, Remember +2, Notice +4, Spot Crime in Progress +3).

Face 3 (Charm +2, Putdown +3, Connive +2, The Badge +4).

Relationships

Family 3, The Brotherhood of Blue 3.

Your Crush

POV: You know who I'm talking about. The one person who more than anyone in the entire world you want to talk to—and for some reason, there's absolutely in a zillion years no possible way it's going to happen. So you watch, you pine, and you wish for a miracle infusion of Courage. Until she starts seeing Jocky McJock the quarterback. Then you just want to curl up under a rock and die for a little while.

Real Deal: Your Crush might just be unaware of you, or might actually be screwing with your head. Regardless, they make you think, and feel, and act crazy.

Grade Level

Any. If there's the chance for unrequited love from afar, then Your Crush will be there. In junior high or high school, you might be the creepy stalker type and not even know it.

Stats and Skills

Feet 2 (P.E. +1, Kicking +1, Dodge +1).

Guts 2 (Wind +1, Courage +2, Wrestling +1).

Hands 2 (Shop +1, Punching +0, Blocking +1).

Brains 4 (Out-Think +1, Remember +2, Notice +1).

Face 5 (Charm +5, Putdown +1, Connive +1, Be Everything You Could Possibly Want +5).

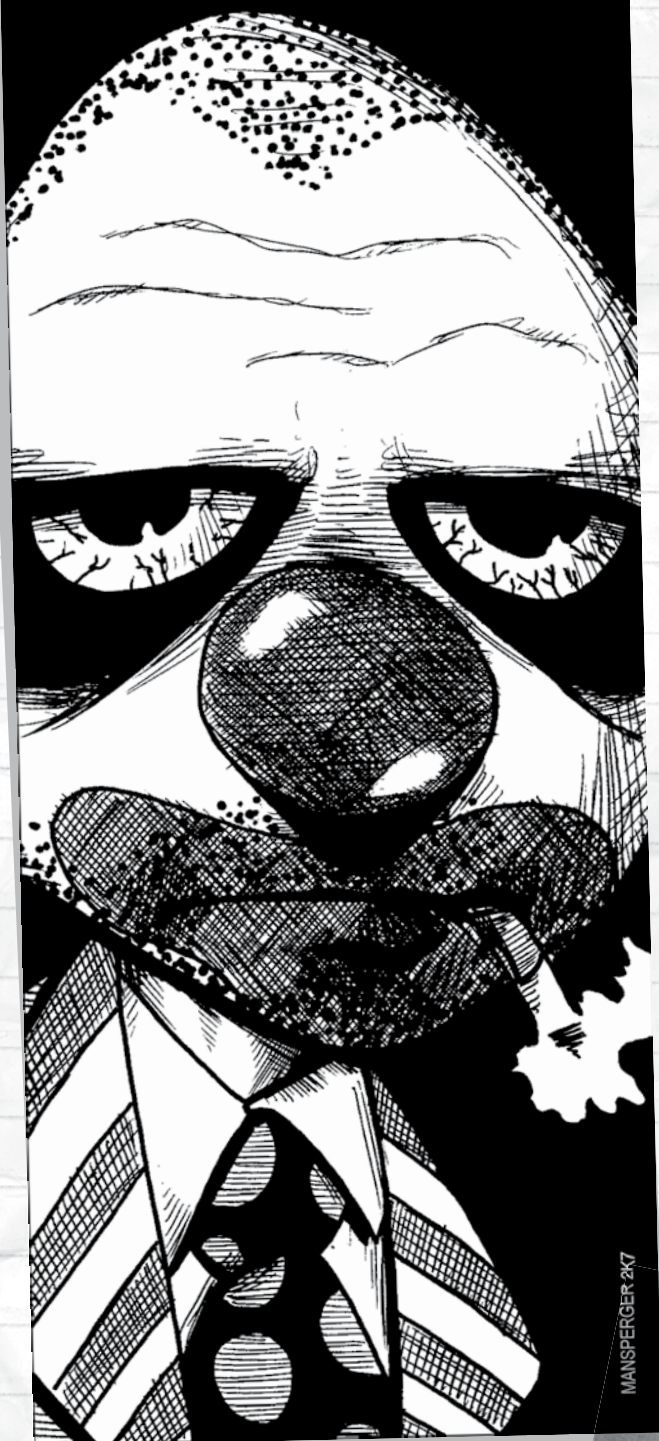
Relationships

Somebody Other Than You 3.

Drunken Clown

POV: OMG, your parents did not hire a clown for your birthday. Oh, you'll never live this down. And . . . is he . . . drunk? He sure smells gross. And he isn't very funny, and he keeps falling down, and his balloon animals all looks like crap, and you don't think a clown is supposed to use words like that. Also, you think he's flirting with your Mom.

Real Deal: He might be a harmless, intoxicated children's performer—or he might be an agent of your enemies sent to distract you while some nefarious scheme goes down. And if there's something occult about him, his balloon animals might come to life and attack you with great rubbery claws.



Grade Level

Probably the worst at junior high, when parents haven't figured out that their kids don't like childish stuff anymore. In elementary school, the drunk part is the problem. In high school, the clown part is almost funny, and the drunk part means he might buy you beer.

Stats and Skills

[values in brackets are while drunk]

Feet 3 [1] (P.E. +2, Kicking +2, Dodge +4).

Guts 1 [5] (Wind +2, Courage +2, Wrestling +1, Gross Physical Comedy +3).

Hands 3 [1] (Shop +1, Punching +2, Blocking +2, Balloon Animals +3).

Brains 3 [1] (Out-Think +3, Remember +1, Notice +3).

Face 2 [4] (Charm +3, Putdown +4, Connive +3, Make Fun of the Birthday Boy +5).

Relationships

Family 3 [1], The Bottle 1 [3].

Fashion Nazi

POV: You thought these shoes were cool. You were really careful to ask your Mom for the right brand and the right color and you saved your money and paid for half of them. Then you wore them to school and the kid you were trying so hard to impress looked at your feet, and nudged the kid next to her, and she sneered at your new shoes, and all the kids at her lunch table laughed. Nobody is wearing shoes like that anymore.

Real Deal: The Fashion Nazi is one of those kids who's always it—setting trends as much as sniffing them out before they hit big. She's always one step ahead of that point where a cool look turns into self-parody, then moving onto something new—and expensive. Likely rich, the Fashion Nazi doesn't really like anyone but herself, and responds with venom and hate to anyone showing her up. She might even be in league with an Excruciator, trading the humiliation of the weak and the unfashionable for favors from Elder Horror From Beyond.

Grade Level

The Fashion Nazi's power to make your life hell increases with grade level, though perhaps it peaks in junior high where there aren't as many distinctly different stylistic cliques to join yet.

Stats and Skills

Feet 2 (P.E. +1, Kicking +1, Dodge +1).

Guts 2 (Wind +2, Courage +2, Wrestling +0).

Hands 2 (Shop +0, Punching +0, Blocking +1).

Brains 4 (Out-Think +4, Remember +2, Notice +3, Spot a Fashion Disaster a Mile Away +4).

Face 4 (Charm +5, Putdown +5, Connive +2, Look Great in Anything +4, Set the Trend +4).

Relationships

Circle of Giggling Mean-as-Snakes Junior Harpies 3.

Gang Banger

POV: The Gang Banger is kind of both scary and pathetic at the same time. He's a little kid, and looks sort of retarded in his older brother's gangwear, but *his brother* doesn't look retarded in his gangwear. His brother looks like someone that might pop a cap in your behind. And the Gang Banger is either already a member of his brother's outfit, or he's going to be soon. He sure lets it be known if anyone messes with him. He swaggers, he affects a prison-yard attitude, and even if he's a big wuss, he can bring the trouble in the form of a whole gang of puffed-up rooster-men looking to scratch.

Real Deal: The Gang Banger is only a wannabe right now. In all likelihood he'll join up when they'll let him, and be that much worse for it. But if he does, he'll likely drop out, so perhaps that's for the best. Until then he's a simmering stewpot of fear and arrogance—a dangerous combination. Like hammers and really big thumbs.

Grade Level

Only junior high and high school, really—an elementary school Gang Banger is just sort of funny, and not really threatening. But perhaps that's the point.

Stats and Skills

Feet 3 (P.E. +4, Kicking +3, Dodge +3).

Guts 2 (Wind +2, Courage +2, Wrestling +1).

Hands 3 (Shop +3, Punching +3, Blocking +1, Hold Gat Sideways Like Gangsta +1).

Brains 1 (Out-Think +3, Remember +2, Notice +2).

Face 2 (Charm +2, Putdown +3, Connive +4, Convincing Threats of Violence +4).

Relationships

His Bro 3, The 8th Street Warriors 2, His Mama 2.

**EVERYBODY
ELSE**

Geek

POV: When you're feeling your weirdest and most rejected by mainstream kids, you can at least look to the feckless Geek and know there's always someone further outside than you. Having a giant monster friend hiding behind your reflection in mirrors is way less dorky than pretending to have a giant monster friend while playing *Monster: The Socially Awkwarding*.

Some geeks don't play RPGs, though, some are into computers in a big way, and will cut your throat if you dis their favorite OS. Others are nuts for *Star Wars* or cartoons from Japan. But there's a lot of cross-fertilization amongst geeks, like planting squash, pumpkins, and cucumbers in the same garden. When you go out to pick a Jack'o'Lantern for Halloween, you end up with a cusquamkin.

Real Deal: Some geeks are filled with rage—rage at being rejected by other kids, and rage at *Marvel: Civil War*. Others are at peace with their social position and take solace in sharing it with others of their kind. Most are harmless.

Generally, a geek is a good friend to have, especially if he's got L33T Skillz 5d and you need to hack a high-security NSA database, or get your character up to 20th level in *World of Warcraft* without having to play through all the boring stuff. Even better, to a geek having a monster friend is the best. It's good to have someone think you're cool.

Grade Level

In elementary school all kids are a little geeky, so the ones who are really into it don't stand out much. Being good at computers is cool. In junior high the Geeks start to stand out, and by high school they are another species entirely.

Stats and Skills

Feet 2 (P.E. +1, Kicking +1, Dodge +3).

Guts 3 (Wind +1, Courage +1, Wrestling +1).

Hands 3 (Shop +4, Punching +1, Blocking +1).

Brains 4 (Out-Think +2, Remember +4, Notice +2, Dungeon Master +3, Hacking [But He Calls It Cracking] +3).

Face 1 (Charm +1, Putdown +3, Connive +4, Geek Rant +5).

Relationships

Online Friends 3, Tuesday Night Gaming Group 2, WoW Character 1.

Gym Coach

POV: It's dodge ball again. There was a time when dodge ball was just physical torture and humiliation. Now that your monster friend comes to school with you, hidden away, it's much worse. You know you can do something about it, but stopping the pummeling will only make things worse, and likely get you kicked out of school.

Your monster aches to rend the kids that throw those fat bouncy red balls at your head. Everything in him screams out to protect you from attack. One time, you got a nosebleed from getting hit in the face, and it was all you could do to stop the carnage. Coach just blew his whistle and yelled the usual abuse, "Cindy-Cakes! You're out! Make room for the winners! Hustle! Hustle! Take a lap!" One day, you won't argue as hard.

Real Deal: The Gym Coach fights a daily battle against the increasingly sedentary modern lifestyle. Running, jumping, climbing rope—not really vital skills anymore. That's why kids are so fat these days, and that's part of the reason the Gym Coach hates kids so much. The other bit is how he went to school to learn to teach Physical Education, but nobody gives him any respect as an educator, and assumes he is a stupid, has-been jock who couldn't cut it in real sports. Which is true, but it still irks that people don't respect how hard it is to get 30 weedy little punks to do a chin-up.

The worst case for the Gym Coach is when he really is the sick sadist he seems to be, and he really does enjoy inflicting pain and misery and humiliation. If so, he might really be an Excruciator under that scowling flesh-mask. Or he might just be a jerk.

Grade Level

The Gym Teacher is a universal menace. He'll likely inspire more fear in young kids who are less skilled at faking injury or getting their parents to sign off on a medical excuse to avoid sports.

Stats and Skills

Feet 4 (P.E. +5, Kicking +1, Dodge +3).

Guts 3 (Wind +5, Courage +2, Wrestling +2).

Hands 3 (Shop +1, Punching +2, Blocking +3, Throwing +4).

Brains 1 (Out-Think +1, Remember +2, Sports Scores +5).

Face 3 (Charm +1, Putdown +5, Connive +2, Shout You Down +5).

Relationships

Ex-Wife 3.

Hood

POV: Ever since third grade the Hood has been getting into trouble. His mom split when he was real little, and his dad drives a truck, so it's him and his older sister at home, and she's boy-crazy and gone most nights.

The Hood is alternately fascinating and frightening. He's great to hang out with if you're looking for some mayhem—blowing up things with cherry bombs, shooting at cars with a BB gun, shoplifting, smoking weed, and generally being a

bad influence on others. But he's as likely to hold your hand on the table and do the knife game as he is to ride bikes with you, so it's a mixed bag. Lawless fun vs. permanent scarring—hard to call.

On the upside, he thinks your monster is “Totally effing hardcore.” On the downside, he's always trying to get you to make it eat the principal's car.

Real Deal: The Hood is on his way to a life of drug abuse, petty crime, thuggery and incarceration. He's a loner, and he likes it—as much as he hates it. All told, he's got a pretty rough mix of nature and nurture, a bad seed in toxic soil. But with the right kind of friend, the Hood might turn around, at least enough to use his thuggish abilities in the cause of good.

Grade Level

The main difference in the Hood at different grade levels is how much trouble he's been in, and just how far he's willing to take things. In elementary school, he might blow up a toilet. In high school he might steal a teacher's car, pick you up in it (saying it's his dad's), and then get into a high-speed chase with the cops with you in the passenger seat.

Stats and Skills

Feet 3 (P.E. +2, Kicking +3, Dodge +3).

Guts 3 (Wind +2, Courage +2, Wrestling +3).

Hands 3 (Shop +3, Punching +3, Blocking +3, Making Explosives from Household Stuff +3, Five-Finger Discount +3).

Brains 2 (Out-Think +2, Remember +2, Notice +2, Spot a Narc +4).

Face 2 (Charm +1, Putdown +4, Connive +4, Glare That Promises Pain +4).

Relationships

Dad 1, Sister 1, Juvenile Delinquency Officer 2.

Janitor

POV: He's old, he's weird, and sometimes he'll tell you something that'll totally change your life. Just a little word or a bit of advice. Something that puts it all into perspective, and gives you a new way of looking at your problems. Other times, he just looks scornful and shames you into doing the hard thing. He's ubiquitous, and he always seems to be there when you need him most, even if you want to seem him the least. Also, he looks and sounds suspiciously like Sam Elliot.

Real Deal: The Janitor knows all—really, he does. Maybe he's somehow involved in the occult, or maybe he's just been around long enough, seen things weird enough, and mopped up puke gross enough to get a certain wisdom on things monstrous. Either way, he's a font of sage (if cryptic) advice from the homespun to the assumption-busting.



Grade Level

The Janitor is a constant no matter the school setting. He does not change.

Stats and Skills

Feet 2 (P.E. +2, Kicking +2, Dodge +2, Always Seems to Be There +4).

Guts 4 (Wind +1, Courage +4, Wrestling +2).

Hands 4 (Shop +3, Punching +2, Blocking +2, Sling Mop Like Janitorial Ninja +4).

Brains 4 (Out-Think +3, Remember +3, Notice +3, Smell Trouble Brewin' +4).

Face 2 (Charm +3, Putdown +1, Connive +2, Cowboy Wisdom +4).

Relationships

You 3, The School 2.

Jock

POV: He plays sports and everyone loves him. You defend reality from the hideous things from beyond space and time and people think you're weird and creepy.

School Spirit is only worth so much—especially when the Spirit is really a great slobbering thing that lives on the astral plane and devours student souls. But you're still required to go to the pep rallies. Some Jocks are also Bullies, but even the ones that aren't active a-holes are pretty hard to deal with.

Real Deal: The Jock is under a lot of pressure. He has to perform on the field, look good and be friendly off it, and indulge in an appropriate amount of excused



delinquency without letting it ruin his game or get him in any trouble with the law that being the starting QB can't get him out of. So we should pity rather than hate and fear the Jock. Right? Hell, no. If he's nice, he's not even on your radar. If you have any contact with the Jock—outside some highly-unlikely cross-clique friendship—then the Jock is helping make your life more miserable. You've got a monster, but he got game.

Grade Level: Jocks start out in elementary school as kids who are good at sports, but in junior high, when organized sports becomes a big thing at school, the young princes get their crown. They get exponentially more powerful in high school, where athletics achieves almost religious importance in some schools.

Stats and Skills

Feet 4 (P.E. +5, Kicking +3, Dodge +3).

Guts 2 (Wind +5, Courage +2, Wrestling +3).

Hands 4 (Shop +1, Punching +4, Blocking +4).

Brains 2 (Out-Think +2, Remember +1, Notice +2, Eye On the Ball +4).

Face 3 (Charm +2, Putdown +2, Connive +2, Everybody Loves Him Even If He's a Tool +4).

Relationships

Girlfriend (a cheerleader or Your Crush) 1, The Team 3, Coach 2.

Older Brother

POV: He's annoying when he talks like he knows everything, but he really does look out for you. And unlike your parents, he really does remember what it was like to be your age. You know you can trust him. He's sometimes into stuff you don't really get, but he says you'll understand one day. So far, he's always been right about that.

Real Deal: The Older Brother is the next grade-level category ahead—if you're in elementary school he's in junior high, and if you're in junior high he's in high school. If you're in high school, he's a senior.

He's been through all the same stuff that you are currently going through. He's a valuable source of advice, and sometimes confusion when he introduces things a kid isn't ready to deal with yet. Some older brothers are jerks, but this one isn't. If you want a nasty Older Brother, then the Hood or Bully template works fine.

Grade Level

Any. The Older Brother is one category older.

Stats and Skills

Feet 3 (P.E. +3, Kicking +2, Dodge +2).

Guts 3 (Wind +3, Courage +3, Wrestling +2).

Hands 3 (Shop +2, Punching +2, Blocking +3).

Brains 3 (Out-Think +3, Remember +3, Notice +3, See that Something is Bugging You +4).

Face 4 (Charm +3, Putdown +2, Connive 3, Give Great Brotherly Advice +3).

Relationships

You 3, The Fam 2, His New S.O. 1.

O'Malley the Anti-Drug Dog

POV: “Hey, kids! Don’t do drugs!” O’Malley is a guy in a suit who comes to your school and talks about drugs, vis-à-vis that they are bad. But once he arrives, he seems to hang around for a long time. Like, weeks.

You caught him poking around in your locker yesterday, and when you got mad he said, “Somebody with nothing to hide has nothing to fear from O’Malley the Anti-Drug Dog!” And he stared at you with those big glass eyes of his.

Last night you looked outside your house and he was standing on the sidewalk, just looking at your bedroom window. By the time you got outside, he was gone.

Real Deal: O’Malley the Anti-Drug Dog is a total cipher. He hands out “Bark at Drugs!” buttons. He talks in a bouncy, cartoony voice. And finding anything out about him is impossible—he’s a figure of menace, weirdness and confusion. He’s a mystery wrapped in an enigma wrapped in a giant dog costume. And if you tell your monster to eat him, it says, “Eat who? *Nobody’s there.*”

Grade Level

O’Malley is just as freaky in elementary school as in high school, though kids might have a stronger sense of the surreal as they get older.

Stats and Skills

Feet 4 (P.E. +2, Kicking +2, Dodge +2, Vanish When You’re Not Looking +5).

Guts 2 (Wind +2, Courage +2, Wrestling +2, Implacably Cheerful Anti-Drug Message +5).

Hands 2 (Shop +0, Punching +2, Blocking +2).

Brains 5 (Out-Think +5, Remember +2, Notice +2, Track Suspected Druggies +5, Hairy Enigma +5).

Face 3 (Charm +2, Putdown +2, Connive +2, Dopey Cartoonish Persona +4).

Relationships

None. Even the cops can’t remember hiring him. But they must have . . . right?

**EVERYBODY
ELSE**

Parents

POV: Yeah, you know they love you, at least in a theoretical way. But they just don't get you. And sure, you love them—not that you want to walk with them at the mall anymore. It's just that they're parents, you know? They're the opposite of cool. If you mixed them with cool, the resulting explosion would destroy us all. Parents mean trouble—and keeping them in the dark as much as possible is mission-critical.

Real Deal: They know more than they let on, and when they say “I understand,” they usually really do. Being a kid is confusing enough, and now that it's complicated by MySpace, cell phones, metal detectors at school, No Child Left Behind, and monsters, it must be awful for the poor little ones.

Parents remember wiping poopie off their kids' butts, and that makes it hard to take the teen-drama thing too seriously, even if they do remember what it was like for them. No parent is perfect, but most really do want good things for their kids.

Grade Level

They're parents. First you worship them, then you resent them, then you hate them, and one day you learn to like them.

Stats and Skills

Feet 2 (P.E. +2, Kicking +2, Dodge +2, Come Home at Worst Possible Time +4).

Guts 3 (Wind +2, Courage +3, Wrestling +2).

Hands 2 (Shop +2, Punching +2, Blocking +2).

Brains 3 (Out-Think +3, Remember +3, Notice +3, Read Their Kids +4, Make Money at a Job +3).

Face 3 (Charm +3, Putdown +2, Connive +2, Mommy/Daddy +4).

Relationships

You 3, Each Other 2, Family 1.

Paparazzi

POV: You know what's worse than being a kid in this dumpy little town? Being a kid in this dumpy little town with people shouting at you and taking pictures all the time.

The real media furor over monsters died down a couple of years ago, but whenever there's any kind of big stink or throwdown, the jackals come out, and it's flashbulbs and telephoto lenses and guys rooting around in your trash to see what kind of toothpaste you use.

And they never use the pic where you're looking cool, the wind is making

your hair float and your monster is gazing lovingly at you. Nope, on the cover of *Sensation Weekly* it's always a shot where you look like a crazed druggie and your monster is snarling at the camera like a rabid kill-crazed squid.

Real Deal: Monsters are legitimate news in fits and starts, but sensational news pretty consistently. People want to know what kids with monsters are doing. The tabloids have their darlings—usually pretty blonde kids—but are equally likely to do a screwjob on them if they think nasty headlines will sell more rag.

A Paparazzo is almost certain to get a pic of something a kid would rather not have on film. It's a question then of how far he and his monster are willing to take things to get it back.

Grade Level

These guys have no respect. They'll take pictures of you at 10 as happily as at 18. The headlines will differ though—"Parents Let Child Play With Monster" instead of "Violent Teen Unleashes Terrible Trained Beast."

Stats and Skills

Feet 3 (P.E. +3, Kicking +2, Dodge +2, Lurk Outside Waiting to Ambush You +4).

Guts 3 (Wind +2, Courage +3, Wrestling +2).

Hands 3 (Shop +1, Punching +1, Blocking +2, Snap a Pic +5).

Brains 4 (Out-Think +2, Remember +3, Notice +3, Ear for Scandal +4).

Face 3 (Charm +3, Putdown +2, Connive +5, Press Pass +3).

Relationships

The B----- Editor 2.

Random Crazy

POV: Oh Jeez, that guy smells bad. You feel sorry for him because he's homeless or something, but man, he's totally nuts. Your monster is skittish around him, too. He says the crazy guy is like a radio station broadcasting nothing but static and curse words, and he'll attract only the wrong kind of attention doing that.

But the crazy guy just won't move along—he follows and he spouts crazy-talk that just almost makes sense. And weirder, he can totally see your monster even when it's hiding, and this either freaks him out or sends him into ecstatic laughter. If you give him a few bucks he goes away for a while, but he always seems to find you again.

Real Deal: A Random Crazy might just be an unfortunate with mental issues, but is more likely aware of the supernatural and driven over the edge by terrible insights he can't forget. He might have started out like a wizard, or perhaps he's psychic, or he suffered a trauma at the hands of an otherworldly being.

His crazy is a potentially insightful crazy. He can see monsters and other things, and perhaps offer useful information on them. Or he might attack with a sharpened bean-can lid and rant about picking up Rush Limbaugh on his fillings.

Grade Level

Other than the experience being more frightening when you're younger, being accosted by a Random Crazy can happen to anyone.

Stats and Skills

Feet 2 (P.E. +2, Kicking +1, Dodge +1, Shuffle Around at Remarkable Speed +4).

Guts 1 (Wind +2, Courage +1, Wrestling +2, Turtle Up and Weep +5).

Hands 2 (Shop +2, Punching +2, Blocking +2, Cut you with a Homemade Pigsticker +3).

Brains 2 (Out-Think +1, Remember +1, Notice +3, See the Naked Horrors Hidden Under Reality +5).

Face 1 (Charm +1, Putdown +1, Connive +4, Freak You Out +5).

Relationships

The Voices In His Head 3, His Shrink 2, The Guy Who Shares His Cardboard Box 1.

Teacher

POV: Your day-to-day adversaries. They see you more than your parents, they know how to push your buttons, and they hold your future in their nicotine-stained fingers. They are the Tom to your Jerry.

Teachers come in lots of sizes and flavors, but all are united in their hostility towards shenanigans and tomfoolery. And what's life without tomfoolery? It's bleak, boring, and awful, that's what.

Real Deal: Teachers are caught in a weird place, lauded as heroes by politicians and paid crap to do a really hard job. You either have to really care about teaching or you have to be a burnout punching the clock till retirement. Teachers have it rough, but that won't stop them from the putting the smack down if kids and their monsters get out of line. Few things get a parent more riled than a call from a teacher.

Grade Level

You got school, you got teachers.

Stats and Skills

Feet 2 (P.E. +2, Kicking +1, Dodge +1).

Guts 3 (Wind +2, Courage +3, Wrestling +1, Fight the System for the Kids/Slog Through Thankless Miserable Day +4).

Hands 2 (Shop +2, Punching +2, Blocking +2, Throw Chalk +4).

Brains 4 (Out-Think +3, Remember +4, Notice +3, Spot a Cheater +3).

Face 3 (Charm +2, Putdown +2, Connive +1, Instill the Joy of Learning/Put the Fear of an “F” Into the Little Punks +4).

Relationships

Secret Feelings for Another Teacher 2, Family 2, The Children 2 or The Paycheck 2.

Trenchcoat Mafioso

POV: Voted “Most Likely to Go Postal and Shoot Up the School.” You know this kid—he’s angry and frightening and pathetic and unpredictable in equal measure. He fringes on geek and hood turf. He has a thing for medieval cutlery. He glares. He listens to death metal. He wears a trench coat. His social skills are not great.

It’s like he decided that if he couldn’t be liked, then being feared was pretty good—at least better than being mocked and humiliated and beaten up. The Trenchcoat Mafioso doesn’t have much to offer in the way of extracurricular fun. He’s too busy brooding, being unhappy, and cleaning his reproduction katana.

Real Deal: This kid is wound really tight. He’s got all the warning signs—he’s starting fires, he’s hurting animals, he’s wetting the bed. He’s got a bone to pick with the whole world, and it’s only a matter of time before he does something crazy. If his uncle has an unlocked gun cabinet, it might be shooting. If he has a monster, it might be something much, much worse.

If the Trenchcoat Mafioso decides the PCs are part of the conspiracy of hateful a-holes which persecute him, then they might have to make a nasty decision, and their monsters might have to take decisive and fatal action. Not how you want to remember your freshman year.

Grade Level

This kid has a definite high school vibe. It takes that long to build up his level of resentment and repressed rage.

Stats and Skills

Feet 2 (P.E. +2, Kicking +1, Dodge +4).

Guts 3 (Wind +2, Courage +4, Wrestling +2).

Hands 3 (Shop +2, Punching +2, Blocking +2, Learned to Shoot With Survivalist Uncle +3).

Brains 2 (Out-Think +3, Remember +2, Notice +2, Remember Every Wrong Ever Done to Him +5).

Face 2 (Charm +1, Putdown +3, Connive +2, Make People Think He's Craaazy +4).

Relationships

Gun-Nut (or Wizard) Uncle 3, Pet Pitbull Mix 2.

Younger Sister

POV: She's so annoying. Always into your stuff. Always following you around, asking stupid questions about your monster. She's impossible! Your parents tell you to be nice to her, and to take her with you when you go out, but Jeez, they have no idea! How could you and she have come from the same family?

But—and you'll totally kill anyone who says you said so—one time you had your monster swallow a guy who was picking on her. He was totally fine afterwards. He just needed a few stitches, and a little therapy. But you're the only one who's allowed to pick on your little sister.

Real Deal: The Younger Sister is always around, so she has to be in the same grade-level category as her older sibling, but one or two years younger. So if you're in fifth grade, she's in third, but you're both in elementary school. She's so annoying because she idolizes her older sibling and she secretly hopes that monsters run in families.

Grade Level

Any.

Stats and Skills

Feet 2 (P.E. +2, Kicking +1, Dodge +1, Sneak Around After You +4).

Guts 2 (Wind +2, Courage +4, Wrestling +1).

Hands 2 (Shop +1, Punching +1, Blocking +2, Jimmy Your Lock +3).

Brains 2 (Out-Think +3, Remember +2, Notice +3, Knows What You're Up To +4).

Face 2 (Charm +3, Putdown +1, Connive +3, Get You in Trouble With Parents +5).

Relationships

You 3, Parents 2, Crush on Your Best Friend 1.



CAMPAIGN JUMPSTARTS

Campaign jumpstarts are just what they sound like: Ways for a time-challenged GM to jumpstart a new campaign. If *Monsters and Other Childish Things* is a car, and the players are the noisy, hungry, impatient passengers, then you must be the driver. Let's jump this thing off and hit pavement.

Welcome to Pluto

When they decided that Pluto wasn't really a planet, the town went sort of crazy and it hasn't been the same since. Lots of stuff people thought was carefully buried got stirred up again. Lots of people suddenly had things that they had to deal with. Pluto, California, went from a sleepy, comfortably run-down cottage community to a more popular beach town, and came into its own as the center of weirdness, scandal, class rivalry, and sensational murder on the American West Coast.

Pluto is a town divided between the classes. The rich rule the Westside, with all their beachfront houses and gated communities. The poor—most of whom work for the rich directly or indirectly—live on the Eastside. All the kids go to Pluto High, though, and friction and rivalry is pretty intense.

Pluto is also a town where stars too weird or scandalous for Hollywood go to live in modest seclusion. The matinee idol who got caught with the bellboy; the old starlet who's had so much surgical work she has to hide her immobile face behind a veil; the director of such famous children's films as *Hector Goes Home* and *Hector Goes to Australia* who gave up his lucrative career to produce experimental features such as *Breast Tissue Autopsy Beach Party* and *Pooping on the Christ*.

Lots of drugs move through Pluto just to feed the Hollywood crowd's insatiable hunger for blow and speed. There's even a little branch office of the Yakuza down from Seattle to run the trade. Mr. Komi is a really pleasant old fellow, who'll laugh with you over sake before cutting your throat with a straight razor. If asked how he ended up in such a lousy town, he'll smile sadly, vaguely wave his three-fingered left hand in the air and say, "Man is a creature of folly and hope."

And then there are all the mystics, cultists, psychics, occultists, cabalists, and assorted other mixed nuts who all wander into town, attracted by the prospect of gullible Hollywood types to fleece, or the charged metaphysical atmosphere of the town. It's a weird sort of a place, when you get under the surface.

Default Grade Level

High school. In "Welcome to Pluto" you get the teen dramatics mixing with real-world crime, high school angst contrasting with occult horrors. It's about mysteries, and things like sex, drugs, gambling, stealing, blackmail, and other popular pastimes. The themes of class war also don't really start hitting hard until high school, where the poor kids and the rich kids end up cohabiting in the same school.

Themes

This one deals with mysteries—ideally, personal ones—which overlap and intermingle with daily concerns. People turn to monster-keepers as a last resort, and ask for help, usually when dealing with some weird personal issue that crosses a PC's big personal mystery.

Inspirations

Veronica Mars, mostly, and the excellent film *Brick*.

Who Knows What?

The revelation of monsters happened a few years back, and people have been able to more or less get used to the idea. Kids with monsters are still outcasts—it's just too weird—but the SWAT teams don't show up anymore, and so long as your monster doesn't do anything too crazy, people treat you like someone with a bizarre pet. Monsters are strictly forbidden on school grounds, on pain of expulsion, but they can hide so well, who's to know?

Monsters and Kids

Kids with monsters in “Welcome to Pluto” are on one hand treated as suspicious, weird, and scary, as outsiders and non-conformists (and not the cool kind). On the other hand, they’re also the people who get asked to help out with things—personal issues, investigations, and any hint of the occult. Until people need them, they generally ignore at best, deride at worst. When they do find they need some monstrous assistance, then, well, things are different.

Every kid in this campaign has a mystery—something they’re driven to find out for personal reasons. Who killed my best friend? Why did my mom vanish? When I passed out at that party last year and had the weird dream with the chanting, what happened between falling asleep and waking up naked on the beach with this weird tattoo on my back?

Hooks

Gang War: Two local Eastsider street gangs look like they’re going to rumble for serious over some pride thing. Some people are going to get killed, and Rico, a new member of the Eighth Street Warriors, comes to you asking you to look into it. He’s heard rumors that El Muertos have a monster in their posse, and he doesn’t want to get killed over some stupid crap.

What’s really going on with this gang war? Why would they break the truce that’s held for five years? And can you avoid getting caught up in the middle of it?

Kidnap: The daughter of one of the richest and most powerful families in Pluto vanishes from her bedroom one night. There’s no sign of forced entry or struggle. She vanished from her third-floor bedroom, and the door was locked from the inside until her father broke it in when she wouldn’t answer the door or her cell. He found a tape recorder and her left pinky finger.

The recorder had a message telling him to wait for further instructions, and not to call the police. Instead, he pulled some strings and got the M.I.B.s involved—how else could someone have gotten in and taken his darling without unnatural aid?

Suddenly anyone with a monster friend is a suspect. Her little brother comes to you asking for some help because he’s afraid that his dad blew it by calling in the authorities, and that his sister is in real trouble as a result. With the M.I.B. on the case, she’s not the only one.

Bad Dice: A kid the PCs know comes up, asking for help. He’s in serious trouble with the local gambling mini-syndicate. He’s run up a crazy debt with them, and rather than money they want him to steal files from his dad—the county sheriff.

The files relate to whatever Big Mystery Case the PCs are hung up in. Do they work things so that they end up with the files? Do they prove that the syndicate cheated the kid out of his money, and they need to lay off? Do they help him swipe the files to cover his marker?

Who Knows What?

Everyone knows just about everything. Some kids have monster friends. Monsters are sort of scary but also really cool, and they can sometimes do wondrous magical things. There's some controversy about putting kids through things like the XMFL, but the spokesman for the league scoffs at such complaints, and points to the number of XMFL trainers who are now going to great colleges on what they won in the league. He doesn't say anything about how many of those trainers are on serious psychotropic medication while recovering from the loss of their monster friends.

Monsters and Kids

Trainers (as kids with monsters are known) are famous. Their friends do the impossible on command. Some are looking at careers in search and rescue, some in heavy construction, others in exploration. But lots of trainers get sucked into using their monster friends for public spectacle and entertainment. As the human face of a monster, a trainer is recognized like a celebrity, and hounded by people looking for autographs and a look at their monster. Fame can really suck.

Hooks

A Monster Head In Your Bed: With all the money being wagered on your fights, it was only a matter of time before someone made you an offer: Take this lovely suitcase full of cash and this new Nintendo Wii, and see to it that Toothy Lucy takes a dive in the fourth round. In case these lovely gifts aren't incentive enough, here is a picture we took of your mom. Note the crosshairs. Almost like we were pointing a rifle at her instead of a camera. So, do we have a deal?

The Fan: It's bad enough you saw the slashfic they're writing about you on the Internet, but now you have to deal with psycho fans all the time. This one guy always seems to get backstage at all your fights. He's there, waiting to ask you inane questions about what you feed your monster, or why he used his Corrosive Slime attack rather than his Heel-Spurs attack, as his acid glands were already in bad shape by the third round. He starts calling you at home. He starts showing up at your school. He starts trying to break into your house. How do you deal with him without letting your monster make lunch of him?

Ugly Secrets

The thing that lives under your bed just showed up one day, like a puppy in the rain. Sad, horrific and pathetic. You couldn't turn it away, but what is it? Scary, that's what. When your stepfather came home, and he had that look like he was going to touch you in the wrong way again, the thing from under the bed dragged him under and made noises like a dog with a shoe. Your stepfather's heels pounded the floor but he couldn't scream because it sounded like something was being

shoved down his throat. Afterwards your new friend even licked the blood out of the carpet.

When your Mom got home, she asked about your stepfather, but you said he went out for more beer and smokes, and she believed you. When he didn't come home, she cursed him, and then you heard her crying after you were supposed to be asleep. Your friend pulled up the covers for you, and then slipped back under the bed. Now he's just one more ugly secret for you to keep.

Default Grade Level

Elementary school. The horrors of this setting hit the hardest when they happen to and involve really young kids. This makes for some pretty uncomfortable possibilities, and nobody should have to deal with issues they don't want to deal with in a game that's supposed to be fun.

It's possible to play this setting for gallows humor, like an *Addams Family* comic strip. But it's also possible to play it serious, and deal with some of the terrible things that can happen to kids. When it's about older kids, the impact is less—which might be exactly what you want.

Themes

By far the most serious of these sample campaigns, "Ugly Secrets" deals with the awful things that can happen to kids in our society, and with the possible reactions and choices such a kid might make if suddenly given the power to do real serious damage to their tormentors.

Inspirations

Stephen King's *Carrie*. The anime series *Kite*. The intense desire to visit horrific punishments upon those who commit terrible crimes on the weak and the innocent.

Who Knows What?

Nobody knows anything. The PCs are the only kids with monster friends any of them know about—and they only just met their scary new friends. Their monsters spy out others of their kind, and the PCs get together however they want. It's all brand new. Other kids sense something weird about the PCs, but they can't name it. Whether they keep their secrets, or blow the whole thing wide open is their choice. Consequences is a major theme for this thing.

Monsters and Kids

Kids with monsters have only just met them, within a week or less of the start of the game. They're still getting used to the idea. Their monsters are also wary of flashing their mojo for all to see. They will if they have to or are told to, but stick to hiding if they can get away with it.

Hooks

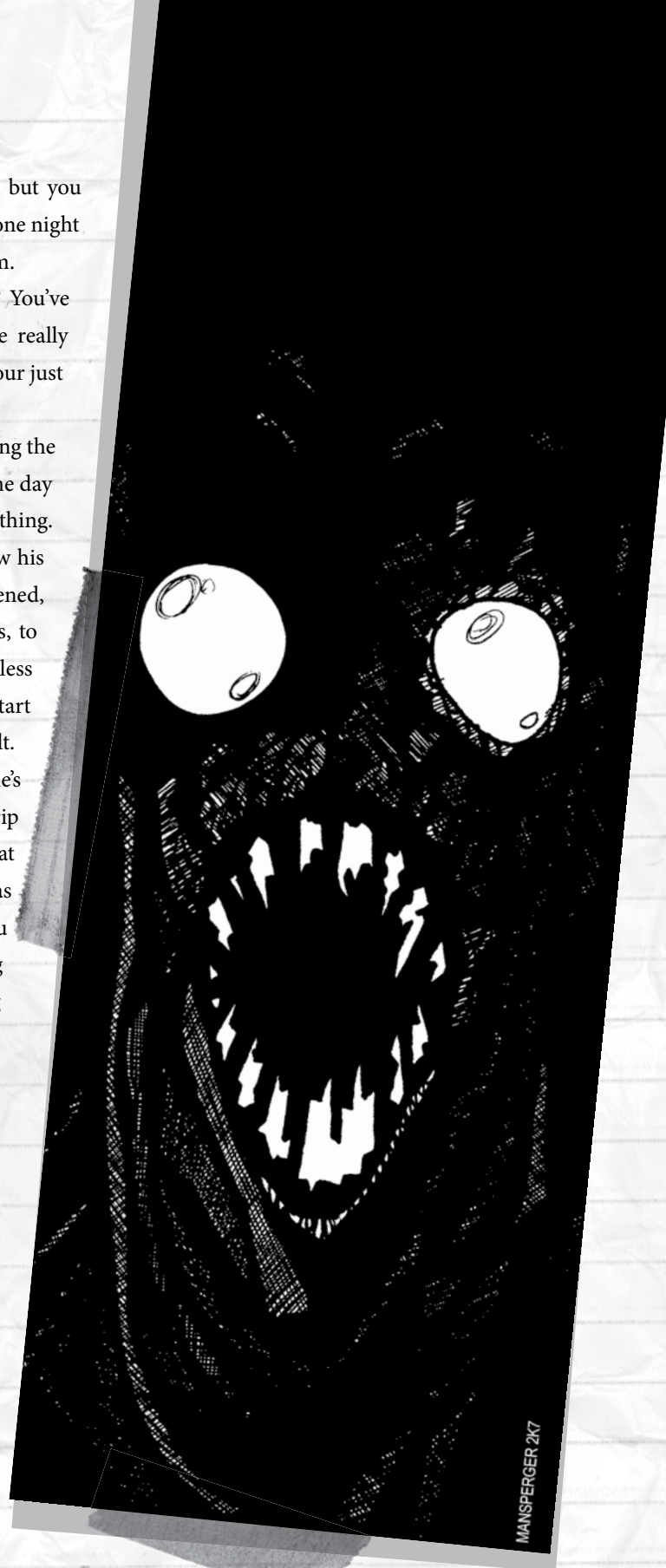
Bodies: Your monster keeps killing people. Bad people, sure, but you can't hide any more bodies in the big freezer in the garage, and one night soon your Mom is going to go out for frozen peas and find them.

How do you get rid of the bodies without getting caught? You've watched enough *CSI* to know about how it works, so you're really freaked out about leaving DNA or something on the corpses. Your just monster licks blood from his talons and looks innocent.

Devil, I Cast Thee Out: You and your monsters start attracting the attention of the local mega-church's fiery pastor. He sees you one day and turns white, and gets away as fast as he can. He saw something. Something most adults totally miss. He saw your monster. Now his latent tendencies for paranoia and religious mania have ripened, and he starts a program to capture and cleanse you and yours, to drive off the demons that plague you. When he finds he's powerless against your monsters, he'll suffer a crisis of faith, perhaps, and start looking for more specialized expertise in dealing with the occult.

Crap or Get Off the Pot: You're looking down at him and he's crying, peeing himself, begging you not to let your monster rip him open and eat his innards. Your most hated enemy, entirely at your mercy. It's in your power to end him now—as fast or slow as you like. To extract as much pain from him as he put on you. You can't help trying to balance the accounts in your head, looking back at what he did, and how you came to have him cowering before you like this.

Flashback, one month ago. . .





Monsters and Other Childish Things is a really stripped-down and simplified version of the One-Roll Engine rules found in *Wild Talents* (available from Arc Dream Publishing). If you want to take the concepts presented here and port them into the full *Wild Talents* rules, here's how.

Optional Rules

Use the Shaking It Off rule for kids (*Wild Talents* first edition, page 26), so they can use Willpower to moderate any damage to themselves or their monsters.

Characters

Create your kid using the normal *Wild Talents* character creation rules. A good point total to build a kid is 250 points, but to reflect their larval status no stat or skill should be higher than 3d without a good, GM-approved reason.

Archetype

Use the following archetype as the basis for a *Monsters*-style kid-with-monster character. Additional sources, intrinsics and permissions to enhance this archetype can be found in the *Wild Talents* rulebook (pages 49 to 56):

Monster Friend [30 points]

Source: Extra-Dimensional (free)

Permissions: Power Theme (monster friend, 5 points)

Intrinsics: Resilient (10 points); Aces 5d (flaw: only to boost monster's dice pools; 15 points)

Description: You're a kid with a freaky extra-dimensional monster friend. This power theme is built by purchasing the Sidekick miracle (*Wild Talents*, page 109), and then using the Attached flaw (*Wild Talents*, page 69) to link other powers to your Sidekick. Monsters frequently have the Bad Dog flaw found in the Sidekick miracle description.

Relationships

These are simply handled with investments of Base Will points (*Wild Talents*, page 22). The more Willpower you have, the better you're able to help your monster out with the Aces miracle built into your archetype—and relationships are a quick way to build your Willpower back up again.

Monsters

The Sidekick power gives you a basic monster you can summon to help you. With the full *Wild Talents* rules, you can create just about any kind of monster with whatever weird powers you can imagine by attaching other powers to Sidekick. To reflect the “basic monster” stuff described above, use the following powers:

'They Aren't From Around Here' and 'Monsters Look After Their Kids'

The first one is a basic function of the Sidekick miracle. A Sidekick can ordinarily survive wherever you can survive, which for a 10-year-old kid isn't a whole lot of places when you consider the universe. Remedy this by attaching a few levels of the Immunity miracle (*Wild Talents*, page 96) to Sidekick, so when your monster accompanies you, you gain protection from environmental harm.

'Monsters Are Good at Hiding'

This is also a function of Sidekick. When the miracle isn't turned on, your monster can just be hanging around close by somewhere waiting to help you. If you want a monster who will leap to your defense even if you don't know what's coming, then add the Unconscious extra (*Wild Talents*, page 68), or for an even more protective monster add Reflexive (also page 68).

'Monsters Can't Die'

Again, this is just how Sidekick works. If your monster is "killed" it really just vanishes back to wherever it hides, to be summoned up again with the expenditure of some Willpower when you need it.

'Monsters Know Each Other'

Attach the Detect (monsters and monster kids) power to Sidekick for a monster who can sense another monster. Get the power without attaching it to Sidekick if you can sort of sense what your monster senses, meaning you can use that power even when you haven't summoned your monster.

'The Only Thing That Can Stop a Monster Is Another Monster'

Buy lots of really dangerous powers for your monster. Heavy Armor blocks damage, Harm inflicts it, Projected Hallucination can drive someone mad, with Radius it can affect everyone in a big area. With monsters as the only source for superpowers in the setting (or at least the only one generally known), ordinary people are going to be really, really out of their depths when dealing with them.

For example, one level of Immunity (universal) combined with 30 levels of the Hardened extra (total cost 76 points) allows a monster to totally ignore 11 Killing and 11 Shock in damage every single round. It can laugh at heavy bombs! Is a special tactical truancy squad going to make a dent in it? And with a single level of the Multiple Targets extra for 8 more points, the monster can apply the same protection to his kid. But by applying a flaw to your monster's defensive powers, you make it vulnerable to the attacks of other monsters or their kids.

"Just quit squirming in there! People will see!"

"How could that be worse than them hearing you talk to your backpack?"

"I don't want anyone to know you're in there."

"People will just think you have a puppy or something. I WISH you had a puppy in here. Your science book tastes like butt."

"I have science second period! Don't eat the book!"

"What am I supposed to eat? Your Literature book just made me hungrier. And now I have to make boom-boom, too. Any chance we can hit the can before home room?"

"No, we're late already. They assigned me to a different room, and I have a different schedule, and none of my friends are in any of these classes. . . ."

"Sounds weird. Sounds—hey, it sounds like someone is messing with you! I could, you know, go talk to the principal for you. I'm pretty sure that's the kind of thing that friends do for friends, right? Like, I could pull off his limbs until he gave you back your classes, and then you could show me where to hide the body. We'd be total BFFs if we shared a murder!"

"No! No more killings! God, we've only known each other for like a few days, how come we're best friends now?"

"We just are. You know how you can smell bacon cooking, and you know there's a delicious plate of crispy, smoky goodness waiting downstairs?"

"Yeah. . . ."

"Well, it's like that for me with friendship. You smell like bacon, kid. And . . . great, now I made myself hungrier."

"Me too! I had to skip breakfast this morning, on account of what you tried to do to the cat."

"So you understand how I'm feeling! Can I eat the science book then?"

"Well, all right. But just quit squirming."



WHAT DID YOU GET FOR CHRISTMAS?

What Did You Get for Christmas” is a starter adventure for *Monsters and Other Childish Things*. It introduces the system and many of the NPCs and adversaries in this book.

If you’re new to this whole roleplaying thing, don’t worry. Think of this kind of like a script for a play. Here you’ll find descriptions of places, people, things and events for your players’ kids and their monsters to encounter and deal with. Read it carefully, make whatever notes you want, and use it to introduce the players to the magical world of monsters.

You can run this adventure either as a one-shot or as the jumping-off point for a campaign. Think of it as the pilot to a TV series, taking the characters from initial confusion and a reactive stance through catching their balance and finally becoming proactive so they can solve the big problem and uncover a bunch of others. If you run it as a one-off, well, there are scads of failed pilots out there, too, lurking in the alleys of TV City, begging for spare change.

The pregenerated characters (page 146) are deliberately simple, allowing players and the GM to interpret them with a good deal of latitude.



Where Does This Thing Go Down?

The setting is pretty generic. It is roughly *now*, and things go down in the smallish city of your choice. I imagined California when I wrote it, for the beaches, sea cliffs and echoes of *Buffy*, *Veronica Mars* and *90210*. Oh, and *The Breakfast Club*, although that has nothing to do with California. Still . . . *doooooon't you . . . forget about me . . . Don't don't don't don't!*

The action begins at Randolph Carter Junior High, a fairly typical mid-size school in an unremarkable city . . . or it was before the winter holidays. The usual problems predominate: the cruel domination of the Jockocracy, cliquish girls obsessed with themselves, bullies, standardized testing run amok, pimples, an unreliable voice that'll crack when you least expect it, bumpy bus rides, pressure to quit being a kid and grow up, and grown-ups who still see you as nothing but little kids.

But something happened to all the PCs over the holidays. They each made a new *f(r)iend*. As far as each kid knows, he or she is the only one in the world with a monster. Then they get to school and it turns out there are a few more.

The rest of the world is just as it was yesterday. But today, some kids have monsters.

What's Really Going On

If you're planning on playing in this adventure, you might want to skip this bit. Or, like, you could read it and then don't let on, so you'll know just what to do during play. You can totally mack the GM. It'll be awesome. I promise not to tell.

Anyhow, here's the real deal on what is happening.

This adventure captures the world right on the cusp of transformation from ordinary to really weird. The PCs think they are the only ones, but it's happening here and there across the world (something to remember if you want to spin this off into a campaign). For no certain reason, and with no logical distribution, little pockets of kids are attracting and bonding with weird creatures from beyond space and time which might or might not have always been lurking around. The monsters don't know why themselves, and the reasons are beyond the scope of this adventure (but again, something to keep in mind if you go for a campaign).

What is certain is that interested parties—mad scientists, sorcerers, black-bag spooks, crazies, and other, weirder things—have taken an immediate interest. They have moved in to observe, persecute, incarcerate, vivisect, or masticate (as their predilections dictate) these kids and their beasties. Upon arriving back at school, the kids find that their class schedule has been changed, their favorite staff members replaced, and each of them is in a new home room with 21 nobodies and five other kids with monsters lurking around somewhere.

From here, things start getting tense. A series of scenes explore how their favorites have all been replaced, as well as forcing them together to contend with some flagrant weirdness. Then they will have the chance to do something about it. The final acts of the adventure will determine whether the reality of monsters becomes public knowledge or a secret.

The Grown-Ups

Arriving at school the first day after Christmas vacation, the kids discover that their favorite (or at least, most strongly linked) staff or faculty member has been replaced by someone (or something) else. The appearance of conspiracy is entirely coincidental. Competing forces have moved simultaneously without any sense of what the competition is doing. To see their favorite staff members restored (or at least, un-disappeared) the kids will have to unravel a bunch of separate plots and keep them from getting tangled up all together.

Here is a summary of what the various shadowy forces are up to.

MR. PHILIP MAGO: Mr. Mago is from Canada. He's quite athletic in a pasty, beanpole, bicycle-racing way. He's got a beard. It's hotter down here than it is where he's from, so he wears shorts a lot, and his legs look like long sticks of string cheese. But he's friendly enough. Too friendly, in fact. Never-gets-angry, passive-aggressive friendly. And he's the school's new coach and P.E. teacher,

The Stars Are Right . . .

. . . about all kinds of things. If you know where to look, you can find Cthulhu's phone number up there. Luckily you don't know that, seeing as how high your mobile phone bills are already. But anyone who keeps an eye on the signs can read, as if it's writ in 90-point bold flashing sparkle-text, that there have been *breaches*. Things man was not meant to hang out with have skulked back into the psycho-social sphere of humanity, and promptly made friends. With kids. Won't someone think of the children?

Yes, they will.

Unfortunately, what they think usually can be summed by:

"By the Elder Gods, their power must be mine!"

Or, "I will tear the secrets of the cosmos from their bones and flesh with the awesome power of *SCIENCE!*"

Or, "It Is The Duty of All Good Americans to Cooperate With the Authorities, So We Anticipate No Trouble Observing, Detaining, and Questioning Suspected Employers of Illegal Extra-Dimensional Laborers."

Or, "Dude! Oh, dude . . . Dude! I gotta, like . . . like . . . duuuuude."

Or, "Yummy."

replacing the winningest football coach in Randolph Carter Junior High's history, the beloved Coach Rodriguez. And beyond the ignominy of having a Canadian coaching American football, Mr. Mago doesn't even know the rules. In the first practice he let each side have only three downs. Then he said, "Oh! *American* football! Where is my brain? Ha ha! I thought you meant *real* football."

The first P.E. unit he starts is folk dancing. And if that weren't bad enough, he's also a Secret Brother of the Maple Lodge, an evil wizard (see page 94), and a power-mad little creep.

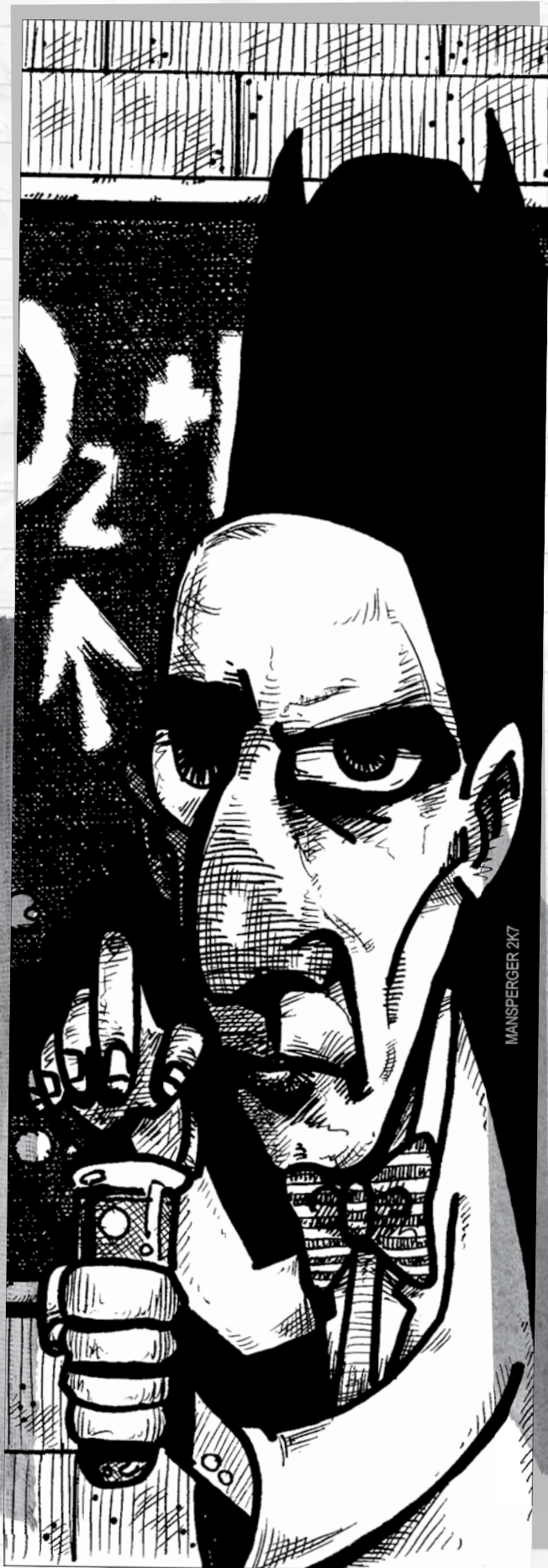
MS. PALE: She's the new assistant principal, replacing Mr. Rich. She's firm but fair, incredibly tidy and well organized, and, oh yeah, an Excruciator (see page 88) wearing the skin of Mr. Rich's ex-wife, Darla. Pale was Darla's maiden name. Mr. Rich has been confined to his home with a case of the twitching crazies that he caught after he mistook "Darla's" 3 A.M. knock on the door for a drunken booty-call rather than the raging alien munchies. She left a little something to keep an eye (or tentacle) on Rich: an Excruciator larva incubating in his septic tank. As a result, Rich is terrified of the bathroom, and has been peeing and pooing in buckets and bottles for the better part of two weeks. This state of affairs hasn't been conducive to his recovering from the crazies.

BILLY PICKMEISTER: Billy is that guy you see hanging around—the townie dropout who needs a haircut and a stern talking-to about wearing black socks with shorts and sneakers. But the socks are just really, really dirty, and Billy isn't just a bum and a mooch and a small-time drug dealer. He's a kid with a monster. Or rather, he's a 20-something Creepy Guy with a monster (see page 85).

See, monsters have crept in before. Made friends before. And most of them moved on when their kids grew up. They had a bittersweet parting, with the kid venturing into adulthood the monster into wherever monsters go. But not Billy. Billy never grew up. He remains an emotionally-weird 13-year-old in the body of a slovenly 20-something. And his monster Bugnutz is still hanging around. When Billy's monster realizes other monsters have come back, he figures its time for Billy to have friends and crazy adventures again. So he's nagged Billy into hanging around outside the school, trying to make friends. With drugs.

LUCINDA SHUMAN: Lucinda is actually Susan S. Shuman's (AKA "The Princess") monster. She's also Susan's new stepmom. Since Susan's dad came home from a trip to Vegas with Lucinda in tow . . . well. Susan's life has gotten weird. Lucinda is pure Vegas: tall, blond, leggy, big hair, wide accent. But it's all a candy coating over a gooey pink interior of horrific goo. And larvae. In order to stay close to Susan, Lucinda (who hides by seeming like a more or less normal woman) has taken the substitute English teacher position after poor Miss Kemp.

What has happened to Miss Kemp is a total red herring. She's actually fine. She caught amoebas while vacationing in Honduras and is laid up and dog-sick. At her house, the curtains are all closed off and horrible noises come from within if anyone sneaks up. She's doing a lot of throwing up, and indulging in a zombie



movie marathon. But otherwise, just fine. But that's not to say that Lucinda didn't do some, um, *questionable* things to people to get the car, teaching certificate, and clothes she needed to fill the role of sub. . . .

DR. FRANK STEIN: Dr. Stein (or *Mister Stein* as everyone calls him, much to his fury) is the new science teacher, and he's into *SCIENCE!* in a big way. He's utterly convinced that *SCIENCE!* will give Man the power to tear down God and rule in His place. Except he's a rabid atheist, so he doesn't believe in God. But he doesn't let that get in the way of a good frothing metaphor.

Under his desk he has about ten ounces of plutonium in a lead-lined case, and in his garage he has a giant robot willing to serve his ends. He puts the "mad" in "Mad Science Teacher" (page 90), and when his Aetheric Wave Transmodulator started beeping at him while he and his robot watched the ball drop on New Year's Eve, he found he had to get close to the source.

The old science teacher Mr. Jackson is currently chained up in Mr. Stein's basement among the surgical instruments and weird devices. Stein intendeds to remove his brain and put it into a cyborg body or a genetically-engineered super-gorilla or something when he gets time. But for now he's enjoying sparking the love for *SCIENCE!* in young minds, and searching for his prize.

OFFICER AGENT TAUPE: He's the school's new cop, replacing Officer Montgomery. Officer Agent Taupe is all business and dresses sharp, in regulation black suit, ear-piece, mirror shades, monotone, and dead, affectless face. Yep, he's a M.I.B. (see page 92) doing his best to blend in. Which is about as effective as screaming "IGNORE ME!" when you don't want to be seen.

The M.I.B.s can't simply whack Officer Montgomery like they were allowed to do in the 1950s (oh, the sweet, sweet '50s), so they have him in a "special detective fast-track training program" in an abandoned warehouse on the edge of town. He thinks he's going to get a quick promotion—or cooler yet, work with the feds and chase terrorists instead of pot-dealing punks. Truth is, when the Mimetic Extraction Surgical Specialist team arrives, they are going to make a M.E.S.S. of his brain.

Who's Involved In This Hullabaloo?

Here are six pregenerated characters with stats (and especially relationships) designed to hook right into this adventure. They have much sketchier backgrounds than the iconic pregens found earlier in the book. These characters have a lot of room for interpretation in play. They also have alliterative Marvel Comics-style names, and are based loosely on the archetypes from *The Breakfast Club*. If players want to use kids and monsters of their own creation, that's cool, but it would help if you insisted that they have relationships like those of these characters.

They each have a unique relationship, one with a faculty or staff member, one with another kid in the group, and one with their monster. The exact nature of these relationships are up to you and the players to define. Just remember, *relationships don't have to be positive*.

David D. Davison: The Hood

David isn't really a bad kid, but he tries to be. His dad is in jail and his mom is in and out of rehab, so usually it's just him and Grandma. But he's got a rep now as junior outlaw, a patchy goatee in the works, and some thug friends. He's in trouble a lot but stays in school because of Grandma. David's monster is **Baby Tick-Tock**, a giant clockwork baby-doll with more blades than an exploding lawnmower factory.

Jane J. Johansson: The Nut

Jane deals with the thronging, threatening masses of humanity by freaking it out and spooking it into keeping its distance. She is sort of crazy, but way more crazy when she wants you to leave her the heck alone. Her monster friend is **The Trashman**, a vaguely man-shaped ambulatory pile of trash with broken-mirror teeth, soda-bottle eyes, and black plastic skin. He likes making witty observations on life and human foibles.

Marvin M. Marshal: The Brain

Marvin is really, really smart. Smart enough to know that being smart doesn't make you popular. His mouth doesn't help. Unlike many nerds, Marvin doesn't mind saying what he thinks of people. Perhaps that's why he gets on so well with **Connie**, his floating giant orthocone monster. She's like a squid in a shell, and loves watching people fail.

Peter P. Peters: The Jock

Peter is one of those big, athletic kids who's too much in the game for anything else, such as the focused malice needed to bully or be cruel. He likes being part of a team, but now his monster is the one looking for leadership. **The Team In I** is a giant zombie football player made of regular-sized zombie football players, and it calls Peter "COACH!"

Arts and Crafts

If you want to inject some real fun into the game, here's something that worked marvelously when I ran this game at DragonCon 2007. Bring a stack of cheap paper plates, some popsicle sticks, glitter, dry macaroni, glue, and some crayons and magic markers to the game. While you're explaining everything to the players, hand out the art supplies and let them draw their monsters onto the plates. Staple the sticks to the plates, and then when the person roleplaying the monster speaks in character, they can hold up the plate like a mask. It's sort of elementary school meets Greek tragedy. When roleplaying a monster is a shared effort—say, if you hand your monster to another player or the GM when interacting with him in play—then passing the masks around makes great token for this exchange.

Also, it's hard not to get into the spirit of the thing when you're talking through a slit in a paper plate.

Susan S. Shuman: The Princess

Susan is a popular girl. She sets trends. She's pretty and she knows it. She's the sort of girl you'd hate if you didn't have such a secret crush on her. Her monster is also her new stepmom, **Lucinda**. Lucinda is tall, blond, and Vegas from her big hair to her shiny pink high heels. But the appearance of humanity is only skin-deep—inside, she's all goo and horror and fresh-baked cookies.

Walter W. Wilson: The Narc

Walter found out early that the expression “nobody likes a tattletale” is a big fat lie. Teachers like tattletales, as do cops, assistant principals and the FBI. While lots of kids would like to pound his head in, nobody dares because of his status as Junior Faculty Member. His monster is **The Watcher From the Corners of Time**, a smoky creature from the dark aeons of strange epochs who can swirl from any corner to lurk and say ominously vague things.

How Does This Go Down?

Here are some scenes to get things moving. The initial scenes happen in order, but the later ones can be arranged based on what the players decide to do. (Such as hosing your lovely adventure by being too clever.) Each scene has a list of links to other scenes; play one of those next. Each scene also lists the nonplayer characters involved and has a number of “hooks” to play out.

First Day Back: Homeroom

The characters arrive back at school to find their schedules have been totally changed, they have a new homeroom, and none of their friends are in there, but at least one familiar face is (the other kid they have a relationship with).

Characters: 20 of those generic-looking students nobody remembers after graduation, the Red Shirts of the school population.

Details: The buzz of “what did you do for Christmas?” conversations, the dumpy new homeroom, embarrassingly bad school TV “welcome back!” show, the growl and mumble of Monsters getting to know each other.

Hooks: The homeroom teacher, Mrs. Finch, is just as baffled as everyone else, but points out, if questioned: “The new assistant principle approved all changes, and they were signed by Ms. Ashe the counselor, so I suppose they’re for the best.”

The kids’ monster immediately spot the other monsters lurking about the room, so there’ll be some meet’n’greet.

The players can establish what their relationships within the group mean now.

O’Malley the Anti-Drug Dog (page 107) comes to speak to the class like they are a bunch of five-year-olds. He hams it up, but is . . . creepy. Especially when the characters realize the monsters can’t see or hear him at all.

Links: Persecuted by the Anti-Drug Dog.

Persecuted By the Anti-Drug Dog

After homeroom, the bell rings, and everyone scrabbles to their lockers—which they find have been reassigned so they are all right next to each other. Everyone gets their books, and the lights flicker. Down at the end of the hall, O'Malley lurks in a pool of light. And then behind the kids, the lights go out. In a pool of flickering florescent, O'Malley advances like a still-motion film.

This is time for freaky imagery. The monsters can't see him. He chases and stalks the characters through the suddenly-abandoned hallways. The monsters holler, "What's going on here?" But O'Malley *won't do anything but menace them*.

If they round on him, and manage to capture him somehow, he'll pull off his head and it'll be a kid from the next grade. The real O'Malley paid him \$50 to help "Teach a lesson about drugs!"

This is a chance to play with dice rolling for things like running away or chasing. The monsters can't really help; they can't see O'Malley at all. So the character will get to roll some of their own dice, and possibly throw in some relationships too.

Characters: O'Malley.

Details: Freaky lighting effects and horror-movie distortion of distance. O'Malley's laugh and "Bark at Drugs!" slogans are weirdly distorted, as if uttered in a sick, malevolent whisper inside a sick, malevolent garbage can.

Hooks: O'Malley chases and torments the characters without actually ever attacking them or anything. Basically he'll chase (or be chased) until things reach a dramatic pitch.

If caught, O'Malley pulls off his head and it's a kid from around the school who says, "Wait, wait! Like, O'Malley gave me fifty bucks to help him out! Look, I even have a tape recorder with his voice!" He's a patsy who poops himself and passes out if he sees a monster un-hidden.

The sounding of the class bell snaps reality back into place—but the characters have missed their first class!

Assistant Principal Pale is there, tisking: "Skipping class? And on the first day back from the holidays. Well kids, my office. Now."

Links: Assistant Principal Pale's Office.

Assistant Principal Pale's Office

The characters are dragged into Ms. Pale's office for a dressing down regarding their class-skipping. Her office is impossibly neat. Every bit of Mr. Rich's clutter and 25-year chaos is gone. There is a dish of hard candy on the desk, but the candy is very, very bitter. Pale attacks the PCs with her Putdown skill. Obviously they can't attack back—although their monsters beg them to—but they can use defensive actions to avoid emotional damage.

Characters: Ms. Pale.

Details: Impossibly neat office. There aren't even any dust motes in the beams of sunlight streaming in through the window. Pale's cool, superior stare. She has a

special barb for everyone, needling them about how their loved ones (she knows everyone by name) would be so disappointed. Their permanent records are open on her desk.

Hooks: Pale uses her Putdown skill to attack each character in turn while dressing them down, trying to cause some damage and get a snack off them.

The monsters will be seriously irritated by the dressing-down (but won't notice anything occult going on) and might need some calming down so they don't do something dumb (either now or later, to Ms. Pale's car, say).

Anyone who eats one of Ms. Pale's bitter candies isn't going to be feeling well by the evening. They're really Excruciator egg-cysts. Monsters who eat them will barf. A kid who eats one will end up with a tentacled monster incubating in his or her innards, which will pass on after a week or so in a very unpleasant bathroom episode. Eat plenty of fiber. It's possible to use super-science devices found in Mr. Frank's house or magic devices found in Coach Mago's condo to shrink the monsters down to tiny size, so the kid can swallow them and they can all fight it out in his stomach and intestines. If the monsters kills the teeny Excruciator (which has normal stats compared to the shrunk-down monsters), then the kid will be fine. Otherwise, he'll take a 10d called shot against his Guts when he goes potty.

After giving them the business, she'll let them off with a warning—but hurry on to your next class!

While passing their lockers, the kids find Officer Agent Taupe searching them, while O'Malley the Anti-Drug Dog looks on from down the hall. Taupe runs a CSI-style cotton swab along their lockers, nods, mumbles into his collar-mounted microphone, nods, and walks off, leaving their lockers rifled and open.

Links: Next class (pick the class you want, perhaps focused on the character of the player who seems least engaged).

Science Class

Mr. (DOCTOR!) Frank Stein is staring out the window, mumbling to himself when the students start to arrive. He's saying things like, "NO . . . no, my friend . . . the time is . . . not yet right. . . ." Anyone who cares to can make a Brains + Notice roll to spot what he's mumbling to: a hulking shape way out on the other side of the parking lot and running track. Sort of man-like. Sort of man-like robot-like.

When everyone sits, Stein rounds on them, eyes wide and totally mad, and says: "SCIENCE! The discipline of the human mind by which Man supplants God as the supreme power for creation . . . and . . . *destruction*." If you can get into ranty-mode, run with it. Stand up, and loom over your players. Ramble on for a few minutes about the glories of SCIENCE! and the ultimate quest, the creation of LIFE.

He then looks sort of uncomfortable for a few moments, and says, "But today's lesson plan is . . . ah . . . the *periodic table of elements*!" If you can do it, rant a bit more about the Periodic Table, then get distracted. Say, "For example

... this element ... *plutonium*. Sweet, sweet plutonium. With the power of this philosopher's stone, you can ... if you are fearless ... and willing to sacrifice ... create ... *LIFE!*"

If pressed about it, he whips out his case from under the desk and shows everyone his plutonium.

At some point, O'Malley glares in through the window in the hallway door. Just to keep things unsettling.

Characters: Dr. Frank Stein, anonymous classmates.

Details: The smell of chemicals, sweat and madness. The room is in chaos. Weird formulae have been scrawled on the board. The TV and the computers have been taken apart, and are mashed into a weird conglomeration half-finished in the corner. On the desk, dozens of prescription pill bottles, spilling out into a rainbow of meds. The potted plants around Mr. Stein's ("DOCTOR Stein!") desk are wilting and dying.

Hooks: Mr. Stein's plutonium is irradiating the room. All the kids are taking dangerous doses of radiation except the PCs, who are protected by their monsters. It's not immediately relevant, but a possible future hook, and something the monsters might point out of the PCs ask about the danger.

Stein scans the room with a weird gadget which looks suspiciously like the ghost-scanner from *Ghostbusters*. When he passes it over the PCs he grins and mumbles to himself, and makes a note in his teacher's planner.

Stein tries to engage the kids' imagination with his crazy science ranting. If anyone shows even the slightest interest he gloms onto them, and will from then on greet them heartily in the hallways as "*Comrade!* How goes the *great work?*" He'll invite his new little comrade over to his house at some point, and this should seem ... inappropriate. "I have a bottle of the '73 Bergoix! Come, we'll decant it while we discuss my theories on dimensional cross-linking!"

Anyone who sees Stein being pally with the kids and acts suspicious—especially other staff—is going to be absent from school the next day. And for a while afterward. Like, always.

Links: Next class (choose one); Lunch.

English Class

Again, arriving at class the kids find their regular teacher has been replaced. Only this time, it's by someone one of their number will recognize: Susan's monster-mother, Lucinda. And she has cookies. What she doesn't have is any idea how to actually teach English. During class, the kids can discuss strategy or whatever. Once during class a Brains + Notice roll hears a low moan from under the teacher's desk. Lucinda—Mrs. Shuman—gives a little kick under there and it goes quiet again.

After class, Lucinda asks for help "With a teensy tiny little problem." There's a Mary Fay Cosmetics lady currently knocked unconscious and cocooned in

Lucinda's quick-hardening pink goo under her desk. "Oh, when I saw that pink car, I just knew it was meant to be mine! But this woman said I was wrong, so I squirted her and stuffed her under my desk. And you said I wasn't supposed to kill people." If asked about the old teacher, Lucinda will look cagey and say, "I don't know *ANYTHING* about that, dear."

Characters: Lucinda, Sue-Anne Lacey the Mary Fay Cosmetics regional sales champ, anonymous classmates.

Details: In class, the sunny bright smell of fresh baked cookies, and the occasional groan from under Mrs. Shuman's desk.

Hooks: Sneaking out to the parking lot during class is a no-no. Kids might be trying to get drugs from a car. And where there's the possibility of drugs, there's O'Malley.

Mrs. Lacey doesn't remember much—one too many blows to the head—but the kids have got to somehow deal with smuggling her out of the school and getting her to a hospital . . . with lots of folks watching.

If they go outside, they'll be spotted by Billy Pickmeister (or his monster, at least), and he'll try to get their attention from the other side of the chain-link fence. "Hey! Hey, kids! Come over, let's talk! I have . . . uh . . . like . . . *CANDY!*" If they don't go over, he'll start following them around when they leave school grounds.

They will also be spotted by a M.I.B. antenna van with three M.I.B.s in it, and they'll notice the antennas rotate to follow them.

Regardless, the danger of Mrs. Lacey's memory returning should dog the kids for a while.

Links: Next class (choose one); Billy's Candy Van; Black Vans and Tissue Samples; Lunch.



P.E.

Time to dress out for P.E. With a new teacher. Coach Mago is a tall, skinny Canadian with no idea how to play American football. Worse, the first unit is folk dancing. "I may not know your American football, but I darn well know your American square dance! Come on, form a circle!"

An Awareness + Notice roll reveals the somewhat unusual patterns he has marked out in blue tape on the outdoor basketball court

where everyone is supposed to dance (in full view of anyone passing by, not to mention kids laughing at them from the classroom windows).

After a while the dancing starts and he calls the moves in some inhuman eldritch tongue (“Well, it’s French, of course. Learned it in Quebec. Now swing your partner—or should I say, *vhoorl wgah’nagi fhtagn!*”), and things get suspicious enough that no roll is even needed. There’s something funny going on here, don’t cha’know.

What is it all *aboot*? Well, the monsters start feeling queasy and start complaining about the dance, trying to convince their kids to quit. If they do, Mago will send them to “Oh, what is it called? Take a lap? Yes, please do that.” The queasy monsters feel better for being away from the Elder Square Dance, but the menacing occult forces keep rising. Then the bell rings, and all the weirdness stops. “OK, kids, see you tomorrow!”

Characters: Mr. Mago, anonymous classmates.

Details: Lots of monster grumbling. Taking a lap is HOT. Mago comes over as a hokey granola type, but he’s got a core of terrible occult ambition which comes out as he calls the Square Dance of the Elder Gods. After the dance, the court smells like burned hair and bad kimchi.

Hooks: If they convince their monsters to keep quiet (a Motivation roll; see page 46), then they’ll pick up an occult tracer, something that’ll let Mago trace their movements and spy on them later on. Monsters can sense this like a mosquito buzzing in their ear. “It’s that weird buzzing again!” It makes them irritable, but they won’t immediately be able to say what it is.

If the kids end up taking laps because they can’t keep their monsters under wraps, they’ll get a bad grade on the day’s participation, and will pass the outside fence close enough for Billy to spot them and come over. “Hey . . . so, I SAY candy, but of course what I really mean is *CANDY*, you know? The kind of *CANDY* you *SMOKE*.” If they talk to Billy, when they loop back around O’Malley will be lurking across the parking lot, staring and slowly shaking his head.

Questions to Mr. Mago about Coach Rodriguez will be met with very lame lies: “Oh, he’s . . . traveling the world . . . to learn . . . about . . . the sports . . . of . . . other . . . hey, look over there, it’s O’Malley!”

Coming back across the parking lot, the black M.I.B. van slowly cruises around the building, and the antennae focus. They can see M.I.B. guys inside taking notes and nodding.

Links: Next class (choose one); Billy’s Candy Van; Black Vans and Tissue Samples; Lunch.

Black Vans and Tissue Samples

Officer Agent Taupe’s associates decide to move on the kids—maybe or they respond to the kids taking offense at their glaring. The black M.I.B. van pulls up, blocking the kids from getting back to the school building, and guys will pile out, one per student, with big goggle things on their faces (de-phasing optical rectifiers), and long telescoping rods with pointy things on the end (multi-probes).

The goggles let them see monsters, and the pointy things let them make with the stabby-stabby against monsters (even when they're hidden).

Like all M.I.B.'s, they also have devices which make them as resistant as monster keepers to monster attacks. Their pointy things are Wicked Fast x3 and have Spray 1 against a single target (the "multi" in "multi-probe"). They do normal Shocks damage, but their real purpose is to snag a tissue sample from each monster and as many kids as they can. The M.I.B.s bail if half their number gets taken down, or they score damage on at least half the monsters. It's time to play with the combat rules. In all likelihood, the monsters will wipe the pavement with the M.I.B.'s, and that's how it should be. But what to do with the bodies afterwards?

Characters: One M.I.B. agent per kid.

Details: The sameness of the M.I.B.'s; they aren't clones exactly, it's just like they're trying to pretend they are. They all have color-names like in *Reservoir Dogs*, except it's all boring colors. Agent Beige. Agent Offwhite. Agent Eggshell. Hotel bathroom colors. They aren't afraid of monsters at all, and work with almost psychic coordination. If one gets chomped, he throws his multi-probe to another one if he's gotten a sample with it. They all smell weirdly of Slim Jims, too. Spicy preserved meat-tubes. This will either gross the kids out or leave them hungry. If a monster eats a M.I.B., it gives him indigestion and a horrible case of the farts.

Hooks: The fight attracts attention. The kids will have a minute or two when it's over to figure out what to do before people—other kids, Ms. Pale, Officer Agent Taupe, O'Malley—start showing up.

If Billy is hanging around, he dashes in with his own (beat to crap) van and offers to help. "Oh man! Oh man! It's these guys again! Oh man!" He's a little too hyped up on something to explain coherently what he knows about the M.I.B.

If the characters are hurt at all, they can visit the nurse's office for some first aid, spinning a lie about the cause of the weird wounds. Later, they'll see Officer Agent Taupe stealing the red trashbag with the bloodied gauze in it.

Links: Next class (choose one); Billy's Candy Van; Lunch.

Billy's Candy Van

Somehow, Billy convinces the kids to get into his van . . . and it's pretty gross. It's like the *Scooby Doo* van if Shaggy just hallucinated everyone else on the show and never cleaned up after himself. It's a P.O.S. old panel van with no seats in the back, and a strong leaky gas smell. There's also the smell of *other* stuff. Stuff O'Malley would most certainly bark at were he here.

Billy grips the steering wheel like a vice, and checks his mirrors spasmodically (even if the van's not moving). Once he has the kids in the van, he's desperate to keep them there, to keep talking. He offers them candy (actual, real candy), and if that fails he chuckles and says, "Holdin' out for the REAL candy, eh? Kids after my own . . . thingy. In your chest. Heart." And he upends a filthy gym bag and disgorges a wave of baggies, pipes, pill bottles, paper packets, and other illicit

paraphernalia and pharmacopoeia. "I didn't know what you liked, so I brought some of everything!"

Inevitably, unavoidably, most certainly some of Billy's cornucopia of candy finds its way into the pockets, backpacks, or folded cuffs of the kids, even if they don't pick any up. When Billy sees O'Malley in the rear-view, he freaks out and starts driving. "Oh God, he's onto me! We gotta go! We gotta go!" Now it's a high-speed chase.

Characters: Billy, O'Malley.

Details: The reek of gas and old pot. The smell of unwashed loser in an enclosed space. The chase will be crazy. They can't really see out of the van, so they'll be thrown around a lot. What the monsters do is going to be interesting.

Hooks: Regardless of the outcome of the chase (which should see them miss another class), somebody ends up with some drugs mixed into their stuff. When found by parents, teachers, Officer Agent Taupe, or, God forbid, O'Malley, it'll lead to lots o' trouble, yes sir.

If the kids try and do something dramatic and *monstrous* to Billy, his own monster pops out and things get nuts. *Bugnutz*. The big guy has no illusions about being able to beat up to six other monsters, even if he could take any one of them, so he grabs Billy and legs it as fast as possible if things go really south. Billy will be crying, "WHY . . . SOB . . . DOESN'T . . . SOB . . . ANYONE . . . SOB . . . LIKE . . . SOB . . . ME?" Bugnutz will be tutting and calling him "Big Man" and telling him the kids are obvious losers or something. "Billy, you don't want to hang around with a bunch of loser kids!"

After missing another class, they have to sneak back into the school without tipping off Ms. Pale or they'll get another tongue-lashing in the office.

Links: Next class (choose one); Lunch; The Office Again

The Office Again

For some other infraction, the kids will be sent back to the office, and Ms. Pale. This is really an opportunity for the Narc to use his office filing privileges to swipe the employee records of the missing staff members so the kids can go to their homes and check up on them. If this hasn't occurred to them yet, you can say, "Wink, wink, finding out where the missing people live might be a good idea, wink, wink." Otherwise it's very much a repeat of the first visit to the office. While the Narc gets to rifle the files, the other kids get a dressing down.

Characters: Ms. Pale, the nice office ladies.

Hooks: All the missing staff members' folders are sealed with blue tape and have "CONFIDENTIAL" stamped on their covers, except for Miss Kemp's.

The monsters are going to start encouraging the kids to cut class and investigate, otherwise the rest of the day plays out normally.

Links: Any of the teachers' homes; Black Vans and Tissue Samples; Billy's Candy Van; Lunch; next class (if any remain).

Lunch

Once again, the schedule changes tell. The kids all end up in the same lunch period, and they earn the ire of their old in-groups who make fun of them for hanging out with the other PCs. No major action here, other than a taste of ostracism to push the group together, and a chance for them to sit together and discuss what the heck is going on—or to sit with their old friends and face uncomfortable questions and smirks. It's best to play lunch after a few of the class scenes.

Characters: Other kids and former friends. Just make 'em up as you go.

Details: The steaming of steam strays filled with steamy goop. Hair-netted lunch ladies. The din of hundreds of kids talking at once, which stops the moment the PCs walk in, followed by a sudden rush of whispering. Frequent monster comments to the effect of "Are you going to eat that?"

Hooks: Monsters are going to sneak off and explore if they can while things seem calm. They'll return saying things like, "Wow, I can't believe they left the test and answers just lying around for the math quiz you have next period," or "Dude, *do not* eat the beef Stroganoff. It is neither beef nor Stroganoff. Because I knew Ludwig Stroganoff back in the old country, and he tasted totally different."

If you want to introduce a normal kid antagonist, someone who can be a jerk to the PC's without being a genuine threat, now is a good time. Seeing how they react now that they have horrible cosmic power should be amusing.

Each kid has a different peer group, and you can use the NPC templates from pages 96 to 112 if you need stats for them. Here's how they might interact with their former friends, the player characters:

The Jock: As one might expect, the Jock attracts the attentions of his fellow jocks (see page 106), who want to know why he's hanging out with such obvious tools, though they'll ham-handedly flirt with the Princess by reflex. If they can't convince him to ditch the losers, they'll mock his skills on the field and off.

The Princess: Her bevy of catty friends swan over, all topped up in whatever the latest thing is (what you'd expect from a bunch of Fashion Nazis; see page 100). They'll use nasty back-handed compliments and the Put-Down skill liberally. "Well, for someone with your thighs that's a *great* look." Just for being seen with the Nut, Brain, Narc, and Hood, the Princess is in imminent danger of losing her throne.

The Nut: As usual, she slouches and glares if anyone looks at her. She's in her element now, being the outsider—but now that it's really for serious, it sort of sucks. When her creepy crush guy comes over, she's almost happy about it, until his grim hostility and awkwardness assert themselves with a vengeance. He's Bill Buzkirk, and he always seems right on the edge of flipping out (see Trenchcoat Mafioso, page 111), and unlike the attention the other kids are attracting during lunch, Bill seems to really dig the whole hostile outsider thing. He'll try and sit with the group, butt into their conversation and make of pest of himself. If told, even ever-so politely, to go away, he feels it like a cutting betrayal and swears

terrible vengeance. At some point, he's going to bring his reproduction katana to school and things are going to get ugly.

The Brain: Mickey Preach (a Bully; see page 97) is a student of the old and honorable ways of bullying, and wishes to teach his favorite victim a few new things he learned from his thuggish older brothers over the holidays. He's surprised to see him palling around with regular kids. Even *popular* kids. He finds this disruption in the natural order of the cosmos upsetting and confusing. But he's going to deal with it the best he knows how—with an atomic wedgie and a pudding cup down the pants.

The Narc: The Narc is used to eating alone. Being a responsible, rule-abiding student is a proud and lonely thing. Though, eating with other kids is pretty nice, too. But these jerks keep coming over and ruining everything. It's getting really aggravating. . . .

The Hood: A couple guys from the Hood's neighborhood (Gang Bangers as on page 101) sidle over, making out like he's forgotten where he's from now that he gets to eat with the popular kids. They're young teenagers trying to affect a prison-yard 'tude, and it would be hilarious except for how one of them keeps bragging about having a gun at his house and a brother with an AK.

Links: Next class (choose one).

Mr. Rich's House

Mr. Rich hasn't left his house in two weeks. There's rain-melted newspapers piled up on his stoop, and it looks like his mailbox vomited as it's full to overflowing. The lawn is overgrown. The gutters are full of crud. His modest ranch home looks like it's been rented to college kids for a whole year. It's *rough*. All the blinds are drawn, and any insistent knock on the door is met by sounds like furtive scuttling. Getting in is easy for kids with monsters, but inside there's a certain . . . smell . . . like the potties at summer camp. A smell like *jars of pee and poo stacked on every surface*. Yeah, Rich has been collecting his own waste.

When he realizes there's someone in his house he'll whisper-shout from under the dining room table (where he's been living), "Shut the door! Shut it, before SHE gets in." He mumbles and rant about devil-women and how his ex-wife ripped his heart out and took the dog and stuck him with alimony and now she comes back, and she's not even people anymore, and he *knew it all along!*

He's crackers, and if he sees a monster he'll lose it and race for the bathroom—the bathroom he's been terrified of for weeks. Terrified because he ate one of Mrs. Pale's little candies, and now there's an Excruciator living in his septic tank.

If Rich makes a dash for it (or there's any violence), the jars and bottles and cans and pots of wee will be upset and will tip each other over like dominoes. Then they break, then they splash and spray.

Avoiding the ick requires a defensive roll, and doing anything else requires multiple actions. Yeah, it's really that gross. Every round the sloshing pee has 2

WHAT DID YOU GET
FOR CHRISTMAS?

Area dice that only do Shock damage, and can be gobbled like normal dice. Ew. I think I just suggested gobbling pee.

If Rich makes it to the bathroom (or you just want to mix things up) the Excruciator bursts out of the toilet and attacks. Defending Rich from the monster will be tricky (the Hood will easily be able to use his relationship with Rich here though). His house will get wrecked, someone will get covered in pee, then the house will catch fire and burn down, but in the end Rich will (probably) be all right.

Characters: Mr. Rich, a juvenile Excruciator.

Details: Rich's house looks like a newly-minted bachelor lived there—dishes in the sink, *Maxim* in the magazine rack, and the only clean thing in the place is the new, huge, high-def TV. But now it's got the air of a sick shut-in's house. It smells bad. The sickly streams of light creeping in around the curtains are yellowed and leprous. Rich's babble mingles ex-wife hate with existential horror at gazing into the bleak unknowable secrets of deep time. But he snaps around to his old lemony self when the promise of getting to stick it to his ex becomes a reality, and when the Thing In the Toilet is put down hard and nasty.

Hooks: Photographs of Rich and Ms. Pale are all over the house.

The recovered Mr. Rich will want his job back, and is willing to work out a deal: He'll keep the Orriblehay Onstermays on the downlow if the PCs help get Ms. Pale booted and him reinstated.

He doesn't know anything about the other staff members, but will be willing to help with them if he can.

Links: Next house (choose one).

Ms. Ashe's Apartment

Counselor Ashe got it hard from everyone concerned. She had visits from Ms. Pale, Agent Officer Taupe, Lucinda, Mr. Stein and Coach Mago, all wanting her to endorse their new position and the schedule changes they were trying to force through. Somewhere between the tentacles, the mind-control drugs, the hypno-helmets, and the mind bondage spells, something cracked, and now she's comatose in her apartment mumbling to herself. The only thing that'll bring her out of it is a friendly and familiar face who's willing to lie to her about it all and tell her she imagined it because of hypoglycemia. The Nut gets to play counselor to the counselor.

Characters: Counselor Ashe.

Details: The house is *very* clean. Crazy clean. When they arrive, the vacuum is running. Ms. Ashe is trying to assert some kind of control over her life with the cleaning. When she's feeling better, she'll knock over a coffee cup and say, "Eh, I'll clean it up later."

Hooks: If they can puzzle out her experiences, Ashe can put all the weirdness into some kind of context for them.

Convinced the whole thing was a blood sugar-induced fancy, Ashe can return

Juvenile Excruciator

Appearance: A smallish mass of tentacles and mouths and slime and ick.

Personality: Alien and unknowable. Also, impatient and demanding. Like this throbbing horror from beyond reality just hit its terrible twos.

Favorite Thing: EATING PEOPLE! The juvie hasn't yet figured out how to enjoy the tormenting of people before the eating.

Way To Hide: The juvie can't hollow out a skin-suit yet, so it squishes itself down into tiny, smelly places like sewer lines and septic tanks.

Bits and Pieces

Locations 1-3: Tentacles! (6 dice, Useful: Squeeze through tiny openings, Useful [hollow out human and live inside], Useful [taste the air and track like a snake], Awesome x2).

Locations 4-6: God, More Tentacles! (4 dice, Attacks, Defends, Gnarly x1, Wicked Fast x3, Area x2).

Location 7: Eyes? At Least It Isn't More Tentacles. . . (4 dice, Useful [see darkest secret]).

Locations 8-10: Mouths . . . Lots of Acid-Drooling Mouths (5 dice, Attacks, Gnarly x3, Wicked Fast x2, Burning).

to her unfilled position, living happily in denial.

If confronted with the reality of the occult, she'll go crazier than a dog covered in bacon fat and need to be institutionalized.

Links: Next house (choose one).

Coach Rodriguez's House

The Coach's house seems slightly odd from the outside, almost as if it's *melting* slightly. On entering, this is discovered to be because there's an unstable dimensional portal inside which leads to another tempospatial realm where physics are bendy, and the Coach is being chased through a forest made from twitching meat and bones by wolves made from shrubbery.

The kids can't pass into this realm because they might get trapped (the monsters make this really clear), but the monsters can, no prob. The hook here is that the players take on exclusive control over their monsters, and run them for a scene down in the Meat Forest trying to find the Coach and get him out before the Bush Wolves find him and eat him.

Characters: Coach Rodriguez, Bush Wolves.

Details: The Meat Forest is just icky, but to the monsters it seems boring and lame. Forest made out of living meat? Meh. Rich's house is a mess from all the tempospatial chaos, and will need some major repairs when all's said and done. He might be convinced it was water damage. With a few drinks in him, anyhow.

Hooks: When the monsters drag the Coach back, he's babbling about "This weird Canadian guy" doing something to him. He'll say, "I need a drink!" which is a great coping strategy for this kind of thing. He'll wake up smelling of booze and think, when he remembers the Meat Forest, "Man, that's the last time I cheap out and buy blended instead of single malt."

Investigating the house reveals obvious signs of similar occult symbols and workings to what they encountered in the P.E. square dance.

Closing the hole in spacetime to the bendy realm will require kicking Coach Mago's butt and making him do it, or a Brains + Remember roll at Difficulty 8 to recall some of the funky magic words Mago was saying earlier. Otherwise, they might ought to find some other place for the Coach to sleep.

Especially when Lucinda starts to take a fancy to him.

Links: Next house (choose one).

Mr. Jackson's House

Mr. Jackson is chained up in his own basement, next to a big machine that looks like a spider holding a bunch of surgical tools. Dr. Stein intends to put him into the Surg'o'matic and extract his brain, but he keeps getting distracted. Guarding him is Stein's sarcastic robot, Brotron (page 91). If there's a fight (did I say *if*? I mean *when*), the surgical machine will start working, and they'll have three rounds before it starts carving Mr. Jackson up randomly (5 Area dice damage

Bush Wolves

Description: Wolf-shaped topiary . . . of death. Bush Wolves are made of plant, but they have lots of thorns and wooden teeth, and they like to chase and kill. Not super bright, which is a good thing, because they might realize they live in a forest made of meat. Gross.

Bits and Pieces

Locations 1-2: Twisted Viney Legs (5d, Defends, Useful [running])

Locations 3-4: Thorn-Covered Trunk (5d, Attacks, Tough x1)

Locations 5-6: Flowering Face (6d, Useful [tracking])

Locations 7-8: Poison Tongue (4d, Useful [paralytic poison], Awesome x2)

Locations 9-10: Snapping Wood-Fanged Jaws (6d, Attacks)

Meat Trees

Description: The trees in the weird bendy world are made of living meat and bones and blood. Which makes campfires really hard, but if you can get one going, it'll smell like barbecue. Unlike real trees, the meat trees can move, and if they get woken up, they'll thrash horribly, clobbering anyone too close with giant slabs of meaty limb.

Bits and Pieces

Meat trees don't really have discrete body parts. They're immobile, so they can't chase. The danger is if they get woken up. If they do, they thrash around something horrible. If there's any kind of loud noise in the meat forest—screaming, monster bellowing, explosions—then the trees in the immediate area will wake up and thrash around with 5 Area dice. These can be defended against like regular dice. If you need to figure out the timing of the meat-storm of thrashing trees, assume they "declare" first ("thrash around"), and and they go on width 2.



every round thereafter). So once they start mixing it up with the robot, they have a limited time to rescue Mr. Jackson before—well, before the only hope for him is a full-body transplant. And finding the poor guy a new body? Trouble, trouble, trouble.

Characters: Mr. Jackson, Dr. Stein's robot Brotron.

Details: The STOMP STOMP of the robot wandering around Mr. Jackson's nice split-level suburban house. His plaintive calls from the basement when he realizes someone else has arrived. His tasteful window treatments.

Hooks: Brotron flees if two of his body locations are totally incapacitated, but he can be followed.

If they don't rescue Jackson before the surgeon machine renders him down into lean fat-free cutlets and a brain in a jar, then they'll have to figure out what to do with his brain . . . and whether to find him a new body. He'll talk with a buzzy robot voice from a speaker in the jar. "WHY . . . AM . . . I . . . SO . . . COLD?"

If they rescue him body-intact, he'll start to develop an unhealthy interest in the workings of the mad science littered about the place. He'll begin to mumble about plutonium, too. . . .

Links: Next house (choose one).

Wrapping This Thing Up

What happens after the kids and their monstrous buddies confront the weirdness, investigate, and identify their enemies? It depends on how you want to conclude this adventure. Do you want to spin it off into a series or keep it standalone?

If you're going to spin it off into a series, then you need to decide which direction the setting will go. Do monsters become public knowledge? Do they remain (mostly) secret? Can the kids stay in their home town, or must they escape it to the open road one step ahead of the law and the minions of alien horrors and secret agencies, like the ancient T.V. show *Incredible Hulk* except with parents and brothers and sisters, wandering from town to town having adventures?

Here are three scenarios outlining possible conclusions for this adventure.

One-Shot Big-Budget Summer Blockbuster Throwdown

So, your players want to do something different next week? Sounds like an excuse to *blow everything up*. Each of the house scenes contains an easy lead for the kids and monsters to follow, leading back to the lairs and digs of their respective enemies. From there, they can follow equally obvious trails back to the school, as the various evil dudes have made the foolish assumption that School Spirit (who, as it happens, is an ancient *manitou* angry that the school was built upon his sacred place) might drive the kids to attend the Big Game that evening. They will bring their hostages/victims for leverage against the kids, and will be somewhat surprised to run into each other.

If you don't somehow manage to get the school burning and have a giant five-way monster battle going on the school's football field while thousands of parents and students look on in screaming mad terror, then I'm going to send some guys around to totally mess up your place and rearrange your bookshelves so you can't tell your first-edition WoD books from your second edition. Your goal here is to run a totally chaotic melee, and to brutalize kids and monsters as badly as possible. You've been given a mandate! Your players want to bail on you? Well, rain down the horrors of beyond upon them! Here are some thoughts on tactics. . . .

Billy And Bugnutz: The loser and his giant bug will side with the kids until one annoys him, or his paranoia gets the better of him. He'll also take things too far too soon, having Bugnutz toss a van of M.I.B.s into the bleachers, say, "I did it for YOU, man! How can you burn me this way, dude? We were like total bros!"

The M.I.B.s: They'll roll up in their vans with their radios and their shock-prods and try to stun everyone into unconsciousness (for later experimentation). They'll start hosing down the crowd with a memory-fuddling mind-altering liquid too, which will lead to crazy magic carpet rides to wacky land for anyone who gets doused who isn't pals with a monster. Anyone with a camera is going to get shocked, but there's like a thousand people with camera phones, so pics are going to get out even if they befuddle everyone.

Dr. Frank Stein: He and Brotron will arrive, and he'll flip out and make a dash for his office screaming, "*Brotron! The plutonium! Execute protocol KABOOM!*" Yeah, he's going to try and nuke the place. He am Shiva, destroyer of schools. Stopping him would be a *good idea*.

Mr. Mago: Seeing the opportunity to enslave a monster for himself, he'll try and

WHAT DID YOU GET
FOR CHRISTMAS?

corner a kid and use the Ritual of Severance, a nasty piece of magic which involves a certain amount of *severing* in a more-than-metaphorical sense. He'll be stalking through the school calling "Heeeeeeeere, kitty kitty kitty!" while looking for a kid. He's got a wizard's powers to help him fight monsters, but if he gets messed up he's going to try to escape into a weird bendy dimension or something.

Ms. Pale: She's playing it cagey, and will strike from hiding at any kid she can get alone. She'll first play the innocent, pretending to be a normal human, but when caught out in the lie (obvious if anyone went to Rich's house), she'll open her mouth wide . . . wider . . . WIDER . . . and then *crawl out*.

It's worth a bit of description.

Then, they have a revealed Excruciator to contend with. She may even have a few juvenile Excruciators secreted around the school as well, just to make things worse.

The Dawning of a Brave New, Very Much Weirder World

You can run this one with some variation on the above scheme, but lower key. Perhaps the kids have a confrontation with only one or two of the enemies outlined in this adventure, but it's equally revealing to the populace at large. Everyone finds out about monsters, and reports start trickling in from across the country.

What follows in the coming sessions can be an exploration of what this revelation means for the world. How will kids with monster friends be treated by the media, by the government, by parents, by other kids? Yeah, they *did* save the school from being blown up by a crazy terrorist science teacher with a nuke, but . . . I mean . . . that one kid's monster is like a giant floating squid. That's pretty freaky.

Relationships are really going to start to play an important role in this scheme, as the balance of public and private lives begins to stress them. Watch the second season of *Extras* for a sense of how fame can be horribly excruciating for the newly-minted celeb.



Keeping Uncomfortable Secrets

Or, let things trail off into ambiguity. The replacement teachers and staff just vanish when the kids uncover their plots. The next day, those teachers who can return come back to school, those who can't start to recover and eventually. People just don't seem to remember what happened, if any norms got a look at anything. The kids return to school, and things are *oppressively* normal, as if some agency were forcing things to seem ordinary. Some force is covering things up.

This suffocating, shadowy presence can then become a major theme in the series. Who's keeping these secrets, and why? Are they friends looking out for us? Are they foes trying to keep us from ruining their plans? The monsters don't know any more than the kids do.

Keeping secrets becomes a major theme for the series, and knowing things about the people you have relationships with, or about the people other characters have relationships with, should be a major source of relationship conflicts. If someone makes a scene with their monster in public, the next day they'll get an envelope in the mail with pictures of their loved ones in it, and a note saying only "Keep it down, kid."

What do the kids do then?

David D. Davison

The Hood

Appearance: Short but stocky, the start of a patchy goatee, leather jacket, ripped jeans, a glare to cut glass.

Personality: David's disciplinary record reflects his antisocial tendencies and issues with authority, but his anger and defensiveness cover a powerful capacity for personal loyalty. The school counselor wrote that in his file on time. He's still in school only because he promised his Grandma he would go.

Stats And Skills

Feet 3 (P.E. +0; Kicking +0; Dodging +1)

Guts 3 (Wind +0; Courage +2; Wrestling +0)

Hands 4 (Shop +2; Punching +3; Blocking +1)

Brains 2 (Out-Think +2; Remember +0; Notice +0)

Face 3 (Charm +0; Putdown +2; Connive +2)

Relationships

Walter W. Wilson 2; Grandma 2; Assistant Principle Rich 2; Baby Tick-Tock.

Baby Tick-tock

David's Monster

Appearance: A giant baby-doll with a cracked porcelain face and clockwork innards. Serrated blades and rotating knives burst from her body when needed. She moves in a herky-jerky series of still poses, like she's stop-motion animated by a drug-addled UCLA film student.

Personality: Baby Tick-Tock wants David to be a kid for as long as possible, and she'll deal HARSHLY with those who want him to grow up. David used to live with his mom and abusive step-father. Now he lives with his mom and his invalid step-father who's on life support and hospice care.

Favorite Thing: Eating clocks, watches and power tools.

Way To Hide: Folds down with a clicking mechanical sound into a miniature version of herself which David keeps Baby Tick-Tock well stashed, lest his rep get ruined.

Location Numbers	Location Name	Dice	Qualities	Extras
1	Toddling Legs	3	Useful (slow but steady)	Awesome x2
2	Big Baby Hands	3	Useful (soothing touch)	Awesome x2
3-4	Cracked Baby Face	8	Attacks; Useful (induce horrific hallucinations)	Tough x1
5-7	Clockwork Heart	10	Defends; Useful (inspire childlike behavior)	Tough x2, Wicked Fast x2
8-10	Rotating Knives and Hooks and Whatnot	10	Attacks	Gnarly x3, Tough x2

Jane J. Johansson

The Nut

Appearance: Carefully unkempt: dark hair starting to plait, bloodshot eyes from medication or late nights, piercings, suspicious scars.

Personality: Jane is nuts—or at least, likes people to think she's nuts. If she acts crazy and creepy, and does and says shocking things, then people keep their distance. Of course, as the stereotype dictates, under it all she's vulnerable.

Stats and Skills

Feet 3 (P.E. +0; Kicking +0; Dodging +2)

Guts 4 (Wind +0; Courage +4; Wrestling +0)

Hands 2 (Shop +0; Punching +0; Blocking +0)

Brains 3 (Out-Think +2; Remember +2; Notice +0)

Face 3 (Charm +3; Putdown +2; Connive +2)

Relationships

Peter P. Peters 2; Grandpa Paul 2; Counselor Ashe 2; The Trashman.

The Trashman

Jane's Monster

Appearance: A giant shambling humanoid with black-plastic skin, bones of bottles and cans, guts of rotten watermelons and leftover meatloaf. When he smiles, his teeth are broken glass.

Personality: Cerebral and ironic. He likes to make witty observations on life in the style of David Sedaris.

Favorite Thing: Old photographs of unknown people.

Way To Hide: He slouches down and looks like an overstuffed garbage bag. When nobody is looking, he moves.

Location Numbers	Location Name	Dice	Qualities	Extras
1-2	Trash Fingers	8	Attacks; Useful (fix broken things)	Tough x1
3-4	Glass-Toothed Maw	5	Attacks; Useful (sarcastic wit)	Awesome x2, Gnarly x2
5-8	Huge Mass of Animate Stinking Garbage	10	Defends; Useful (engulf stuff as big as cars); Useful (regurgitate cool stuff)	Tough x5, Wicked Fast x3
9	Shambly Legs	4	Useful (modest jog)	Tough x1
10	Broken Mirror Eyes	4	Useful (see hidden vulnerabilities)	Tough x1

Marvin M. Marshal

The Brain

Appearance: Small and skinny with a crew cut, big black glasses, bowling shirt, and a laptop in a messenger bag.

Personality: Marvin's excellence in academics gives him an arrogance that combines badly with his social awkwardness. He tends to say whatever he's thinking, for good or ill; but more than anything he wants to be liked.

Stats and Skills

Feet 3 (P.E. +0; Kicking +0; Dodging +1)

Guts 2 (Wind +0; Courage +1; Wrestling +0)

Hands 3 (Shop +2; Punching +0; Blocking +0)

Brains 4 (Out-Think +3; Remember +4; Notice +2)

Face 3 (Charm +1; Putdown +0; Connive +1)

Relationships

David D. Davison 2, The Science Club 2, Mr. Jackson 2, Connie.

Connie

Marvin's Monster

Appearance: Connie is a giant airborne orthocone, a predator from the ancient seas before anything walked the land. She resembles nothing so much as a giant squid stuffed into an ice cream cone made of gnarled barnacled shell. At the center of her cluster of tentacles is a giant parrot-like beak. Connie swims in the air like it's water, moving with a floaty weirdness.

Personality: Connie loves to commiserate and suggest absurd distractions or convoluted revenges. She enjoys misery because then there's more to bitch about.

Favorite Thing: Watching disappointment. Seeing would-be homebuyers get turned down for a loan? Endless fun.

Way To Hide: Connie turns into a doodle, sketch or graffiti image of herself when she's hiding. There's just something like that around Marvin all the time.

Location Numbers	Location Name	Dice	Qualities	Extras
1-2	Jet Nozzle Orifice	8	Useful (jet through the air); Useful (super sense of smell)	Wicked Fast x1
3-4	Deep-Adapted Eyes	6	Useful (see in the dark); Useful (see what people hate about themselves)	Awesome x2, Sharing
5-7	Thick Barbed Tentacles	10	Attacks; Useful (grabbing and crushing); Useful (sense vibrations)	Gnarly x1, Wicked Fast x2
8-10	Gnarled Cone Shell	10	Defends	Tough x5

Peter P. Peters

The Jock

Appearance: Peter is tall for his age and quite fit. He is built for sports and plays most of them well. He most often wears his letter jacket, jeans, and training shoes. He has a short, neat haircut.

Personality: Peter has trouble taking his mind off the game and focusing on his academics. He is well liked without being especially charming—his record as last season's 6th grade MVP makes up for any deficiencies. He's a team player and something of a conformist.

Stats and Skills

Feet 4 (P.E. +4; Kicking +1; Dodging +1)

Guts 3 (Wind +3; Courage +0; Wrestling +3)

Hands 3 (Shop +0; Punching +1; Blocking +0)

Brains 3 (Out-Think +2; Remember +0; Notice +0)

Face 2 (Charm +0; Putdown +0; Connive +0)

Relationships

Susan S. Shuman 2, Mom and Dad 2, Coach Rodriguez 2, The Team In I.

The Team In I

Pete's Monster

Appearance: A mass of zombie football players mashed into a giant conglomerate player fifteen feet tall. When the Randolph Carter Jr. High football team went off that cliff in their bus 13 years ago, what arose was more than the sum of its parts.

Personality: Gung-ho and ready to rock. Lots of "hooo-aaaa!" Calls Peter "Coach."

Favorite Thing: Bringing in the Win, and playing a good game. But mostly the Win.

Way To Hide: The Team In I breaks up into individual shambling zombie football players that nobody seems to notice.

Location Numbers	Location Name	Dice	Qualities	Extras
1	Zombie Bench Warmer	5	Useful (detach and go do stuff that needs human hands)	None
2-3	Pumping Corpse Legs	6	Defends	Awesome x2, Tough x2
4-5	Huge Linebacker Arms	6	Attacks; Useful (pick stuff up, hold it tight, toss it far)	Gnarly x2, Tough x2
6-7	Massive Bony Helmet	8	Attacks; Useful (plan the winning strategy)	Tough x1
8-10	Giant Undead Torso	10	Attacks; Defends; Useful (plow through walls and stuff)	Tough x3

Susan S. Shuman

The Princess

Appearance: Blond, slender, clear complexion, fashionably dressed. She rarely smiles but sneers or arches her eyebrows often.

Personality: Susan is quite polite but comes across as superior, especially to less-popular children. She is well regarded but shows signs of stress, and has resorted to being the resident “mean girl” to keep up with her clique.

Stats and Skills

Feet 2 (P.E. +0; Kicking +0; Dodging +1)

Guts 3 (Wind +0; Courage +1; Wrestling +0)

Hands 3 (Shop +0; Punching +0; Blocking +0)

Brains 3 (Out-Think +1; Remember +1; Notice +1)

Face 4 (Charm +3; Putdown +4; Connive +3)

Relationships

Marvin M. Marshal 2, The Popular Girls 2, Miss Kemp 2, Lucinda.

Lucinda

Susan's Monster

Appearance: Lucinda looks like a coifed Texas beauty queen aged to about 40, but her appearance is only skin deep—and that skin is a hard shell, covering a thick gooey filling that smells like concrete sealant and burns the skin. She’s always smiling. And she always has cookies or brownies, fresh from the oven, *even when there isn’t an oven for miles*.

Personality: Lucinda is Susan’s new stepmom, and plays the part of “wanting to be her best friend” but sort of . . . wrong. She looks human, but hasn’t gotten the hang of the subtleties. She talks in a slow Texas drawl, paints her nails every morning (drinking the leftover polish), and just wants to know *everything* about her new stepdaughter.

Favorite Thing: Cookies.

Way to Hide: Lucinda smiles wide and acts like regular person. She even has a job substituting at Carter.

Location Numbers	Location Name	Dice	Qualities	Extras
1-2	Hard Candy Shell	5	Useful (blend in with regular folks); Useful (could seduce a saint)	Awesome x2, Tough x2
3-4	Graceful Hands/Tentacles	7	Attacks; Useful (cooking, cleaning, <i>baking!</i>)	Tough x1, Wicked Fast x1
5-6	Long Shapely Legs/Pseudopods	8	Defends; Useful (run like a steam engine)	Tough x1
7-8	Pulsing Goo-Sack	5	Attacks; Useful (spray quick-hardening goo)	Awesome x2, Tough x2
9-10	Ovipositor	7	Attacks; Useful (inject mind-controlling larvae)	Awesome x2

Walter W. Wilson

The Narc

Appearance: Utterly average. Mousy and harmless. He dresses in standard jeans and tees, and the only thing that makes him out is his constant watchfulness.

Personality: Walter is stuck between his fear of authority—and his urge to win the favor of authority figures—and his desire to be liked by his peers. He is always anxious but always listening, in case he has to rat someone out.

Stats and Skills

Feet 3 (P.E. +0; Kicking +0; Dodging +2)

Guts 4 (Wind +0; Courage +3; Wrestling +0)

Hands 2 (Shop +0; Punching +0; Blocking +0)

Brains 3 (Out-Think +1; Remember +2; Notice +0)

Face 3 (Charm +0; Putdown +3; Connive +4)

Relationships

Jane J. Johansson 2, The Administration 2, Officer Montgomery 2, The Watcher
From the Corners of Time.

The Watcher from the Corners of Time

Walter's Monster

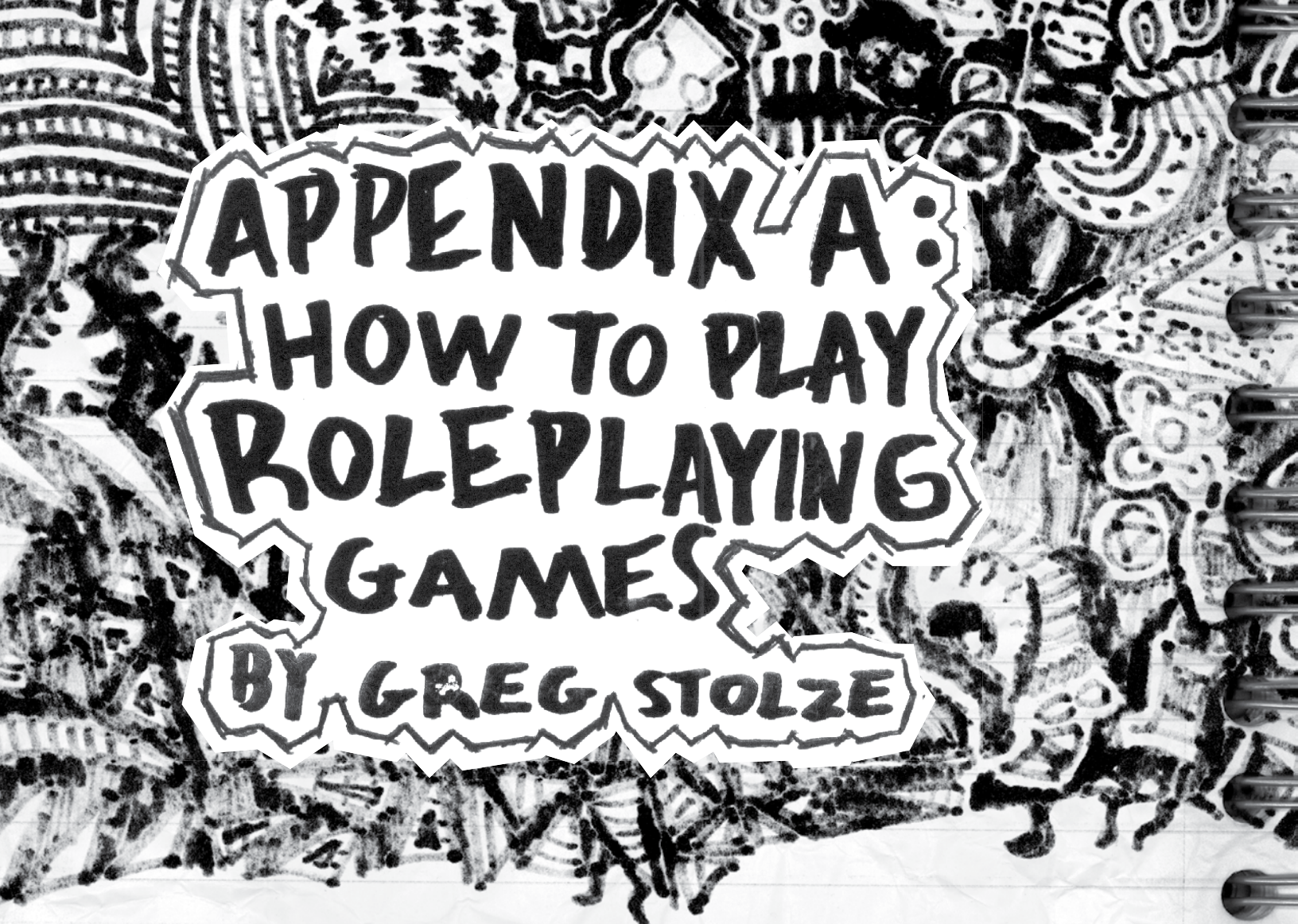
Appearance: A vaguely reptilian shadow in a coiling, semi-material inky cloud of sweet-smelling gas which boils out of a corner in the room.

Personality: Mysterious and enigmatic. The Watcher speaks in a breathy whisper, and it says crap like, “Build it, and they will come.” But he’s talking about building a monolithic temple to the elder beings, not a baseball diamond in a cornfield.

Favorite Thing: Revealing the shocking truths of the cosmos to frail mortal minds.

Way To Hide: The Watcher slips into whatever strange spaces it is native to, but can manifest when called from any corner: the corner of a room, a half-open book, or even hands that have been held in prayer and then opened to form an angle.

Location Numbers	Location Name	Dice	Qualities	Extras
1	Three Glowing Eyes	3	Useful (see through higher dimensional spaces)	Awesome x2
2-4	Misty Limbs	10	Attacks; Defends; Useful (exert crushing force)	Tough x2, Wicked Fast x2
5-7	Smokey Maw	10	Attacks; Useful (speak unholy truths about time and reality)	Gnarly x3, Wicked Fast x1
8-10	Body of Liquid Smoke	10	Defends; Useful (pour through cracks); Useful (move through higher dimensions); Useful (slide through ancient eons of time)	Sharing, Tough x1



APPENDIX A: HOW TO PLAY ROLEPLAYING GAMES BY GREG STOLZE

For the past ten-plus years of my life, I've been writing roleplaying games. I've been playing them for much longer. Back when I started, you could abbreviate "roleplaying game" to RPG without people immediately thinking about "rocket propelled grenades" and the acronym is still around causing trouble today.

In that time, I've watched the market bulge, shrink, grow, recede and, constantly, change. The consensus as I write this is that the hobby is shrinking. To counteract that, of course, we need to recruit new players. Hopefully, that's you.

RPGs are fun. They're worthwhile. They take more effort than a computer game but I believe you can get a different kind of payoff. Give it a try and you may come to agree. But I'm not just going to ask you to baldly trust my assertion. I'm going to see if I can explain the precise appeal of this peculiar habit that's absorbed so much of my time. In the process, I'm going to show you how to get the most fun out of it, by being a good player. At the same time, I'll warn you about the pitfalls of being a bad player. It's the whole package. Enjoy.



What's Gaming?

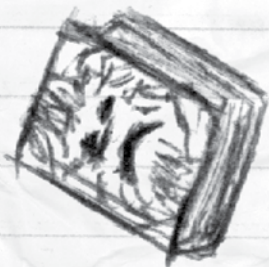
It's like Cops and Robbers, only with dice and rules to curtail the endless round of "I hit you!" "No you didn't!" disputes.

That's one standard explanation, but it's really only the thin edge of the wedge. It's the first step into the territory, but it merits some expansion.

Like Cops and Robbers, in roleplaying games you pretend to be someone else. Only in games, the characters are far more detailed than the generic cops or robbers who run around the yard shooting each other. The characters in RPGs are more like characters in novels or TV shows—they grow and change over time, they have tastes and history and quirks and motivations. They exist, not only to do things, but also because they're interesting in and of themselves.

RPGs are games built through, and around, stories. The story progresses as the game is played. There isn't a winner or a loser, and there isn't a board, but there are dice and rules . . . a radical departure from standard Cops and Robbers.

The stated reason that most games have all these rules, with dice or cards or other random number generators to provide absolute impartiality, is that it "keeps



things fair” and “resolves uncertain actions”. I’m going to break with tradition and assert that this is a crock.

The dice are impartial, but their application and interpretation can be confusing and subjective, giving a decided edge to the guy who understands the rules best. The more complicated the game, the more advantage accrues to that guy. Known in the parlance as a “munchkin” or a “rules lawyer” or a “min-maxer,” he’s a player who tries to build his character for optimal performance in some area of play (stereotypically, it’s combat). He also plays his character in such a fashion that events are resolved through his character’s strengths. This is regarded as a bad thing.

Yet I find myself hesitant to dismiss a player who puts that much effort into his game. If only there was some way to harness that drive and make it a force for Good, not Annoyingness. Hm. . . .

I got off on a tangent there. I was talking about dice and impartiality and resolving disputes. If you really wanted an impartial dispute resolution system, reach in your pocket and grab a coin. Heads you win, tails you lose. Bingo. Fair, impartial, and easy to understand. Let’s tell our story!

The only problem with this is that, if you’re telling a story like *Lord of the Rings*, the coin-flip gives Sam Gamgee a fifty/fifty chance of knocking out Aragorn with one sucker punch to the jaw, which any reasonable person knows Sam would need a ladder to even reach.

On the other hand, it seems reasonable that Sam would have some chance of decking a goblin, or Peregrin Took, or Gollum. What’s needed, then, is some way of determining which chances are “reasonable.”

Enter the Game Master. In gaming’s frenzy of acronymming, she’s called the GM.

For Cops and Robbers, no one wanted some know-it-all standing on the porch saying, “Tommy, you can’t hit him! He’s around the corner and bullets only go in straight lines!” Or, in our hobbit example, “Give it up, Sam. Aragorn’s been beating people up since you were a sperm.”

RPGs are more complicated than Cops and Robbers because the characters and roles are more involved, and the setting is more complicated, and the events have both more factors influencing them, and more repercussions arising from them. So I think we can set Cops and Robbers aside.

Football has impartial referees to pass judgment on the teams, and a GM is something like that. The rules of the game serve the same purpose, providing an agreed-upon structure. What is this structure for? It provides the logic of the setting.

The Logic of the Setting

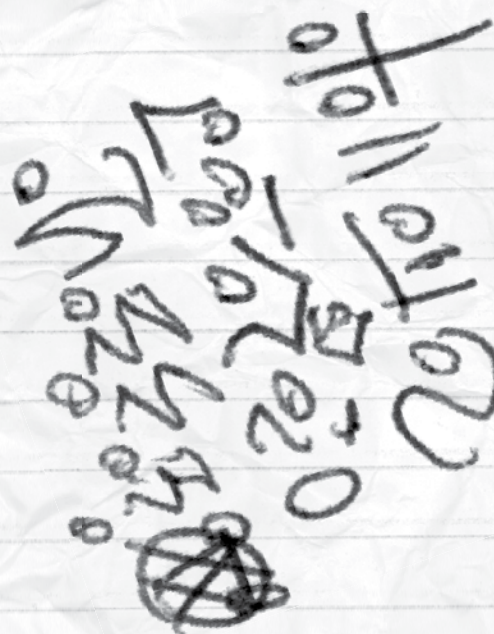
Okay, I'll try really hard not to be overblown and pompous here. But RPGs come with their own little worlds, an imaginary map on which the characters move. But this isn't just a map of physical places, it's a map of events and people and governments and starships and beliefs and magic spells and battle tactics and . . . well, everything that makes up a world, supposedly. RPG stories aren't told in the real world, because the real world is taken up with our lives. So we build a pretend world, out of words and consensus, and we tell stories there.

The advantage to making your own world, obviously, is that you can depart radically from reality. In fantasy games, wizards weave smoke into air-weight castles as strong as steel and bold beggars with a treasure map and a plan can unearth troves of rubies the size of hen's eggs. In science-fiction games, starships break the lightspeed barrier with impunity in search of new alien races to conquer (or learn from, if that's your bag). In a horror game, the awfulness you need to fear isn't a terrorist, it's an unquiet ghost. Unless it's the unquiet ghost of a terrorist.

Does the beggar find the rubies? Which alien race triumphs? Can the undead terrorist be stopped? The rules and dice are there to resolve these issues, not by a fifty-fifty coin-flip, but with degrees of likelihood.

Believe it or not, degrees of likelihood are fun. They don't sound fun, but watch people playing poker—they're calculating degrees of likelihood. Betting on a football game, playing the stock market or bellying up to the roulette wheel are exciting and fascinating because there's uncertainty, but it can be managed. You pick the horse with the best record on muddy track or you fold instead of drawing to an inside straight. Interacting with uncertain events and testing your judgment against them is neat, and that's part of the thrill of gaming. Only instead of betting your hard-won real-world cash, you bet the fate of a character you've created, being rewarded with more power, glory or knowledge when you win . . . or being punished with humiliation, injury or even that character's death when you fail.

Understanding the rules means understanding the logic of the setting, which means understanding how things are meant to go. Now's a time when it's helpful to compare games to fiction. Characters in soap operas behave differently than characters in action movies, because they're different types of stories. A character on *Days of Our Lives* is unlikely to resort to Tae Kwon Do to resolve her problems, because in that setting success arises from emotion and social interaction—you can't just spinning-back-kick your troubles away. Furthermore, Jackie Chan can take on legions of enemies armed with nothing more than a ladder. In *Saving Private Ryan*, a grittier ethos is in place (and rightly so). Am I comparing apples to oranges? Yes, but only to explain why you need different tools to get the juice out of each.



Trouble: The Overactor

Some players invest very little in their characters and get little out of them. That's really their lookout, and as long as they're contributing to the game they're only hurting themselves. One group of players who damage the collective are actually those who get too far into character.

This can take two forms. The first is someone who gets too solidly into a role that doesn't contribute or which actively impedes the rest of the group. Say, for example, four of your players create hardy merchant sailors who are going to roam the seas trying to outwit goblin pirates. Great: Lots of fine, swashbuckling, sea-faring excitement there. The fifth player creates a powerful wizard with a lot of connections to one specific port town. This wizard doesn't particularly care for sailing—she gets seasick, in fact—but signs on out of greed or simply because she needs to get out of town until the heat dies down.

This contrast can work, if the player is willing to let her character grow into being a sailor with the others. The contrast can actually provide a lot of friction, interest, and comic relief. That's not a problem.

It's a problem if the player constantly tries to pull the whole crew out of this week's adventure because her character has no interest in it. She wants to get back to her port town and work her intrigues and have the ship's crew serve as her patsies and side-kicks. If anyone calls her on this spotlight-hogging, she says, "Hey, I'm just staying in character."

As if staying true to a toxic character is somehow a virtue.

Players like this need to understand that they don't call the shots, that the group isn't

The rules in whatever game you're playing should reinforce the setting and the way events turn out. The game *Everway* settles things with draws from a deck of symbol-laden cards, because the setting is based on symbolism and intuition rather than the logic of strict realism. *Dogs in the Vineyard* emphasizes emotional motivation for actions and emotional consequences for them. Most other games tend more towards the idea of modeling physics, but even then they may be modeling the physics of an action movie (where the hero can survive falling off a hotel if he lands in the pool) or the physics of horror fiction (where, no matter how fast the heroine runs, the shambling zombie is always right behind her).

Why is this 'Fun'?

Roleplaying games have been evolving since the 1970s, and there are some features that most of the games written have in common. Specifically, they have character generation—some means by which players create characters who roam through the world having adventures, making huge messes and/or cleaning up huge messes. Games almost universally have combat systems that resolve physical conflict, often in loving, minute detail. Finally, games usually have a setting, with pages and pages of description intended to evoke a particular feel or flavor or style of game.

I don't think that's an accident of lazy game design. Most games have these things because all these things entertain. In one way or another, those three elements cover nearly everything that's fun about RPGs.

Character Generation, or, The Joy of Ham

It's a good time, pretending to be someone else. If you agree with this statement, you probably don't need the rest of this section and can skip right down to the bit about fighting.

All right, for all you skeptics: Inhabiting another role is entertaining in and of itself, at least for many people. It makes a nice change from the day to day life of a parent or a plumber or a punk teenager—instead of acting the way you always do, because it's right or expected or you'll get fired if you don't, you get to act out. If you're normally laid back and noncommittal, you can find out how it feels to be a passionate, noisy troublemaker. Since it's all in fun, all in the game, all in a made-up world, it doesn't count. For many, the chance to have a change of pace in the form of a change of behavior is reason enough to game, period. Not to mention the opportunity to use outrageous accents and gesture wildly. (I'm thinking right now of one of my most flamboyant players, who by day is an educator and presumably can't run around screaming, "So angry! So angry! I'll pee on your shoes when you're dead!")

So pretending to be someone else can vent ya-yas whose expression is otherwise unacceptable, what with the violent murders and shoe-peeing and all. But there's more.

Playing another role can go deeper and have a more profound impact than the superficial level of wilding and ranting and blowing off steam. Like theater or literature, game stories can confront characters (and, through them, you) with truly challenging issues. Your character could end up deciding whether a mother or father gets the kids in an acrimonious divorce. You could be a tribal chief who has to decide whether a neighbor tribe's cattle rustling is worth going to war, or if you should just let them get away with it. Your character might need to give up true love for honor . . . or for peace or just for political advantage.

RPGs, like all stories, can present us with choices between conflicting values (or conflicting perils) . With the remove of knowing it's fiction, we get all the interest and excitement of making important decisions . . . without having to actually deal with the unpleasant consequences that such choices have in real life.

Furthermore, by playing a character very different from oneself, you can make those choices based on different values, combining the joy of thinking through the tough stuff with the joy of chewing the scenery.

Combat: The Crimson Bliss of Power

RPGs grew out of wargames and it shows. Combat is nearly universal in these games, and for good reason: It's an intense, dramatic and exciting form of conflict, one everybody can understand. If you think you'd enjoy having your proxy in the game mow through hordes of unfortunate enemies with tireless swings of his mighty axe, you probably get it and don't need a lecture on the desirability of specific combat rules.

But maybe you do need that lecture. Maybe you think fighting should be just another character element, like looking good and speaking suavely and being an unfairly-cashiered starship captain. Why does "fearsome warrior" get a whole chapter devoted to it when "compelling public speaker" does not?

Here's why: Fighting is the lowest common denominator. A fist to the face is a language everyone understands. So too in gaming. A player who doesn't have the verbal skill to engage in a legalistic duel of wits can still stack his character to dominate in combat—and it's a lot easier to drag the courtroom down to a brawl than it is to elevate a fistfight into articulate discourse. Furthermore, the consequences can be severe. You fail to grasp the nuances of manners and your character looks like an oaf. You fail in battle and his skull could become your arch-enemy's new goblet.

Beyond its intensity, and the possible permanence of its outcome, complex fighting rules may be desirable because many players like them. Strategy is fun. Chess has been popular for centuries. Furthermore, figuring out a complex set of rules is, for many players, very engaging. It's interesting to try and optimize a character to succeed at a difficult task.

This is known as min-maxing and, as I mentioned earlier, it's got a bad

there to serve their pleasure at the expense of their own, and that it's okay for selfish, odd-duck characters to grow and change so that they work better with the rest of the party.

The other problem thespian player is the one who may work very well in the party, and has no need to be a jerk or a control freak . . . but he meanders. He enjoys playing his character so much that going to the shop to pick out a new space suit is as exciting as a clandestine mission to extract a prisoner from a tightly-guarded prison moon. He jaws on and on (in character), maybe amusingly, maybe only amusing himself, while everyone else sits around drumming their fingers on the table . . . or worse, discussing their latest DVD purchases.

A little in-character chatter is great. Some groups are composed entirely of meanderers and for them, that works. They can have long, involved, satisfying campaigns in which very little happens except that their characters were interestingly characterized. The problems arise when you get more typical players who have a heavy interest in plot and mechanics, and who see the in-character noodling as pointless. They're not out of line. In his own way, this meanderer is as much of a spotlight-hog as the selfish control-freak, but in this case the fix is much simpler. The GM just has to give him opportunities for in-character behavior within the scope of the plot. Ideally, these chances let him contribute to the success of the party. In the space jail example, he'd probably be just as happy developing his character by fast-talking the guards into letting the party land their supposedly-crippled ship there for emergency repairs. The difference is, now the other players are happy with the character too.

Trouble: The Powergamer

The stereotypical min-maxing twinkie combat munchkin abuses character generation to get a character who is staggeringly efficient at fighting, often at huge expense to his abilities in other areas. This is because he is not concerned with exploring the nuances of character, or appreciating the interesting elements of the setting. He's going to ignore that stuff and get to fight scenes, which he will win, so that he can get some form of power-increasing reward, which is plunged into optimizing his character for more combat. Furthermore, whenever any other player tries to do something besides fight, he finds a way to sabotage it. Even when the other characters can fight, he seeks out means to hog the spotlight, be the most powerful warrior, and suck up as much of the GM's time and attention as he can. As far as he's concerned, the game is about his character's prowess and glory, full stop. The other characters are sidekicks, barely more important than the endless parade of enemies. The setting is just a backdrop. The GM's ideas about theme or motive, or intrigue or story or meaning, are dismissed with a resounding "Who cares?"

Doesn't this guy sound like a pain in the neck?

Luckily, this pure-form stereotype is rare, and if you do run into one your GM has ample justification to give him the boot. Honest. Tell her I said it's her sovereign duty to expel him for the good of players who aren't jerks. But really, it should almost never come to that.

reputation. But as I also mentioned earlier, putting a lot of attention into the game is something I'd like to encourage. So I'm going to go out on a limb and suggest that it is not the min-maxing itself which other players find so annoying, but rather a host of behaviors that usually accompany min-maxing. Many of these can be dealt with, and advice for such dealing is in the nearby boxed text.

Setting and the Sedentary Compensations of the Couch Potato

The third common element to the archetypical game is its setting. Sometimes this is a licensed setting like *Dying Earth* or the *Star Trek* universe, but more typically it's something custom built, because that's more satisfying and provides more creative freedom. Cheaper, too. It's not uncommon for a successful game line to have dozens of books providing ever more intricate details of the nations, races and cultures of the setting.

Why, though?

Chess doesn't need a setting, nor does *Cops and Robbers*. But RPGs do because events and circumstances form character, and without characters in your game you're not really playing a role. Setting matters for the same reason that character matters, because it shapes the story.

Different settings provide different pleasures. Hard SF gives a glimpse into a future that will never be, while historical revisionism offers an alternative past that never was. Comic book settings let players find out if flight really is better than invisibility, which is a meditation on power and temptation all on its own.

In short, the outré and bizarre settings of RPGs give us a break from the real world, just as playing characters offer us a break from our real selves. Furthermore, the kind of profound and literary emotions stirred by a deeply-empathized character going through a wrenching and difficult choice are mirrored in the tragedies or triumphs of nations in conflict. All within the safety of fiction.

Setting provides a chance to explore alternate societies, places of unreal grandeur and bizarre philosophies based on a world that is magical, not logical. In a word, it provides spectacle.

There are many gamers who find settings interesting. They like having characters—possibly characters who are two-dimensional and rather passive—tour the regions, hear the neat descriptions, run into fascinating denizens, and engage in hand-to-hand combat with them. They're not obsessed with finding the optimum killing attack in every situation, they're not chewing the scenery, they're enjoying richness of the setting. This is the third joy of gaming: Seeing what new marvel the GM or the game designer has to show you this week.

The only real problem setting-explorers is that they can sometimes are little bit too laid-back.

Your Mission, Should You Choose to Accept It

With all that stuff about character, system and setting in mind, just what are your duties as a player? When you play, what are you expected to do?

Show up

Most obviously, you're expected to be there and be a warm body. Gamers refer to "sessions" which means (for example) that I'm going to be at Thomas' house around 1:00 on Sunday afternoon, and we'll play the game until 5:00 or so, then meet again the next Sunday for another. Most games go from session to session, like issues of a comic book—there's usually a session climax, but the characters continue to press on towards a larger goal that takes many sessions to accomplish. If you're going to be part of a gaming group, make the time commitment or explain to the GM that won't be able to be there every time. If you're only showing up every other session, get used to sketchy rundowns of what you missed, and get used to plots that focus on the people who are there consistently. No one's demanding Cal Ripken-like perfect attendance, but it's hard for a GM to center stories on your character if she doesn't know if you'll be present.

If you like gaming but your schedule just won't let you commit to your group, there are a couple ways around it. If the plot and structure permit it, your character may just be intermittent—like a recurring character on a TV show who isn't in every episode. Otherwise, you may have to agree to let the GM control your character while you're away, expecting her to play it safe, not take big risks, and not depict him getting drunk and fathering a slew of illegitimate children (unless, of course, that's the character you want). Alternately, you can let your fellow players run your character by consensus in your absence. Neither one is a perfect solution but, hey, it's an imperfect world.

Pay Attention

You can't expect to be spoon-fed the joy like you can with passive media. Gaming is interactive: If you don't respond to what's going on, it doesn't work. This means you're expected to understand the rules. Total command of every nuance isn't required, but have a general idea of how the game's mechanics kick in to determine success or failure. Pay particular attention to rules that come into play a lot for your character. If your game has fairly involved systems for piloting a starship in combat, either do the homework of learning them or let someone else be the flier. Similarly, in a high fantasy game you probably don't need to study how magic works if your character isn't going to be casting spells. If she is a sorceress, understand the game's idea of magic. Not only does this keep you from dragging

If you're a min-maxer, odds are good you don't realize how annoying you are. Quick, who's the most irritating player in your group? If you don't have a ready answer, it may be you. The good news is, help is here if you aren't doing it on purpose.

To cure munchkin syndrome, you just need to understand that RPGs aren't about winning, aren't about getting the most power-ups, aren't about being the toughest, and aren't about hogging the spotlight. These games work best when players are working half for their own characters, and half for the good of the game as a whole. One of the biggest rewards RPGs offer is the opportunity to keep playing, but that's a cruddy payoff if every player is trying to one-up everyone else. No one wins at RPGs, but it's perfectly possible for everyone to lose.

If you want to be the best fighter in the group, that's fine . . . as long as the players rally around that idea and there's enough GM attention to go around. Many other players actually don't like combat all that much and are more into characterization or just grooving on the setting and plot. If you're a combat monster player, you can be a great fit with players who couldn't care less. All you have to collectively do is understand when you need to step back and let the expert do his job. For them, that's solving mysteries or making diplomatic overtures or coming up with the overarching master plan for world domination. For you, it's when diplomacy fails.

Most players just need to have it explained that there is a wider view of cooperation, and then they perceive it, pursue it, and are willing to take turns with the spotlight. Those who can't are probably real crybabies and your game's better off without them.

Trouble: Mr. Lazybones

Some players are used to being spoon-fed their entertainment by TV and movies. I love the tube and the theater as much as the next guy (though I'm just lukewarm on spoons), but gaming requires more investment. You have to figure out what your character's doing and have at least a sketchy rationale for why he's doing it.

The lazy gamer, however, just goes with the flow. He likes to hear about the cool space-ships and brutal bloodbaths. He contributes, he has ideas but . . . he's passionless.

This can actually be just fine.

If you are having fun and keep showing up, don't worry that you feel no urge to produce in-character journals, or use CAD software to lay out a space station, or indulge in all the other diversions of geek-craft typical to character-ham players. (There's no shame in it if you do, though. I've personally done some lovely colored-pencil character sketches.) Maybe your big reward is the company of your friends, together, gaming. Or doing whatever.

This is okay. Arguably, you're getting less out of it than the frothing and committed fanatics, but that's your choice. In fact, laid-back players make a fine counterbalance for those whose natural instincts make them want to hog the spotlight.

The problem arises when you get a whole group of passive players. They expect to be fed a plot with several options, they casually discuss them until they pick, then they roll dice to see how it turns out. Lather, rinse, repeat, see you next week.

the pace of the game to a crawl as you look up the rules, it makes your character more effective since you actually know what she can and cannot do.

More than that, follow the script. Pay attention to what the GM tells you. Remember the characters' names, and if you can't remember them, write them down. In a mystery novel, the detective eventually puts the pieces together. In a game with a mystery plot, those pieces aren't going together unless the players do it. You don't need to be obsessed, but you do need to be invested.

Let It Go

Involvement yields enjoyment . . . until things go poorly. It's quite possible in many games to spend multiple sessions building a great and powerful character and then, through the cruelty of a few bum rolls, your character dies. Or goes insane or breaks his magic helmet or undergoes some other miserable setback that certainly wasn't in your plans. When that happens, you have to be philosophical.

It is possible to enjoy the death of your character, if it's a kick-ass death. If you go down swinging and are overwhelmed, while the other characters survive and complete the mission, that's about as heroic as it gets. It's particularly poignant if the GM lets you get in some cool last words like "Tell Martha I always loved her" or "Avenge me, Kuin!" or "I am fortunate. I shall rest with honor. You, my friend, must continue the struggle."

Far more often, the setback won't be something so dramatic. You roll badly and the villain makes you look silly. Your character throws up at the drinking contest. You bungle an easy task and, instead of being suave and cool, your character looks like a ninny.

If you're willing to take those lumps without taking it personally, you may enjoy the setback as comic relief. Failing that, you can look at it as the background for the eventual triumph. After all, in movies the hero typically gets knocked around a lot before his final success. You can't have a dramatic, come-from-behind, underdog victory if you've always succeeded at everything. If you can negotiate a course between apathy towards the game and obsession with it, you can groove on the highs and shrug at the lows.

It's not just character problems that can stick in your throat, either. It may be that your GM misinterprets a rule and your character suffers as the result. Let it go. Every pro ball game has some bad calls, and GMs aren't perfect. Many great GMs sacrifice complete fidelity to the rules in order to keep the game moving at an exciting pace, or to provide for a better plot in the long run, or simply because they made a mistake. If you really must make a case for a different interpretation of some specific text in the book, talk it over with your GM after the session. Nothing makes a GM defensive like being criticized in front of the other players, because she needs to have some authority to run the game. Even if she admits it was wrong,

don't hold a grudge and don't demand some kind of redress. Just accept that bad calls happen to good characters and hope that the next fumble goes in your favor. Usually, they balance out.

Share

The game is not about your character, it is about your group's characters. If your GM is doing her job, you get your time to excel and look like a champion, and so do the other players. One very common complaint about bad players is that they're RPG ball hogs—they want to be the most important actor in every scene. When you get a group of these attention magnets together, it's ugly. It's like babysitting toddlers on a rainy day.

Good groups, on the other hand, support each other. Suppose events have been building towards Leon's character Xanthar's confrontation with High Lord Gharst. Your last several adventures have involved finding evidence to link Gharst with the plot to poison the queen, and now Xanthar (the good looking and eloquent diplomat) is going to present what you know. But, in a surprise twist, Gharst shows up to frame him. It's down to a battle of wits.

Leon's a big ham, so he's got all kinds of speeches planned. If you're a good player, you sit back and let him have his moment in the sun. If you're a bad player, you have your stuttering barbarian attack Gharst so that it degrades into a big fight scene (that's the Powergamer tactic). If you're a great player, you find some way to enhance Xanthar's speech. Even simply shouting "Hear hear!" when he makes a good point can work. Most essential, though, is respecting his turn in front. If you do that, Leon's far more likely to enjoy a scene where Xanthar talks about what an indomitable warrior your character is (or expert sailor, or smooth loverman, or whatever your character concept is).

Contribute

In the spirit of aiding Leon and Xanthar, learn how to contribute to the game. The more you put into it, the more enjoyment you're going to get out of it, and that doesn't just apply to your character. If you're seeking ways to make other characters look good, their players just might return the favor. If you look for ways to make the GM's job easier, everybody benefits as the game runs more smoothly. If you show up planning to accept whatever you're given, you get something. If you show up wondering how you can make the game cooler for everyone, you get more. If everyone shows up focused on making the game great with their characters, instead of making their characters powerful in the game, you can get something spectacular.

If that's your situation, someone needs to step up. Someone needs to invest some energy and thought into the party and push in a consistent direction. If you don't take that initiative, either someone else will, or the game is doomed.

Maybe the person who puts the pepper in the recipe is your GM. Most experienced players prefer to be the ones making plans and developing strategy: When there's really only one path to follow, the game might as well be a scripted computer game. This is called "railroading" and while it's widely despised, it's widely known for a reason, and that reason is that it works . . . kinda. It's far from optimum, but it's better than having a game flatline due to terminal apathy. Many GMs, rather than see that happen, put the game on this sort of bossy life-support system. Just like a respirator in a hospital, it's an artificial method of doing something a body ought to do.

As a player, you're there to have fun, but you also have a responsibility to contribute something fun for others. (In fact, helping others have fun is, itself, fun—having your creativity appreciated by an audience is one of the primo perks of the GM job, I find.) If you're uncertain or shy or don't trust your ideas, it's okay to hang back—especially if your group is full of people who aren't shy and don't hang back. The role of audience is necessary, if not exactly glamorous. But don't be afraid to speak up when you become comfortable. Maybe even a bit before that, just to get practice. After all, it's all imagined, and the only repercussions are to characters who don't really exist and can't sue you.



APPENDIX B: HOW TO RUN ROLEPLAYING GAMES BY GREG STOLZE

Running a roleplaying game is work. It's fun, it's rewarding, it stretches you and makes your mind function in new, exciting ways . . . but it's work. That's okay. Work is good. Anything worthwhile requires effort and attention, and in gaming especially, more effort and attention is likely to yield a better outcome.

If you've never run a game before, it can seem overwhelming. It's not. I don't know you, but I'll go out on a limb and assert that people dumber than you have run successful games. Running a game requires effort, but it's not something so esoteric and complicated that only a brain surgeon can do it.

The GM's duties boil down to this: When the players show up and their characters are ready, you present them with a situation. They react to the situation. You present the outcomes of their reaction. They react to those outcomes. Lather, rinse, repeat. The whole art of running games comes down to creating settings, stories and circumstances, then altering them as the PCs go through—altering them in ways that are fun, challenging, exciting, and which open new opportunities for continued play.



The GM's Basic Duties

Here's the meat-and-potatoes stuff: Plot, character, conflict. If you can accomplish these practical tasks, you're there, or at the very least you have an excellent start.

GMs who fail at these can be termed "incompetent." I'm not saying that to be unkind, but to distinguish them from the "dysfunctional" GMs I'm going to discuss later. If you take it easy, pay attention and keep everything in perspective, you should be able to run a game functionally and competently.

The Plot

A story is when things happen. Cool characters alone do not make for a good story, even if they're in a cool setting. Here, I'll show you.

"Tarzan and Sherlock Holmes walk into a bar. They have a few drinks, talk about last night's game, and then they go home."

That's not a story. That's not even a joke, because it doesn't have a punch line. Plot is the punch line.

"Tarzan and Sherlock Holmes walk into a bar. Holmes says to Tarzan, 'I bet I

A Quick Lexicon

On the off chance you don't know these acronyms . . .

PC: Not "Personal Computer" or "Politically Correct" but "Player Character". A character controlled by a player, meaning, not you. The PCs should be the most important characters in the game, though not necessarily the most powerful.

GM: "Game Master" or, if that's too S&M sounding, "Game Moderator". The person adjudicating the rules, presenting the plot and deciding the outcomes after the PCs make their choices. In other words, you.

GMC: "Game Master Character". Any character you control, that is, not a PC. (Sometimes called an NPC or Non-Player Character.)

can predict what you'll order if you let me examine your hands.' Intrigued, Tarzan complies. Holmes squints at Tarzan's fingernails, turns to the barkeep and says, 'He'll have seven shots of Scotch.' 'That's incredible!' says Tarzan. 'How'd you know?' 'Because you had the same thing last night, you lousy drunk,' Holmes replies."

Now you've got conflict (can Holmes predict correctly?) and dialogue and interest and even a dénouement. ("Dénouement" is French for "Everything gets explained.")

In this case, the characters drove the plot, because Holmes made his bet and initiated the conflict. You can't always rely on your PCs to do that, so as a GM it's a good idea to have an event developing—or even better, a couple of them.

Events for a plot should focus around a conflict (see below). They should involve repercussions that the characters care about. The characters should be able to alter the outcome, but it shouldn't always be easy.

The rough outline of plot starts with some sort of introduction or story insertion or "plot hook". It progresses through rising action, arrives at a climax, and then there's falling action.

The Hook

This is what gets the players interested and, through them, the characters. To motivate characters, it helps to hold out rewards or threaten punishments, or both. If they're going to miss out on the carrot and get swatted by the stick, it's easy for them to tell what you want them to do. Great, right?

Yes and no.

I ran an informal online poll about bad GMs and one frequent complaint was about "railroading"—where the GM has a very concrete idea of where the story is headed and permits no deviation. Characters who act predictably get rewarded. Those who don't are humiliated, robbed, damaged or otherwise schooled.

While the GM is in charge of the world and what happens in response to the PCs' actions, that doesn't give authority over the PCs' choices and decisions. This means you. It's essential to respect the players' free will when they're deciding how their characters think, feel and act.

On the other hand, a GM who shows up with no preconceived ideas can't be accused of railroading, but she can be accused of apathy. Ideally there's an interplay between the characters' desires and your plots, but you have to find a balance between cramming them into a script, and having nothing for them to do.

Luckily the gray zone between "strict control" and "nothing at all" is quite broad. The solution is to create a situation that's unstable, introduce the characters, and let things play out in a manner that feels natural. Appeals to self-interest are good: So are insinuations of threat. Using both may be overkill.

The hoary old gaming cliché is that a stranger approaches the PCs in a bar with a treasure map. This became a cliché because it works: The appeal of gold and violence is enough for many characters. But let's see if we can't improve on it, hm?

The way you bait the hook can make it more appealing, and to find the right bait you need to look at the characters' backstory.

"Backstory" means "everything that happened to the characters before the game began." Sometimes the GM provides part of the backstory. ("For this game, you all have to be in the starport at Ursa Minor, and you all have to know and get along with one another.") Sometimes the GM provides all the backstory. ("You're all the children of a doddering and aged king. He has to choose one of you to inherit the crown, but has not yet made his choice.") Sometimes the GM doesn't provide a thing. If you go that last route, it's perfectly fair to tell the players to come up with a rationale for why they trust one another and are working together. Monitor the character generation process—you're the objective observer who can spot the character that's going to cause problems. ("Since the others are all playing loyal soldiers of the Empire, having a noisy insurgent ideologue in the party may not work." Conversely, "You both want to make highly personable tactician characters, and the party doesn't have anyone with much medical skill. Can you re-work a bit to address these issues?")

Many games gloss over backstory, and many GMs let the players write it but then don't pay much attention. That's wasteful. By examining what the players already decided about their characters' lives, you can suss out what issues concern them and what sort of game they want to play. For instance, if all your PCs are charming, sociable, control many lackeys and servants, and have low-to-absent combat skills, you're going to have some unhappy players if every problem requires a violent resolution. Conversely, if you give them plenty of chances to outwit, outmaneuver and downright lie their way into power, they're playing the game they want.

A good hook, then, has the following.

- *Promise of reward OR some threat that must be met*

- *A tie in to the character's backstory*

I'm also going to suggest it should have

- *An obvious way to get involved*

- *Flexibility for when the characters ignore it or approach it obliquely*

Those last two are pretty important, even though you'll only need one of them. If your plot hook is set on a far away island and the PCs have no boat or money to hire one . . . well, who would blame them if they shrug their shoulders and ignore it?

It's also possible that even the juiciest hook gets overlooked. Have a couple others on hand—preferably a plan B that can't be easily ignored. If the PCs decide that going out to the spooooky, probably-haunted castle isn't the game they want to play, well, fine. Don't take it personally. Don't get upset and, especially, don't punish them somehow. They control their characters, so if they don't want to go poking around some manky dungeon, have an alternative. See if they won't nibble on something that keeps them in town, again something tailored to their interests.

Paper Tigers

Every so often, I like to throw some obnoxious and obviously inferior opponent (or opponents) against the PCs. Someone they can handily defeat without major consequences. Someone, in other words, who serves mainly as a foil so that the PCs get a chance to show off how buff they are.

The no-brainer example is the bully in the bar. He picks a fight, won't take no for an answer and winds up supine in the gutter with his teeth broken and his kidneys bruised. Many games offer a more social milieu, so the example might be a sneering lecher who gives the PCs a chance to befuddle and distract him so they can get the naïve coed (or other victim) out of the way.

There are no big moral issues here. There's no massive, plot-reinforcing reward. It's a chance for the PCs to show off, pure and simple.

Is this pandering? Well, a bit. But people play games because they're fun, and being a cool, competent guy who can handle himself adroitly is fun. One core element of gaming is escapism, and easy victory is a nice escape.

The problem lies with diminishing rewards. Throw up a paper tiger for a character once every three sessions or so, but no more than that. Make sure every character gets one periodically. Don't overdo it and—most importantly—make sure they don't interrupt engagement with real tigers.

If every problem is easily resolved, it stops being a story about a cool guy doing neat stuff. It becomes an unstory, because the character never encounters a task that lives up to his abilities. If your players start taking success for granted, it's going to stop feeling like success.

Paper tigers remind characters that they're competent and can get stuff done. But they're intermittent rests between bouts with durable opposition.

No matter what plot they engage, try to be prepared for the unexpected. Players are creative types sometimes, maybe as creative as you, and they try to find their way around things in a way that hurts them least and helps them most. This is addressed at length under **Conflict** on page 24, but the same advice from there applies here.

Rising Action

Everything that builds up to a showdown and increases the tension is called “rising action”. As a general rule of thumb, it consists of the characters making a gain or suffering a setback. You want your rising action to consist of a mix—some triumph, some failure—but you don't want to predetermine this. You do not want to decide, in advance, that the PCs succeed at the first encounter, lose in the second, succeed in the third and fail in the fourth. That's railroading at its most repugnant, even if you do it well and it seems natural to them.

Instead, I recommend a variety of encounters that you feel are balanced, with possible rewards and obstacles arising naturally from either success or failure. By “variety” I mean situations that call for different skills—some social, some physical, some combative, some puzzling and so on. By “balanced,” I mean that if your characters react with average intelligence and get average rolls, the outcome depends entirely on random chance. If they react really cleverly, they should overcome. If they're stupid, well, that should have fallout. All this is part of conflict, so—again—it's covered there, on page 24.

If your characters are waltzing through every encounter, tighten things up, especially in the beginning when you're getting your bearings with your PCs. Similarly, if they keep failing, maybe you're overestimating their abilities and need to ease things up a bit.

Let's suppose your proposed plot is “small abandoned fortress is infested with zombies.” A member of the local gentry, Sir Hook, has inherited the fortress and its contents after the death of an aged relative. He sent a servant to check it out and he never returned. Rather than go himself (the old place was dreadfully drafty and out of the way) he'd like to persuade some hardy and trustworthy people to do it. But he'll settle for the PCs.

You expect the zombies to be pretty tough—a notch or two above a paper tiger—but nothing the party can't handle, even with a few bad rolls. Your plot is, they get rid of the undead and either claim the fort or they take off with its contents. Furthermore, the source of the zombies is a demon that's gathering strength nearby. Your plan is for that demon to be the main antagonist.

You might decide to throw up some roadblocks before the characters even reach the castle proper—just in the interest of building up gradually and letting the players get the hang of their new characters. First, they encounter a washout where a flooded river has swamped the road, stranding them with a garrulous local. If they can figure

out a good way to get themselves over the river, they save some time. If not, they have to go miles out of their way. If they can get themselves and the peasant across, she's grateful and provides good information about the fortress.

Second, they run into some suspicious locals who dislike outsiders and try to bully anyone who looks weak, or maybe steal from anyone who looks strong. Dealing with the ne'er-do-wells successfully gets them off the PCs' backs permanently and earns them some respect from decent folks. Failure (which includes brutally murdering them) alienates the same good people.

The final challenge is when they get to the fortress and get their first inkling about zombies. Handled carefully, they can get in a good position and get tactical advantages. Handled badly, it's a slugfest.

See how this works? Events crop up in their path, with potential and risk, but nothing that's really derailing or seriously deadly . . . yet. You work up to that.

You can stretch out the rising action for some time. If the climax comes too soon, it won't stand out as special. If you delay too much, though, your players are going to get bored waiting for it. The optimal amount of rising action varies from group to group, so I can't give you a perfect number of sessions. Just be aware that your particular players might have wanted more or less.

Climax

The climax is the big finale in which the characters uncover enough of what's going on that they can take decisive action. It is often a great idea to set up the circumstances and then hand the resolution to the players. If you have a preconceived notion of the Right Way to handle the major issue, you'll resist different solutions that might be as good or (let's face it) better. If you think the Evil Overlord should be shown the error of his ways by means of a space armada and that the climax should be the clash of a thousand starfighters, you may be cheating your players of a different sort of satisfaction. Maybe they want to talk to the Evil Overlord. Maybe they think he's not so much evil as misled. Maybe it would be a better, more fun, and more satisfying game for them if they could redeem him and persuade him to step off his dark path.

For the zombie castle example, perhaps the PCs sent a messenger to Hook requesting backup, while they engaged the enemy. Then they proceeded to lure the zombies into a series of deadly traps, dispatching some and chasing off the others without getting too badly hurt. They figure Hook will show up first thing in the morning to find what a top-notch job they've done, and then he and his soldiers can do the busywork of chasing down the stragglers that fled into the wilderness. The sun's going down and no way are the PCs heading into zombie-swamp after dark.

That's when they see that the zombie-swamp is coming to them . . . with reinforcements.

Here's the climax: Can the PCs defeat the zombies? Do they need to take them all out, or is it enough to survive the night until the cavalry arrives in the morning? Did their messenger even get through?

You expect your characters to hole up in the fortress and play at *Night of the Living Dead* until the reinforcements they sent for arrive. But it's also possible that they try to take the fight to the zombies, or that they make a run for it. Whatever they do, if it's the climax it has to be tense, exciting and constantly in doubt. If they flee, it has to be a thrilling chase scene until they get to the village . . . and then what happens? Are the villagers up to the challenge of fighting a horde of the undead, or have the PCs just doomed them? If they defend, can they hold them off despite exhaustion and limited numbers? If they go out to battle, do they have a prayer in the world?

The climax should be the biggest conflict in a plot line, and you don't want to clutter up a climax session with much fallout from side-plots or rising action stuff. Focus in on the big showdown or debate or battle or escape. Test your PCs to their limits, and—here's the important part—don't pull your punches.

When I say "don't pull your punches" I don't mean you should give your PCs an impossible challenge that inevitably kills them. You play the role of their enemies, but you are not their enemy. Your job is not to beat them, but to give them a fair challenge.

Part of the fairness is that the bad guys may win. If the PCs fail, don't torque coincidence so that they escape, and don't have some GMC (game-master character, aka NPC) show up to save their bacon (and make them look like chumps). Many players would actually rather have their characters go down to death fighting than get bailed out in a humiliating fashion by some pet character controlled by the GM. Better, many would prefer to leave their character in an untenable position if it saved the other characters. You can't really ask for a better end to your character's story than "He died saving everyone else."

Sometimes though, characters die stupid and pointless deaths. Depending on your feelings and your judgment of the game, you may opt to spare characters who died only because some lucky creep rolled an absurd string of unlikely successes. On the other hand, maybe you're just fine with characters dying pointlessly—especially if it encourages the other characters to play through their grief, and if it serves the plot.

By the same token, if they win, let them win. If you snatch their victory away at the last second by some petty and intrusive GM plot crank, do you think they'll be happy showing up to next week's session?

I'll be honest, I can't imagine what would make a GM want to abuse his players that way, but in that poll I ran, that was a common complaint—that the GM was cheating so that the characters always failed, or always failed if they didn't do exactly what the GM wanted. If that sounds like fun to you, I don't know what to tell you. Maybe running games isn't something you should do.

The end of a story should be like the end of a great novel or a great movie: Everything comes together, creating untenable tension, and then it snaps and reshapes events. If it's a good climax, no character comes away unchanged. That should be your goal.

Falling Action

At the end of the movie *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* you get brief blurbs explaining what happened to everyone after graduation. That's falling action. After the climax, everyone adjusts to a new position. Here's where rewards, both in-game stuff like wealth and gratitude, and rules-stuff like experience points, get parceled out and explained. This is a calmer sequence where the characters get a chance to work out how they feel about what happened and display that. It's also the time to plant seeds for future adventures.

Let's assume the characters bungled zombie castle. They bailed out and the zombies followed, killing one character after he fell off his exhausted horse. The others got as far as the village and had time to panic the residents before the hordes showed up. The PCs and the peasants managed to repel the zombies but only at the cost of terrible casualties. Now the zombies are back in the fortress, the village is decimated and Hook shows up to a huge mess. He's not happy.

Maybe the characters decide to just get the hell away—they've done enough, the peasants hate them and it's time to cut their losses. Maybe they're angry at Hook for sending them in unprepared. Maybe they think he should compensate them for the zombies they did wipe out. Or maybe they're devastated by their failure and want to make it right, doing everything they can to help battle the scourge and rebuild the village.

Depending on how they play it, they could regain the villagers' trust, or make an enemy of Hook, or rally back to defeat the zombies (and ultimately the demon responsible). If they do make a comeback, it's going to be far more satisfying because of this setback. But the beginning of the comeback story emerges in an ending of bitter defeat.

Conflict

Here we come to the brute, beating heart of it. Conflict arises when peoples' desires run into obstacles. The obstacle can be another person ("I'm in love with a cruel man's daughter and he hates me") or nature ("This grain is going to spoil if we sit out that storm in the harbor, and the famine was bad when we left") or some other circumstance ("I'm really poor, and I'd prefer to change that").

The samples above, by the way, are all external conflicts. That means they're something outside of the character being thwarted. There are also internal conflicts, where a character is literally her own worst enemy. Internal conflicts arise when a character has to make tough decisions between two bad outcomes ("If I lose this battle, my homeland may fall to the invaders, but the only way to

win is by killing by long-lost sister”) or has to choose between two conflicting goods (“I love her, but if I marry her I’ll never be able to inherit the crown, and she’d never accept the role of ‘mistress.’”)

How does a character overcome challenges? Is she direct and blunt? Does she seek the path of least resistance? Does she always try to choose honorably? Does she always seem to go for the most destructive, sadistic, harrowing option? All these things are a chance to be informed about a character, and all these things give insight into what game the player wants to be playing.

Your job is to provide opposition. Not every problem has to be profoundly difficult—go back to page 166 for my little essay on cakewalks. But certainly some challenges should be, you know, challenging. Dealing with failure reveals as much character as capitalizing success. More, probably. Don’t be afraid to allow the characters to fail if that’s how the dice fall out. (Players, don’t be afraid to fail.) On the other hand, don’t force them to fail by providing obstacles too powerful to overcome. Or if you do, do so because you’re setting them up for grudgy rematch at the climax: That’s perfectly legitimate. How many movies have the hero get beaten like an American cricket team in the first reel, only to get payback sevenfold at the end? Just make sure the players understand that the characters get another shot . . . if they earn it.

It’s not impossible, of course, that your players may have their characters do something really stupid. If you’ve made a point of establishing how elite and deadly the Imperial Crimson Guard are, and two of your PCs decide to charge them, with no strategy, for no very good reason . . . well, that’s like touching a clearly labeled electric fence. In all likelihood, what’s going on is something outside the game. The players are bored and want to stick it to you, see if you’re going to hold to your cherished notion of the game or if you’ll give them a break. If you want my opinion on this behavior, go read the section on “Leadership”. Or maybe the essay on how to be a player. There’s a dynamite section on kicking out troublemakers.

A pointlessly easy adventure is just as stupid and ultimately boring as a pointlessly hard one. Present them with middle ground. Make sure they know when they’re probably getting in over their heads—or that they can get out mostly intact, anyhow.

Now, there’s a big difference between a player who’s being contrary (or stupid) and one who’s simply doing something you didn’t expect. The first can take their lumps. The second you need to respect. For example, a group of PCs may meet the character you’ve designated as the game’s major antagonist . . . and they may try to join up with him. What do you do?

The knee-jerk reaction is often denial. “Dark Lord Soanso isn’t hiring!” But why not? Why not let them be part of the problem for a while? Maybe even for as long as they like. Perhaps you can use their service to show them, up front, just how horrible Lord Soanso is. (“Well then, just break her legs and toss her off the cart! I’m a busy man, dammit!”) If they get into it, clearly they want a game of being evil. You can deal with that by letting them get their ya-yas out until eeeevil just isn’t fun any more. Then you can put



out feelers about a redemption plotline, which could turn out to be all the more interesting for having trolled the depths before the slow climb to the heights.

It doesn't have to be a big moral curveball either. Perhaps you're planning a lively and lengthy game of deadly cat-and-mouse through the thickly forested emplacement of the Jungle Monks of Ereg, but your PCs decide, "Hell, we've got those crazy monks bottled up. Only two ways out of the jungle valley and we're ensconced at both. I ain't goin' in there. Let's just starve 'em out a couple months, see if they crack and, if not, go in after the leaves fall when we can see what the hell's going on."

This may be disappointing to you if you planned on that jungle hunt being the climax of your game. You can change-up on the fly though, and have the monks counterattack one of the chokepoints after the first month of blockade. Don't feel like you have to pull some alternate climax out of your sleeve: By going for a waiting option, your players are showing you they're willing to put up with more rising action. They're willing to gamble setbacks (as the increasingly desperate monks fall back on guerrilla tactics or unleash secret weapons) on the hope of getting an advantage. That's fine. Save the climax for next session after you've had a chance to think of one.

When the players do something unexpected, don't punish them. Understand that they aren't trying to screw you. They're just trying to resolve the conflict, and you should be commended for creating one challenging and realistic enough that they're thinking creatively. Their unexpected action is a gift to you, like a reward for being a good GM. It's your chance to confront the unexpected—the same sort of excitement you've been giving them. Cherish it.

Rules Resolution

As GM it's your duty to drive the rules. You decide when a character can do something as a matter of course, when it has to be rolled for, and when it's simply out of the question. You evaluate penalties and, if your game's typical, you hand out experience points at the end of the session.

This is a lot of power.

(You also decide how all the GMCs react to the PCs' actions, which is also a lot of power, but that's covered later.)

Because you have this power over the game, it behooves you to use it wisely, in the pursuit of everyone's fun. I'll say again that it's not your job to beat the players. Let's face it, if you want to beat the players—and by "beat the players" I mean "look like a jackass and ensure that your friends are miserable so you can ride some petty authority trip"—you will.

Instead, it's your job to keep the playing field level and to keep the game interesting. Most games have tools built in for making things easier or harder. You can use these, not only in response to what's being tried, but in reaction to

what's at stake and how much it matters. You may decide that a particular fact a character's trying to find in a library is both rare and irrelevant. In that case, you might want to just tell him he can't find it and move the game along. But if he's really adamant about wanting to know, you can give him the fact as a freebie—and move the game along.

Here's how you decide how challenging any given task should be, in no particular order.

- *How difficult is it within the game setting?*
- *How big is the reward?*
- *Does it make the character look cool?*
- *Will it derail the plot without providing new opportunities that are as good?*

Things that are more difficult according to the logic of the setting should have rules penalties—obviously, lifting lead bricks is harder than lifting clay bricks. That's the “objective” difficulty.

If the reward for success is disproportionately large, you may want to raise the tension by making it more difficult.

Alternately, if succeeding makes the character look cool and isn't going to ruin some other player's plan, or bring the plot to a premature and less exciting end, you may want to keep it simple.

The plot consideration takes the most GM finesse. You don't want to cheat—either to ensure success or preclude it. But at the same time, you want the challenge to feel real and urgent. By keeping your finger on the pulse of the game, you can know when it's time to make things harder and when it's time to make them easier. Your first duty is to enable the players to tell a good story with their characters, not to give them a cakewalk or a steady diet of failure.

It's also a GM's job to understand the rules. When players have questions, they're going to ask you. You do not want to end up pawing through this book in the middle of the action while you refresh your memory about how somebody's “Fleshly Plasticity” power works.

If the mechanics seem too fussy or clunky to you, by all means change them. Altering rules so they suit your tastes is as honorable and reasonable as cutting the garlic in a recipe if garlic makes you gassy. Most of the time, this sort of tinkering boils down to deciding how much authority you want to cede to the rules. This is a matter of personal taste—just make sure your players know how it's going to go. If you're slanting simulationist, (meaning, you let random factors filtered through the rules be the ultimate arbiter) then study! Make sure you know how the PCs' skills or abilities or devices work so that you're consistent when they use them, or when they try some fancy maneuver. If you're going narrative (meaning, you apply your common sense and use the rules to sculpt outcomes), be really clear

communicating to the players what they need to roll and get for this particular action, and strive to be as consistent as you can. Nothing ruins the fun of a game as much as the feeling that the GM is being controlling and arbitrary . . . unless it's a GM so hesitant that she's looking up rules in the big book every twenty minutes.

I'm not saying you shouldn't ever consult the manual during play, but try not to break tension or interrupt the flow of play to do it. Games have tense, fast-paced times and they have down times. If you must check the book, do it during down times.

Character

The players control the main characters. You portray everyone else. This is a big job. To make it easier, remember that not every stablehand, or even every head honcho they meet, has to be as intricately detailed and elaborate as a PC. It's okay for a character to be sketchy or two dimensional if she's only involved for a few scenes and then dies to show how the monster works. The players can project a rich inner life onto that GMC if they want, but by and large they're more concerned with their own problems.

For the purposes of running GMCs, we can break them into four categories: Major characters, minor characters, antagonists, and extras.

Extras are people who are basically setting. They don't need to have individual names, they don't need stats, they're there to take the PCs' hats and answer questions about where the bathroom is. In a fight, they're unworthy opponents, and any marginally competent fighter should be able to cow or clobber them without even rolling.

Minor characters get names because they recur and have some stake in the plot. The bombastic settlement administrator who could be an ally or a pain in the neck is an example here: He's an element of plot, and he has a personality, and the PCs have to deal with him as an individual. Minor characters may or may not need stats, but they certainly don't need a full character sheet—a few simple notes like “Make inspiring speech, 7d” and “Resist fast talk and flim-flam, 8d” may be enough for that mayor. To portray minor characters, give them a memorable element or two—a particular way of dressing, a habit of speech, a big ghastly scar or some behavior tic—and keep that consistent. Even if they players don't remember the name, they may remember, “Oh yeah, the coachman's daughter with the stutter.”

Interestingly, the more the PCs interact with minor characters, the more real those characters become. Don't fight this. Some big and unexpected fun can arise as characters get promoted from “wacky neighbor” to “major ally”.

Antagonists may or may not get names, but their purpose is to put up a fight with the PCs, pure and simple. You may not catch the name of that Goliath on the battlefield who's coming at you with a sword in one hand, a shield in another, and

Keeping the Villain Alive

PCs tend to play for keeps. If someone gets in their way, their instinct is to instantly escalate to lethal force. On the surface, this looks like very sound tactics—nip a small problem in the bud before it becomes a large problem.

But it's poison for plot.

The best plot is one in which there is one unified issue or problem or enemy and, over the course of much effort and despite many setbacks, the characters either overcome it (and have a happy ending) or succumb to it (and die in tragic glory). If they find the bad guy who's in charge of it by the second session and whack him, that tends to deflate the plot.

One tactic is to have an enemy government or guild or corporation. With big faceless collectives to battle, scraping off the leadership level is just one tactic. Someone new pops up and the Church of the Leprous Wolf continues. Nevertheless, having an identifiable face of evil is powerful. So here are some ways you can introduce an enemy individual and keep him alive long enough to really drive the characters mad with rage—which, in turn, drives the players mad with joy when they defeat him.

- **Dodge.** A villain with spectacular evasion abilities who isn't shy about running like a whipped dog can survive a long time. It's indisputably frustrating to fight a guy you can't hit, but it's also hard to respect a foe when the most common comparison is 'he runs like a whipped dog'. But this can be made to work, if you're ready for them to mingle contempt with hatred.

- **Deadliness.** PCs certainly respect an enemy who decapitates one of their tough fighters on the first pass of a fight. They may flee him, especially if the system you're using has a reputation for deadliness. On the other hand, hysterical fear may make them feel cornered and force them to fight until only one group leaves. If it comes down to that, your plot is

a big warhammer in the third—what the? Three arms? Yikes!—but he's certainly a cut above the hat-holder. Characters like this should have full combat stats, because their function in the plot is to have long, glorious fights with the PCs. (If your players don't care for battle, you may never need an antagonist. Most players care.)

Major characters are those who are involved again and again, and who either support the PCs and need their support in turn, or—most commonly—are the enemy against whom the characters strive. You're going to portray these characters a lot, you're going to need to make coherent decisions on their behalf that feel real, so you need to get into their heads. These characters are, for you, as detailed as the PCs should be to the players. You should identify with them . . . as long as you don't fall into the trap of wanting them to be the main characters. The PCs are the main characters. Your major characters exist to provide plot and resistance to the PCs, so when it's time for them to fall back and let the heroes be heroes, do it gracefully. When your beloved villain dies at the PCs' hands, it should be the climax of climaxes, your death of Hamlet, but the PCs' big scene.

Description

At last, a GM task that isn't fraught with peril! With character, plot, conflict and rules—with all that stuff you have to keep a balance between fairness and story bias and fun maintenance and everything else, but description, ah! That's far, far less political.

Here's how it works. You play the character's senses. When they enter a scene, you describe it, telling them what they see, hear, smell and otherwise observe. Note: You don't get to tell them what they feel about what they're seeing. That's the player's job, though it rarely hurts to say something like, "Yeah, it looks like your brother struggled a long time before he died. Looking closer, you see they pulled his fingernails out. How do you feel about that?" In fact, any time you want to stall while you figure something out, or just want to slow things down for pacing purposes, you can play psychologist and ask for a read on the character's emotions. Many players love to tell you about their characters.

Good description shows the important (or maybe just most obvious) stuff without bogging down in useless embroidery. Good description uses a lot of senses—on a battlefield the characters should feel mud under their boots and hear the cries of the dying and the wounded, louder even than shouts of terror and command. They should taste smoke and smell blood with each breath as the sun beats down on the chaos.

When players ask for more details, supply it but don't sweat it. If there's no particular relevance to how a given GMC is dressed, you can make something up or just gloss over it—"He's dressed very nicely" isn't terribly evocative, but may communicate to the player that this isn't a detail that needs to matter much.

Describing his furs and jewels may, however, communicate exactly how rich he is, or his taste, or his history. After all, a guy in a fancy and finicky confection of lace and pastel fringe creates a much different impression than someone in exquisitely cut but subtle gray velvet.

One pitfall to avoid is inconsistency. If there was only one door into the room a moment ago (or last session), saying that there are two now is going to confuse the players, snap the illusion and lower their trust in what you're telling them. This is a problem. How much of a problem depends on how major the disconnect. If it's a minor detail, you can shrug and move on—no one will care and no one should. Big things though, you need to get right. Take notes. Review them before the gaming group is all together. It doesn't have to be flawless . . . it just has to be better than the players' notes.

It's impossible (and undesirable) to catalogue everything in a given space. Tell them what's relevant but (here's the tricky part) be flexible with stuff that might become relevant. Just because no one noticed that there's a mop in the room doesn't mean the room has no mop: If a player asks "Is there a mop or something around?" your answer should depend, not on whether you put "mop" on your mental list of room props, but on whether it's appropriate ("No, the Dark Master's private meditation chamber does not have a mop") and whether you think they're going to do something cool and/or scene-wrecking with it.

Certain places, just by their nature, contain certain things. Characters in a blacksmith's shop should be able to find a hammer and some bellows. Characters in a forest should have no trouble finding sticks and leaves. Characters in a library can find books, paper and ink. Even things that just might be in a certain place . . . it's often a good idea to let PCs find them, as long as it's plausible and they're not becoming ridiculously lucky. Giving the players a little bit of ownership of the setting opens possibilities for the characters. (Finding a broom in the blacksmith's shop, a character sets the bristles on fire and makes a torch. A PC maneuvers a guard onto a patch of ice before trying to trip him. A character whips up a simple but elegant meal from forage at the campsite.) Furthermore, giving them that scope to imagine gets them invested in the game. If they have some authority to decide there's an incredibly heavy, elaborate and filthy spittoon in the tavern, they're more likely to produce some interesting and comical characterization or fight choreography involving a big dirty jar of drool. It gets them into it because it's theirs and they're making it, instead of having it be yours and they're just looking at it.

The GM's Advanced Duties

If you can manage the concrete elements of conflict, character, description and plot, you are a competent GM. That probably makes you a fun GM . . . as long as you're applying those skills the right way. But even a GM with encyclopedic rules

derailed no matter who wins. Deadlines is a good combination with the dodge emphasis, however. A guy who gets cornered and slices off a PCs' arm before escaping isn't someone to dismiss—as long as he runs after proving himself. However, both combat-intensive survival strategies are far from foolproof, as the occasional unexpected underdog victory is a feature of many games.

- **Political Connections.** If the bad guy is the sector commander, that's likely to give bloodthirsty PCs some pause. Setting your blaster to "Disintegrate" isn't just a matter of personal vendetta now, it's armed insurrection. The more political your game is, the better this works, since his followers are able to make trouble for the PCs. But not all PC groups operate legally, or maybe you want a villain who's an outlaw himself. While this is a good option, it's not universal.

- **Disguise.** Perhaps their opponent is known only as "Mister Crimson," no one's seen his face and he has countless tricks to conceal his identity. Killing him isn't the issue—the immediate challenge is to find him. ("Paging Mr. Soze, Mr. Keyser Soze . . .") This also opens up the classic plot twist of having the nemesis' secret identity be a friend or ally of the PCs.

- **Achilles' Heel.** Hey, Sauron didn't bother hiding from anyone. Some opposition can only be destroyed by some highly specific and arcane means—destroy the One Ring, bullseye that thermal exhaust port, pour a small quantity of water on her. The drawback of this approach is that you may have one idea of what the vulnerability is, but your PCs just can't figure it out, becoming increasingly frustrated with what looks like a railroad plot. There's an escape hatch to this, which is to simply decide that their most plausible theory about the weakness is correct (no matter how far afield it is from your plan). If you're okay changing your plot midstream, fine. If it's not to your taste, also fine—just be aware of the pitfalls.

• **10,000 Minions.** Some games, you know your enemy, you're confident that you could wring his neck . . . but he's miles away in his black basalt fortress and the army between you and him is pledged to his defense. The only real problem with throwing waves of minions at the PCs is that it may start to feel repetitive. The cure is to spice the mix with other options: If this guy's got such a following, other authorities are unlikely to want to get on his bad side (political pressure) and while he himself may be no combat shakes, he could employ skilled body doubles (disguise) and bodyguards (dodge). It's especially juicy if that bodyguard is someone the PCs like or at least respect. If you can pull off that scene where they say, "In other circumstances, we would have been friends." "Yes, good ones. To the death, then?" "I'm afraid I can accept nothing less"—then you're golden.

knowledge, deft plotting abilities and a superb grasp of drama is going to fail if she is running the game in the wrong direction, or if she misunderstands the point of the exercise.

Here goes: **The purpose of the game is for everyone to have a good time.**

This would seem to be obvious, but many anecdotes indicate that people lose track of it. To keep your GM eyes on that prize, there are some rather more abstract concerns, above and beyond just knowing how trip attacks interact with charging attackers. There are elements of attitude. I hesitate to describe a 'GM mystique' but certainly there are approaches that work and those that crash and burn. Here's what works.

Trust

Your players need to trust you to run the game. You need to establish a standard of fairness and stick to it. You need to make an effort to be consistent—with the rules, with the facts of description, with the personalities of your GMCs. They need to feel that they have a reasonable chance to make assumptions and predictions about the game world: If you're not consistent, there's no point in doing that. If you arbitrarily throw meaningless opposition at them whenever they try something unorthodox—or worse, whenever they're nearing success—they'll conclude that it's your game and that you're just using them for your own amusement without giving anything back.

Running a game is fun, making up the jungle-gym of the story is neat, but you have to trust the players enough to let them play on it—even if they're not playing the way you expected they would.

You need to trust them, too. You must be able to trust your players to make a real effort to interact realistically and to commit to their character. If they aren't doing that, you can't give them the game they want. If they're not involved with the character and don't really care, it doesn't matter what you put in front of them.

The difference is, when a GM doesn't trust her players, she has so much power over the rules, the setting and the GMCs that she may be tempted to try and "encourage" the players to "do it right". Then you just get antagonism. Instead, you have to use all the tricks in the GM bag to seduce the players and draw them in. Give them spectacle and opportunity and challenge and excitement. Give them a fair game. Offered that, anyone with the potential to play well, will.

Tone Control

"Tone" means the emotional backdrop of the game. Is your game going to be gloomy and desperate, light-hearted and frolicksome, or somber and majestic? These are tone concerns, and they influence character, plot and description.

Decide on a tone before the game starts and you'll save yourself a lot of headaches—headaches that are hard to explain without considering tone, such

as the dissonance caused when characters based on splatterpunk high-violence assumptions are tossed into a political game of intrigue and insinuation. Or the issues that inevitably crop up when one player's character is desperate, one is frolicsome, and one is majestic. Something's got to give there, or the party is going to constantly tug in different directions.

One way to communicate tone is to tell your players "This game is gritty and combat can be deadly fast, so be hesitant to escalate—the GMCs are." Or to say, "This is a talky game of somewhat satirical realpolitik—people do cruel things for absurd reasons, but as politicians the characters can often escape the consequences of their callousness." That's fine as far as it goes, but there's a difference between having a tone and merely asserting one. If you tell them what you're planning and don't follow through, you've misled them, and that's unlikely to turn out well.

Once you've set the tone, maintain it. Description is the most immediate and simple way to keep tone consistent. If the game has a tone of moral degradation, and the PCs are the relatively-clean heroes who are going to fight the power, you can reinforce that by stressing details like muddy streets, horses with sores from being made to pull loads too heavy for them, the potbelly on the mayor's mistress while urchins starve in the street. . . . If your tone is bright and fully of shiny, heroic wonderment, you can describe the fresh air of the forests, the tall and graceful spires of the palace, the dewy rosebuds climbing the trellis by the baker's house . . . any and all those details might be in both games, but you've only got so much time in a session to describe things. Concentrate, then, on the details that fit the feel you're after.

Leadership

This is a big one, and tough. Gaming is fun, it's an entertainment, and most likely you're going to do it with a group of friends. Most of us don't like bossing around our buddies—we like to go along, get along, let consensus emerge in a laid back form of democracy.

That works . . . to a point.

In gaming though, the GM has more power. It's your setting and your plots and while the players have the main characters, the burden is on you. If a player skips a session, the rest of you can probably muddle through. If the GM blows it off, there's no game.

Like it or not, you're the leader while you're running the game. You should certainly be an enlightened despot who cares about her players' desires and who respects their input, but you can force things to happen in a way that players can't. I've cautioned again and again about abusing the authority that comes with being GM, but there's an upside to that authority as well.

The upside is, you can lead.

If you act a certain way, the players are likely to model that. If you prepare and

have a good grasp of the rules, you can encourage them to do the same—hearing “Hey, before the game starts, you might want to brush up on exactly how long that spell takes to cast and how it works” from the GM carries a lot more weight if she’s not running to the book every ten minutes. It also carries more weight than if it comes from another player.

If you break character in order to stick in a Monty Python joke during tense moments, the players are going to feel that’s okay. (In your game group, maybe it is.) On the other hand, if you want your drama to be pure, you certainly have the right to shush a disruptive player who cracks wise at an inappropriate moment.

Some people, assertive people, find this very easy to do. If you’re not assertive, you’ve got a choice. You can put up with enjoying the game less than you should, or you can screw up your courage and call out the tone-breaker. In most cases, the guy doesn’t realize it bothers you and simply making your position clear one time suffices. But if a player consistently breaks the game . . . or is rude to you . . . or is being a jerk to the other players . . . well, you may need to kick him out. This, too, is a traditional role for the GM—policing individuals so that they don’t screw with the collective. It’s not necessary all that often, but when it comes down to it, you’re better off booting the guy who can’t play along. If you don’t, the odds are pretty good that the game dies a slow, painful death anyway.

Fair Conflict

Why is gaming fun?

It can be for the same reason that chess is fun—you manipulate the rules to get an outcome you like. It can be for the same reason that poker is fun—you calculate probabilities in a system with random elements in pursuit of advantage.

It can be for the same reason that a film or a play is fun—characters are put into trying circumstances and deal with them (or fail to deal with them in some compelling way).

The common element is conflict, opposition and obstacle. It has to be a fair conflict, too—anything else is unsatisfactory. (No one wants to play chess against

an equal opponent if you start out down a queen and two rooks). But it also needs to hold out the promise of improvement. The character (or player) needs to be able to take concrete steps to better his odds and improve his situation. At the same time there needs to be the real risk of over-reaching (or stagnating) and making the situation worse. This is what's behind all that rising action: Is the character on the right track? It's also what's behind falling action: Did he meet his goals?

Some GMs implement fairness by writing up a set of circumstances beforehand, balanced against the PCs' abilities, and then letting the chips fall where they may as the players attempt to navigate their characters through it. This "dungeon" approach has a long and honorable tradition. If it works for you, okay. But it's prone to the "death spiral" effect if you construct it strictly, in which one setback makes the next setback more likely, until a cascade leaves the characters writhing helplessly. If you can run a good tragedy, that works. Otherwise, you might find yourself interrupting your plans to bail out the characters—so building some wiggle room into the initial setup is a good idea. Rigid prep like this also makes it harder to respond when the PCs get some wild notion and jam off after it. No matter how much you try to prepare and anticipate, some day they will make your jaw drop. Accept it, adapt to it and move on.

Other GMs go session-by-session, adjusting this week's challenge based on last week's actions. This requires constant effort, but it's easier to cleave to the players' goals, actions and current success level. The issue with this approach is that your game may drift and feel plotless. If everyone's having fun, that's not an issue. If it's starting to feel stagnant and pointless, you may want to pre-load a little more to get a greater sense of direction.

You're going to have to experiment and find out what works best for your group and yourself, but that's actually a big part of the fun of it—trying new things and enjoying unexpected successes. As long as you're fair with your players, they'll usually forgive quite a bit. As long as you put in the work, even average players can provide a more than ample payoff.

My Monster

My monster's name:

My monster's appearance:

My monster's personality:

My monster's favorite thing:

My monster's way to hide:

Relationships that my monster has stolen or borrowed:

What My Monster Can Do

Hit location numbers and name:

Vice:

Qualities and extras:

My Monster

PERMANENT RECORD

© 2007 Arc Dream Publishing • Permission granted to photocopy for personal or educational use only.

ESSENTIAL DATA

Student's Name: _____

Parents/Guardians: _____

Birth Date: _____

Gender: [] m [] f

School: _____

Grade Level:

[] elementary [] middle [] high school

Homeroom Teacher: _____

Monster: _____

SUBJECTIVE EVALUATION

Appearance: _____

Personality: _____

Favorite Thing: _____

Comments: _____

PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

KEY: 1 = Needs improvement 2 = Meets expectations
3 = Exceeds expectations 4 = Highly proficient 5 = Gifted

CIRCLE ONLY ONE OPTION FOR EACH ENTRY

FEET (locations 1-2)

	1	2	3	4	5
Skill: P.E.	1	2	3	4	5
Skill: Kicking	1	2	3	4	5
Skill: Dodging	1	2	3	4	5
Skill: _____	1	2	3	4	5

GUTS (locations 3-6)

	1	2	3	4	5
Skill: Wind	1	2	3	4	5
Skill: Courage	1	2	3	4	5
Skill: Wrestling	1	2	3	4	5
Skill: _____	1	2	3	4	5

HANDS (locations 7-8)

	1	2	3	4	5
Skill: Shop	1	2	3	4	5
Skill: Punching	1	2	3	4	5
Skill: Blocking	1	2	3	4	5
Skill: _____	1	2	3	4	5

BRAINS (location 9)

	1	2	3	4	5
Skill: Out-Think	1	2	3	4	5
Skill: Remember	1	2	3	4	5
Skill: Notice	1	2	3	4	5
Skill: _____	1	2	3	4	5

FACE (location 10)

	1	2	3	4	5
Skill: Charm	1	2	3	4	5
Skill: Putdown	1	2	3	4	5
Skill: Connive	1	2	3	4	5
Skill: _____	1	2	3	4	5

RELATIONSHIPS

KEY: 1 = Superficial relationship 2 = Important relationship
3 = Very close relationship 4 = Devoted relationship 5 = Inseparable

CIRCLE ONLY ONE OPTION FOR EACH ENTRY

	1	2	3	4	5
_____	1	2	3	4	5
_____	1	2	3	4	5
_____	1	2	3	4	5
_____	1	2	3	4	5
_____	1	2	3	4	5

EXPERIENCE POINTS: _____





Superhero action
as it's never been played before

A superhero game
you'll never forget

Dennis Detwiler
Greg Stolze
Kenneth Hite
Shane Ivey
with art by
Todd Shearer

**WILD
TALENTS**

Second Edition
2008

www.arcdream.com/wildtalents

GODLIKE

In the beginning, there was only one.

He flew into the Berlin Olympics in 1936 to light the torch, then landed beside Hitler to proclaim the triumph of the Aryan will.

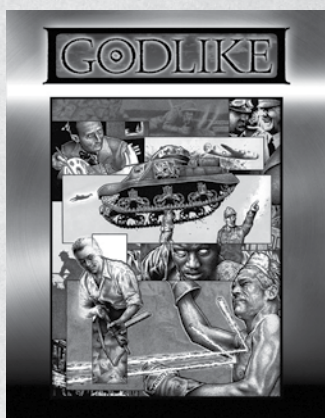
By the end of the war, there were *two hundred thousand* of them. They came from Poland, from Finland, from England and from

France. They came from besieged villages and from the halls of academia, from the devastation of Stalingrad and from the corn fields of Kansas.

Their powers were both great and small, and they died by the thousands for the sake of the people they loved.

This is their story.

Superhero Roleplaying in a World on Fire



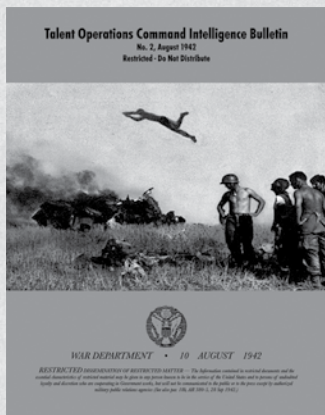
The core game book



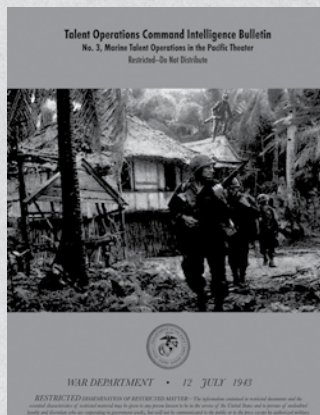
The Nazi Talent program



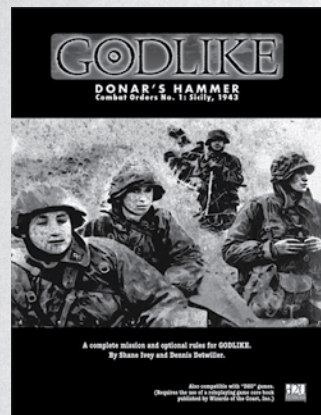
A spectacular game tool



Talents waging war in Europe



Talents battling in the Pacific

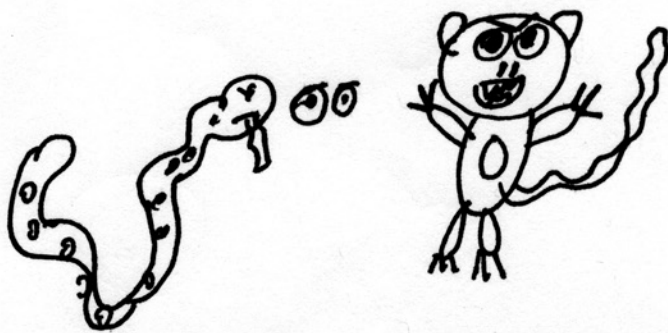


Behind enemy lines in Sicily

Get the latest **GODLIKE** products and updates at
www.arcdream.com

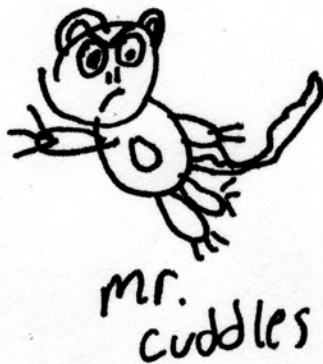
October 29

Today at School That bully
Kathryn Willis started picking on
me. Lucky for me, she didn't know
about Mr. Cuddles. Lucky for her,
I didn't know she had a pet
Snake. The next thing we know, the
Snake is lying on the floor with
his eyes ripped out. I got detention, and
made Mr. Cuddles fix the snake.



October 30

Today I took Mr. Cuddles to the park. There, he found his arch enemy. A chimpanzee, owned by Megan Baker. (my best friend.) The chimp was in the middle of a large group, showing off by doing flips and tricks. When Mr. Cuddles there, the chimp slashed Mr. Cuddles in the face. He ripped out the chimp's eyeballs.



October 31

Today was halloween. I went as a pirate, and Mr. Cuddles went as a monkey. At the first house a elder lady came out and started talking about what a cute little monkey he was. She gave Mr. Cuddles a handful of candy, and I got one piece! The same thing happened at all the other houses...



Monsters are real.

You know because you have one.

He's the *best*.

He's more fun and way tougher
than all the *other* kids' monsters.

Try not to let him eat your friends.

MONSTERS AND OTHER CHILDISH THINGS

A distressingly fun roleplaying game about kids
and the relationship -devouring horrors from
beyond time and space who love them.

Arc Dream Publishing
ARC 3000
U.S. MSRP \$29.99