

MONSTER HUNTERS

Monsters exist.

Don't let them tell you otherwise. There are monsters out there, and we're talking actual real rip off your face and crawl around in your skin monsters. But try to tell that to Joe Sixpack and Jane Boxwine and you'll just wind up in a padded cell. Everyone knows monsters just don't exist. It would be crazy if there were vampires, werewolves, demons, witches and more just out there, preying on humanity. But that's what's really going on.

It's your job to hunt them down.

“There are things that go bump in the night. We kill them.”

-Frank Remington, Hunter

The Scoop

MONSTER HUNTERS is a the *Leverage Roleplaying Game* hacked into a *Supernatural* game. The hack comes from Rob Donoghue's blog (<http://rdonoghue.blogspot.com/>), slightly reorganized and added to by Thomas Deeny (<http://denaghdesign.com>), mainly for my game group's benefit. You will need a copy of *Leverage RPG* to play **MONSTER HUNTERS**.

Hunters

To play **MONSTER HUNTERS**, you will make a hunter protagonist to play. Your hunter's character sheet is mainly a list of **attributes**, **weapons**, and **distinctions**. Like *Leverage*, your hunter might pick up some **talents** along the way.

Attributes

To describe your hunter's physical and mental abilities, *Monster Hunters* uses six **attributes**. Each time your hunter attempts something that calls for a roll, you'll be rolling an attribute that relates to the task. Every hunter has the same six attributes:

QUICK	SHARP	SMART
STRONG	STUBBORN	TOUGH

These are relatively self-explanatory, except for Sharp and Stubborn. Sharp covers awareness and perception. Stubborn is your hunter's willpower.

Take 1d10, 2d8s, and 3d6s and distribute them among your six attributes. At your option, you may drop one of the d6s to a d4 and then either increase a d6 to a d8 or increase a d8 to a d10.

Weapons

Hunters are armed with several weapons that they use to help keep them alive in tough situations. These weapons are more important than any knife or shotgun, they are the essential strengths of the hunter. Whenever you roll to determine if your task succeeds or fails, you'll be rolling a weapon die along with an appropriate attribute. The roles are:

CHARM	CUNNING	FISTS
LORE	GUNS	TOOLS

Charm: Sometimes you can talk your way out of things you can't shoot your way out of.

Cunning: Low animal cunning and trickery, and all the areas where books won't save you.

Fists: Whether it's back street brawling or seven different black belts, this is the ability to throw a punch or kick.

Guns: Shooting things. It's kind of amazing how well this can work as a strategy.

Lore: Research is not the most exciting part of a hunter's life, but it can be the most important weapon in one's arsenal. When it come time to find the right arcane antique or incant the correct exorcism ritual, this is the weapon to bring to bear.

Tools: The toolbox or lab may not be as dramatic as the arsenal, but there are times when bullets aren't going to do the job. Building or repairing things may not seem too dramatic until you realize that things include bombs and cars. (Oh yeah - this covers driving.)

Distribute 1d10, 1d8, 3d6, and 1d4 among your hunter's weapons.

Distinctions

Each player picks three distinctions. Distinctions are descriptors like "Army Brat" or "Friends in Low Places" and they work the same way they do in *Leverage* (that is, if it would help, add a d8 to the roll, if it would create a problem, add a d4 to the roll and gain a plot point). It's worth noting that specific gear (like, say, a car) probably deserves to be a distinction.

Marks

The player may pick a fourth distinction which has some magical significance. It might be a curse or a bloodline or a destiny, or most anything else. The TV show provides no shortage of examples of this. Mechanically, this works just like any other distinction, but for the GM this is basically a big cosmic "kick me" sign. By marking your character, you're guaranteeing that the mark will come up a lot over the course of play, specifically, bringing in supernatural interest.

Players may remove marks if they are resolved (assuming that's possible) or may add a new mark during a season break. A character may only have one mark at a time.

Kicking Things in the Head

Since combat is a bit more common in the context of **MONSTER HUNTERS** than *Leverage*, we'll use a slightly more fiddly damage system revolving around "statuses". Those statuses are **Hurt**, **Tired**, **Confused** and **Scared**. During a roll where there is a possibility for damage, the loser gains these statuses as die traits, at a level equal to the highest opposing die not used in the roll. If that value is lower than the character's current status value,

then just increase their status by one (if there's no unused die, treat it as a d4).

*Frank is started by a ghost who wins a roll and scares him. The ghost rolled 3d6, keeping a 4 and 5, not using the 2. Since the highest unused die is a d6. Frank is now **Scared d6***

*If the exact same roll were to happen again, Frank's **Scared d6** would bump up to a **Scared d8**.*

Status Effects

When a character is carrying a status, it is initially just an inconvenience. So long as the status is less than the appropriate stat (**Sharp** for **Confused**, **Tough** for **Hurt** or **Tired**, and **Stubborn** for **Scared**) then the character rolls an extra d4 along with rolls where the status might apply. So long as stress is at this level, it's easy to get rid of: have your hunter spend a scene doing something dedicated to removing it, such as putting on bandages, taking a nap and so on.

"I THINK WE'RE SAFE."

This may seem like a kindness, but the reality is it is an invitation to the GM for something bad to happen. If you think about any horror movie you can, the worst things happen when thwe characters stop to recover their wits, get some sleep, take a shower or the like. As such, don't just hand wave these scenes. Make sure the players describe exactly what they're doing and how it lets their guard down. This is not to say that you *always* attack them in these scenes, just often enough to maintain tension (and consider whether you want to attack on the same status they're recovering from or not).

Once the status equals the stat in question, it's become a serious matter. In addition to the d4, they now put their status die into play, allowing opposition to roll it against them. At this point, getting rid of the status will take some serious downtime, possibly in a sickbed.

When the status exceeds the stat, the character is taken out of play in a manner of the GM's choosing (though this may be a great time to spend plot points to soften the blow). Alternately, the player can spend a plot point to stay on his feet for one scene. He can keep doing this, paying plot points every scene to stay on his feet, as long as he has the budget for it, but once he stops, he's down.

NO ROLES?

Unlike *Leverage*, where your crew-member has roles, hunters all effectively do the same thing: kill monsters. What separates them is how they kill monsters. Instead of **roles**, hunters have **weapons**.

Monsters

Like most of the rest of the world, monsters are defined more simply than players, as traits. Most monsters have a core trait that reflects what they are like **Vampire d6** or **Wumpus d8**. They might have more traits, but that core trait ends up being very important for much of what the critter does.

Killing Monsters

When monsters take a status (usually hurt), they also roll the d4. Unlike hunters, monsters usually go down as soon a status equal's their core trait. A lot of monsters can be killed in perfectly normal ways. Some monsters may be a little tougher or more fragile (being taken out as if their die level was higher or lower) but none of that's very complicated. Also when players take a monster out, they describe how it happened, that can matter a lot.

Where it gets problematic is when you start dealing with things that can't be killed in a normal way. These tend to fall into one of three categories:

Dispersible: You can beat these things, possibly very easy, but that only gets rid of them for a scene. Ghosts are a great example of this (though they're a bit more complicated).

Fast Healers: These things shrug off damage done. They take statuses normally, but they only remain in effect for the next roll, then they're gone. Vampires and Demons work this way.

Invulnerable: You just can't hurt these guys. Think Angels.

In each of these cases, there is usually some way around this resistance, and it's a function of knowing what that

CALLED SHOTS

You really need to hurt something? You can set aside dice for a called shot by opting not to roll them to guarantee their availability for damage.

HURT DICE

Some monsters naturally do this. In addition to the kept, hard, and hard kept dice mentioned in the next column, a hurt die is an additional die that is always set aside for damage purposes only.

is and getting your hands on the right tool for the job. Finding out and acquiring the thing you need makes a good adventure seed for oddball monsters, but a lot of them are standard enough (silver, iron, salt, holy water) that hunters are usually equipped. In such a case, all that's required is that the hunters have the tools and describe using them.

This applies equally well to knowledge of weaknesses. Decapitating a vampire is not a function of making an awesome roll, rather, it's a function of taking one out and being able to describe it in a way that includes decapitation. Smart players will make sure the scene includes enough large blade to make sure that's reasonable.

One interesting point about these weaknesses is that they're often two-layered. There's a reasonably simple trick for fending the critter off (iron and salt for ghosts, holy water for daemons) but actually getting rid of it requires something more substantial (like salting and burning the bones, or an exorcism). This two-tiered structure tends to work itself well into plot design.

Nasty Monsters

This merits more discussion later, but in short, a lot of monsters aren't going to make it easy for you to kill them. Even if you have a gun full of silver bullets, a werewolf is strong and fast, enough so that you may never get a shot off.

There are a lot of different potential monster tricks, but here's the key one. Depending on the scariness of the monster, their core die might be treated as a kept die, or a hard die (or in some cases, a hard kept die, which is really nasty).

A **kept die** means that it's always added to the total, effectively letting the critter keep three dice (one of which is always that core die).

A **hard die** is never rolled, it's just set down as it's maximum value.

A **hard kept die** means it is always added to the roll at it's maximum value. This is, mechanically, pretty terrifying.

Fair and Unfair Fights

So, given that die advantage, what's to keep a hunter from just getting torn apart? Something as fast and strong as a vampire should, by all rights, have no more trouble with a highly trained hunter than you might with an exceptionally fierce rabbit.

Thankfully, hunters know this, and they cheat.

All of those rules about hard and kept dice apply in a fair fight. A fair fight is generally one where both sides know it's coming (or at least the other side does) and has time to put their game face on. A good hunter knows to avoid any fight like that.

Unfair fights are ones that start with your opponent off balance, and keep up the pace so he stays that way. Most unfair fights begin after a successful skill roll of a non-combat kind. Maybe to sneak up on something, maybe to confuse it, maybe to just piss it off. If a hunter uses a success like that to launch an attack, then it's an unfair fight, and there are not hard or kept dice.

However, if the hunter can't win the fight quickly, and the critter has the opportunity to catch its breath and get its feet back under it, then it goes back to being a fair fight. And that's just no good.

Weird Powers

While the bulk of monsters are purely physical threats, and can be modeled with kept, hard, and hurt dice (and a little manipulation of damage thresholds (that is, how quickly things are taken out), some monsters just have a little bit of extra oomph. There are weird powers and other craziness to deal with, but rather than reinvent the wheel, just drag *Smallville* into the mix. *Smallville* has an incredibly robust system for modeling powers that works in terms of how they work in fiction (rather than in physics) and it would take very little reskinning to translate heat vision over into flaming breath.

Weaknesses

For **MONSTER HUNTERS**, the real trick is handling the *weaknesses* of the various supernatural menaces. A lot of the things that show up are simply too dangerous to fight, even unfairly, unless you have some particular trick up your sleeve.

When the weakness is to an action (like vampire's vulnerability to decapitation or zombie's to getting shot in the head) then so long as the characters know this, it is assumed that all their actions are in pursuit of this end. As such, there's no real mechanical concern with making "called shots"—you just fight and do what you can.

Other weaknesses, such as to salt or iron, may benefit from a mechanical representation:

A **mild weakness** pretty much guarantees that you will always have an unfair fight. Going after a werewolf might

suck, but if you're armed with silver, it levels the playing field. A mild weakness is generally something that the critter is vulnerable to (so it can't heal or ignore) but which is not necessarily much more dangerous to it. If you need to kill something by stabbing it through the heart with a particular weapon, that's a mild weakness, since you have the means to kill them, but you don't make them any less dangerous.

A **medium weakness** is like a mild weakness, except the substance actively hurts the creature. Any damage you inflict is considered one die step higher.

A **serious weakness** will drop the creature with a hit of any quality. Don't bother with damage - if you hit, it's done. Now, "done" may have various meanings - it might mean incapacitating (like holy water to demons) or temporarily dispersed (like hitting a ghost with salt) but it usually means something short of destruction. Serious weaknesses are usually very important to keeping hunters alive, but are rarely a long-term solution to whatever problem is on hand. Serious weaknesses may include things like demon traps. One important note: many serious weaknesses are not also mild weaknesses. That is, they don't necessarily make it an unfair fight.

An **absolute weakness** is like a serious weakness, but it's final. This happens, and the fat lady has sung. Simple as that.

WAIT—I JUST NEED TO HIT THIS GUY ONCE AND THAT'S IT?

Serious and absolute weaknesses are very common on *Supernatural*, but very uncommon in RPGs. The idea of being able to kill a big bad in one shot is at odds with the thought that we need an extensive fight scene. Now, we aren't saying there shouldn't be a fight scene—landing that critical blow can be a big deal—but there's not always going to be one. That might be anticlimactic, but consider the structure: if the "hard part" of the adventure has been finding out what's going on, or getting your hand on the weakness, it's ok for the final fight to be short. But if you get right to the fight, making it a cakewalk is satisfying for nobody. The only time you're going to want to do that is if the big bad was a fake-out, and you have something else up your sleeve that explains what's going on.

Creating Monsters

The Investigative Method

One of my absolute favorite tricks in *Leverage* is that there is no obligation to stat the opposition from the get-go. Structurally, there are certain questions you need to answer about the mark and such, but the mark isn't really the opposition. Consider characters like Sterling, the ones who can really give the players a run for their money and who make for interesting challenges. While the GM may write them up, the system doesn't require it, and in fact offers a much more elegant solution.

The trick to this revolves around the primary use for complications (situations where a player rolls a 1).

Complications give the GM currency which can be most easily thought of as narrator plot points. The GM can use them to introduce twists and complications in the form of slapping new descriptors down on the table. So, for example, let's say the players are casing a joint and they produce some complications. The GM might use those to say "Ok, there's an Insurance Investigator checking the place out too, that might be a problem". And if that GM is me, then he picks up a sharpie and writes **Insurance Investigator d8** on a post-it note and puts it down on the table. That's now in play, and the GM will pick up that d8 any time the Insurance Investigator comes up to mess with the players (and a clever player who finds a way to leverage the investigator might be able to pick it up too).

That's a good start, but where it gets fun is that the GM can add to it as he gets more complications. Let's say that this investigator is in a really good scene, and based on how it went (and the complications I have to spend) I add **Sees more than he lets on d10** to his post-it. Later on he ends up in a scrap on the player's side and one of the players spends some plot points to add **Old Army Buddy d8** to the note.

The net result is that if an NPC is interesting enough, he will develop stats over time that emerge organically from play and is a fantastic way to handle monsters in an investigative game.

The thing about *Supernatural's* monsters is that a lot of them are throwaways. There are certain recurring types—demons and vampires, for example—but a lot of them have familiar sounding names out of the mythology of your choice. Now, it's totally possible to build a monster in advance based on an idea, but that's not the only way to do it. It's entirely possible to build a monster from its effects.

Imagine the monster's stats as a blank sheet. As you start the adventure, you describe the gruesomely mangled bodies of the victims. With this point, you have revealed something about the monster: whatever it is, it's capable of making injuries like this. So you note down **Monstrous Claws d8** or **Heavy Cleaver d10** or whatever caused the wounds. If you want to leave it uncertain, then **Monstrous Claws? d8**, with the question mark indicating that you might come back to refine the descriptor later.

Later on as they talk to the sheriff about what he saw, the sheriff talks about unloading his revolver into the thing's back and it not even flinching. Slap down **Bulletproof? d8** on the sheet, leaving your options open, Maybe it's a ghost, maybe it's heavily armored, maybe it just shrugs off gunfire. When you get a better idea, you can scratch out **Bulletproof? d8** and write down something more precise.

Sometimes information might be wrong (bad witnesses or the like) so feel free to note that with extra question marks (**Can fly??? d8**) so that you know which information you can ditch if it ends up contradictory.

D8 COMPLICATIONS?

In **MONSTER HUNTERS**, complications are a tad more potent than they are in base *Leverage* rules, starting at d8 rather than d6, on the reasoning that since d6 is the default die—that is, the die you roll when there's no relevant descriptor. The GM has an infinite budget of those.

OLD ARMY BUDDY D8

Note that the player has just done two useful things there - created a connection to the character AND given him something useful in a fight that the player can add to his pool in the fight.

Continuing this over time you'll find yourself creating a complete picture of the monster while your players are doing the same thing. In effect, their investigation is your monster creation process. At some point it will all fall into place (for you or them) and all you'll need to do is a name.

Not every game will suit this approach, and it definitely is a better tool for the GM who likes to discover things while describing them, but if you need to pull a session out of the air, this lets you do so with only the barest outline of a plan, and build it as you go. ■