

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.

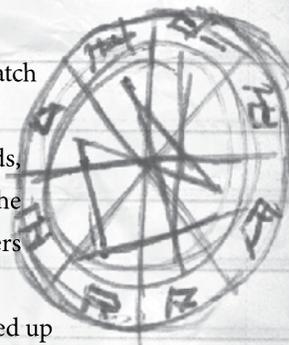
Childhood is a time when relationships matter in a powerful and primal way. The body remembers being utterly helpless, a babe in arms, totally dependent on love for survival. The racing monkey brain might seek independence, but it also craves contact.

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'arak 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

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