

BLOOD ON THE LENS

HORROR MOVIE RPG



BLOOD ON THE LENS

HORROR MOVIE
RPG

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CONTENT WARNING

Blood on the Lens is a roleplaying game that evokes the themes of horror cinema, including violence, blood and gore, mental illness, and death. It asks players to grapple with trauma and make hard, sometimes impossible choices.

It is highly encouraged that players and Directors make use of a safety system, like the one included in this book, to ensure safe boundaries are respected for everyone.

THE GAME

Blood on the Lens is a game that places you squarely in the center of an unfolding **HORROR MOVIE**. You must survive whatever supernatural Threat is on the prowl, investigate it, and perhaps even defeat it. Not everyone will make it out alive; nobody will make it out unscathed.

WHAT YOU NEED TO PLAY

This game is played with a handful of **D6s**, a **CHARACTER SHEET** for each player, a pair of **SCISSORS**, a few **INK PENS**, and a handful of **INDEX CARDS**, and a **RULES REFERENCE** sheet for the table. Everything in *Blood on the Lens* is written in ink or ripped permanently off your character sheet. Don't bother bringing pencils.

BLOOD ON THE LENS IS...

BONE CHILLING

Oppressive blackness, an inhuman snarl, and the glint of a knife. *Blood on the Lens* puts you face-to-face with the most wretched abominations the Director can coax out of their imagination. Will you summon the courage to look upon them, or flee into the night?

INVESTIGATIVE

An episode in *Blood on the Lens* is like being in the minotaur's labyrinth. At any moment, you could meet the monster's bloody ax. Until then, you search and solve, peeling away the layers of mystery in hopes of finding a solution that might save your life.

STREAMLINED

You can start playing in as little as ten minutes. Players need only their character sheets, a few dice, and nerves of steel.

YOURS

There is no canon in *Blood on the Lens*, no story bible you must follow. Every element is designed to empower you, as a Director or player, to make your own story with minimal friction and maximum agency.

THE CORE SYSTEM

This chapter is for players and Directors.

Lights!
Camera!
Run.

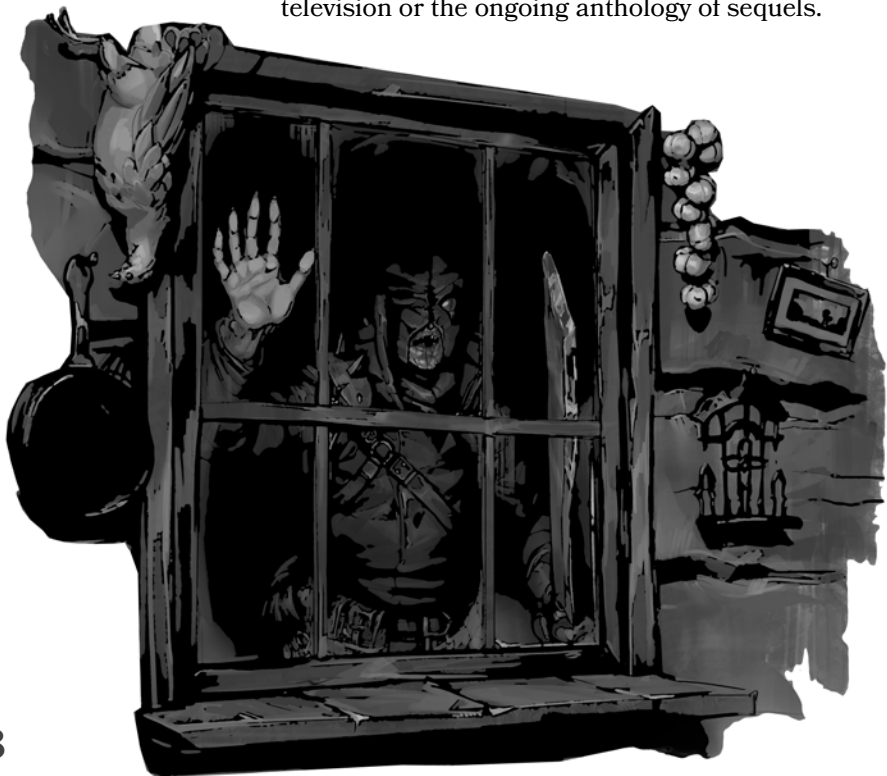
Most of you will be **PLAYERS**—characters on which the horror movie is centered. One of you, however, is behind the camera—the **DIRECTOR** is the cinematographer and screenwriter, creating a dynamic world around the players and commanding a horrific Threat against them.

There's no script supervisor in this film. In a roleplaying game, the players and Director work together to create the narrative, with the randomness of dice injecting tension and surprising twists around every corner. Everyone around the table is the cast and the audience, simultaneously.

SESSIONS, SCENES, EPISODES

The Director describes a **SCENE**: where the characters are, what it looks like, what it smells like, who else is there, and what's happening when they arrive. The players use their Actions and abilities to interact with the scene, and the scene changes in response or we cut to a new scene. Just like in a film, these scenes connect to tell a grander narrative; in our case, a gruesome horror movie.

Usually, this game is played in **SESSIONS** lasting at most a few hours. One or two sessions make up an **EPISODE**, the complete plot of a horror movie, and more sessions can replicate a season of television or the ongoing anthology of sequels.



ROLLS

Whenever the outcome of something is in doubt, make a **ROLL**. There are three types of rolls:

- ◆ You can make an **ACTION** roll to do something challenging.
- ◆ The Director calls for you to make **REACTION** rolls in response to the scene.
- ◆ If nothing else is applicable, the Director can call for a **LUCK** roll.

ROLL A DIE for each **CIRCLE** of the Action or Reaction filled in on your character sheet. You roll only one die for Luck rolls. The Director can referee the roll, changing an Action roll to a Luck roll if no Action is suitable, or adding or removing dice based on the circumstances.

If you roll a **5 OR 6**, the roll is a **SUCCESS**. The roll was effective and reasonably beneficial.

Any other roll is a **FAILURE**. The roll wasn't effective and the situation worsens. You gain **ADRENALINE**. Mark half of an Adrenaline box on your character sheet. You can spend Adrenaline (filling the other half of the box) to reroll an entire roll and add a bonus die to the new roll.

TWISTS

If you roll **DOUBLES**—two or more of the same number—the roll is a **TWIST**. The result is still a Success or Failure, but there is also an unexpected outcome. All players can suggest what happens with the Twist, and the Director picks the best one.

SUCCESS <i>If you roll any:</i>	TWIST <i>If you roll doubles:</i>	FAILURE <i>If you roll only:</i>
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ACTIONS

ACTIONS are how you interact with the game. To attempt something, choose one of your Actions that best represents what you want to accomplish and roll a die for each of its circles on your character sheet. There are seven Actions common to all characters, but some characters might have special ones applicable only to them. Remember: if you can use an Action in a sentence, you can roll for it!

ACTIONS

Aim
Convince
Force
Improvise
Investigate
Rush
Sneak

AIM

Just like you practiced.

Precision when you throw, stab, or shoot. *Use Aim to:*

- ◆ Slip a dagger between the ribs of a snarling beast.
- ◆ Hurl a satchel of tools to someone in the distance.
- ◆ Place a creature's weak point in your crosshairs and pull the trigger.

CONVINCE

See things my way.

Argue, lie, and sway hearts and minds to your side. *Use Convince to:*

- ◆ Coax more information out of a nervous witness.
- ◆ String together a series of bold-faced lies to a cop.
- ◆ Compel a gunman to lower their weapon.
- ◆ Offer an excuse as to why you're trespassing.

FORCE

Put your back into it.

Raw muscle and personality. *Use Force to:*

- ◆ Shove your way through a dense crowd.
- ◆ Crush a skull with a well-placed sledgehammer swing.
- ◆ Cower a thug looking for an easy fight.
- ◆ Wrench your arm free from a clawed grasp.



MAXIMUM NUMBER OF DICE

Unless otherwise stated, even with Advantage and other increases, you can't roll more than five dice at once on any roll. Director's Dice allow you to roll more than five dice.

IMPROVISE

This might just work.

Planning, repair, and ingenuity. *Use Improve to:*

- ◆ Dream up a just-crazy-enough-to-work plan using the tools in an abandoned shed.
- ◆ Cobble together a mechanical man-trap for a supernatural foe.
- ◆ Repair a sputtering engine for a few more miles.
- ◆ Modify a weapon with the addition of barbed wire and nails.

INVESTIGATE

No stone unturned.

Focus on details. *Use Investigate to:*

- ◆ Scour a room for any sign of monstrous intrusion.
- ◆ Study a pile of books or dig through the internet to learn something specific.
- ◆ Sift through the contents of a drawer and find the one out of place element.
- ◆ Follow a trail of blood and broken twigs through the woods.

RUSH

Run like the wind.

Escape, climb, and jump. *Use Rush to:*

- ◆ Remain a few paces ahead of a bounding, four-legged monster.
- ◆ Clamber up some loose bricks to a second story window.
- ◆ Take a running jump over a precipitous drop.

SNEAK

Not a sound.

Stealth and subtlety. *Use Stealth to:*

- ◆ Prowl through the grass without being seen.
- ◆ Slip a wallet out of someone's pocket without their notice.
- ◆ Hold your breath in a moment of panic to avoid a Threat's attention.

REACTIONS

REACTIONS

Notice

React

Think

Withstand

Unlike Actions, you don't choose to roll **REACTIONS**. The Director prompts you to roll a Reaction in response to something happening to you or to establish something about the scene, such as your awareness of something around you. If a Reaction is the best way to accomplish something, you can ask the Director to let you make a specific Reaction roll.

NOTICE

What's that?

Incidental detection. The Director will call for a Notice roll to establish if you hear or spot something. (Investigate rolls are used when you're actively searching for something.) *Roll Notice to:*

- ◆ Catch the faint echo of a scream on the wind.
- ◆ Spot the glimmer of predatory eyes locked on you from the treeline.
- ◆ Recognize the hunched body language of someone in need.

REACT

In the space of a second.

Pure instinct and instant movement. The Director will call for a React roll when you move to avoid danger or perform anything with split-second timing. *Roll React to:*

- ◆ Duck below the swipe of inch-long, lethal claws.
- ◆ Catch a glass trinket an instant before it hits the ground and shatters.
- ◆ Swerve a vehicle to avoid an obstacle on the road.

THINK

Piece it together.

Book smarts and experience. The Director will call for a Think roll to establish your foreknowledge or your in-the-moment deductions. *Roll Think to:*

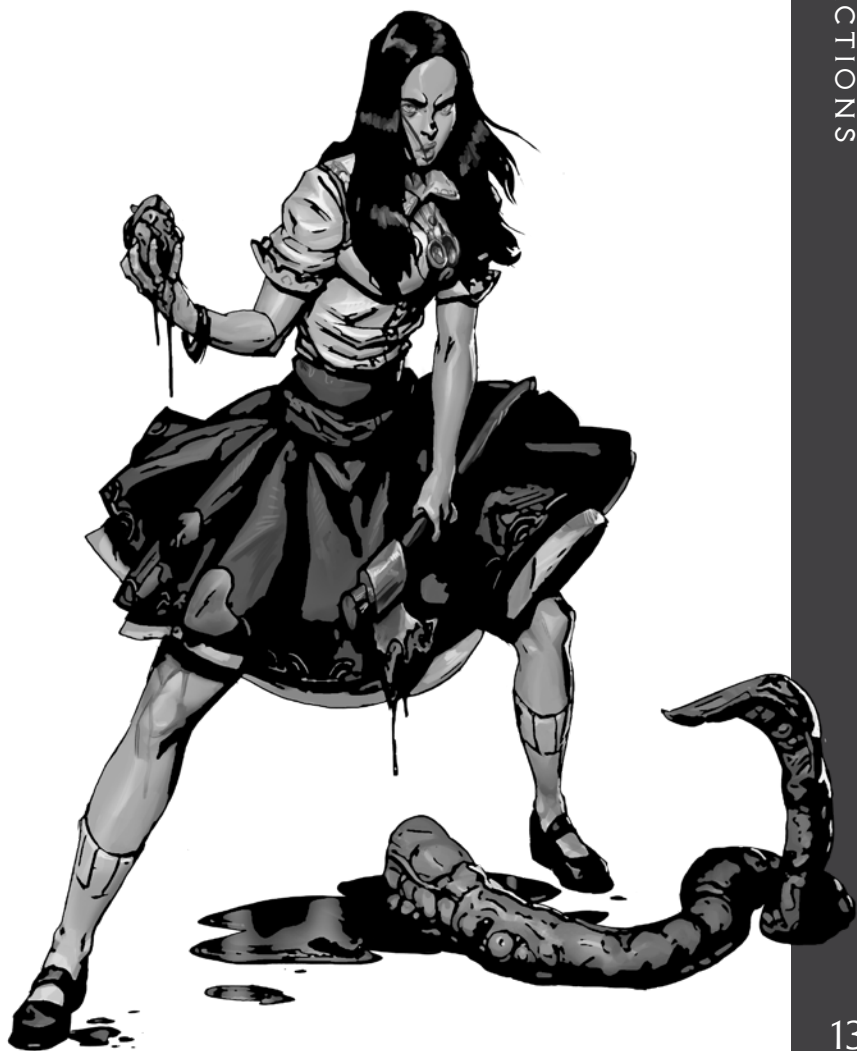
- ◆ Recognize the stem and petals of an exotic flower.
- ◆ Deduce that someone isn't telling the whole truth.
- ◆ Recite a few paragraphs of Bronze Age history or mythology.
- ◆ Read and understand scientific jargon.

WITHSTAND

Knock the wind out of you.

Toughness, both physical and psychological. The Director will call for a Withstand roll when you must endure physical or psychological pain. *Roll Withstand to:*

- ◆ Absorb the brunt of an impact with breaking bones or bruising organs.
- ◆ Grab the scalding barrel of a gun without dropping it.
- ◆ Leverage your willpower to shake off magical influence.
- ◆ Grip a wound tightly enough to prevent bleeding out.



LUCK

The Director calls for a **LUCK** roll when you are entirely at the whims of fate. This is usually a single die, but the Director can let you roll more than one in special circumstances. You also make Luck rolls for actions you have Sacrificed and when no available Action is suitable for a task.

ADVANTAGE AND DISADVANTAGE

If you are in a uniquely beneficial or detrimental position, the Director can give you **ADVANTAGE** or **DISADVANTAGE** on a roll—you can add a bonus die or remove a die (to a minimum of 1), respectively. You can't gain Advantage or Disadvantage more than once on a roll, but the Director can grant more than one bonus die for Advantage.

One thing that will always grant Advantage is **FLOW**. If your Action directly follows and benefits from the previous player's Action, you gain Advantage. For example, if another player improvises a weapon and tosses it to you, you have Advantage on your roll to immediately use it.

You will also always gain Advantage if your Action is in furtherance of your **MOTIVE**.

DIRECTOR'S DICE

You can add two **DIRECTOR'S DICE** to any Action roll you make, even after rolling the dice. Keep track of these dice separately, preferably with a different color of die. These dice can exceed the maximum of five dice on a roll.

If you roll a 1 on either of the Director's Dice, the roll is a **CRITICAL FAILURE**—it is a Failure, even if you also rolled doubles or a 5 or 6, and you suffer additional consequences for the failure. Common consequences include:

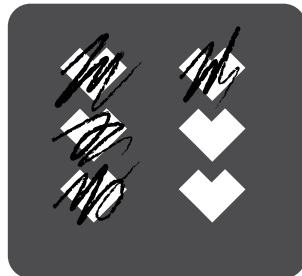
- ◆ Mark 1 Trauma.
- ◆ Until the end of the scene, you can't take the Action or Reaction you rolled; roll Luck for it instead.
- ◆ Permanently lose an item.
- ◆ The environment turns hostile.

TRAUMA AND SACRIFICE

When you are harmed, psychologically or physically, the Director will tell you to mark one or more **TRAUMA**. Every three Trauma requires you to **SACRIFICE**: find part of your character sheet that has been unlocked and has a dotted line—cut or rip it off permanently. Sacrifice is a core part of the game; it's never easy, but neither is survival.

If you Sacrifice something other than an Action, such as a location or beloved person, that thing is **DOOMED**. It may not be destroyed when you take the Trauma, but it is sure to be destroyed soon.

If you can't Sacrifice, or you can't mark more Trauma, you die.



LIFE OR DEATH SCENES

In most scenes, players are free to take Actions in whatever order they wish. In **LIFE-OR-DEATH SCENES**, however, players and the Threat must take turns, moving around the table clockwise. The players choose who goes first. A player can move and take one Action on their turn. Generally, the Threat (be it a monster, a burning building, or a vehicle veering off the road), acts or moves after each player. Each full set of turns around the table takes about 10 seconds in the fiction of the game.

For pivotal scenes like these, it can be useful to determine where each player is located. For simplicity, each player is **CLOSE** to the Threat, **FAR** from the Threat, or **OUT OF THE SCENE** altogether. A player can move between these ranges (close to far, far to out of the scene, or vice-versa) on their turn.

WEAPON ROLLS

Most of the time, you'll make Weapon rolls during Life-or-Death scenes. Each weapon calls for an Action roll, as detailed in parentheses in the weapon's description. Many weapons grant bonus dice to your roll with it. Generally, a Failure results in a harmless miss (regardless of the weapon), whereas a success deals Trauma equal to the number of 5s or 6s rolled.

THE CAST

This chapter is for players.

You've just been cast in the next blockbuster
horror movie.

Problem is, you've never seen the script.

As a player, it's your job to survive whatever Threat the Director has planned for you. If you're lucky, you'll be able to investigate the Threat, unravel its weaknesses, and dispatch it for good. If you're unlucky... the story won't end well for you.

Your **CHARACTER** is synonymous with your character sheet. It lists your Actions, traits, motives, fears, and so on. When you are injured, you rip off part of your character sheet. When you gain a level, you unlock new sections of your character sheet.

You have two ways to make a character: **ARCHETYPE CHARACTERS** and **ADVANCED CHARACTERS**. You can make an archetype character in minutes—it has everything you need printed on the character sheet and offers plenty of ways you can make the character your own. By contrast, an advanced character offers more freedom of expression, but requires more time and creativity on your part. Try archetype characters for your first game, especially if you're new to roleplaying games.

WHERE TO FIND CHARACTER SHEETS

You can find character sheets for modern archetypes at the end of the Nowhere, USA chapter, medieval archetypes at the end of the Grismoor chapter, and futuristic archetypes at the end of the Blackpost chapter.

But don't rip up the pages of this book!
You can find printable and form-fillable version of every character sheet for free at BloodOnTheLens.com

MODERN ARCHETYPES	MEDIEVAL ARCHETYPES	FUTURISTIC ARCHETYPES
Agent	Alchemist	Amnesiac
Antiquarian	Dungeoneer	Gadgeteer
Con	Graverobber	Hacker
Exorcist	Inquisitor	Merc
Final Teen	Magician	Private Eye
Financier	Mystic	Smuggler
Ghost Hunter	Scoundrel	
Prodigy		

ARCHETYPE CHARACTERS

You can make an archetype character in under five minutes; just print a character sheet and follow the instructions on the sheet.

CHARACTER CREATION IN TEN STEPS

Here's an overview of how you create a character:

1. **PICK AN ARCHETYPE.** Your archetype is the core expression of your character, an homage to existing horror characters that you use as a starting point. Your archetype determines which character sheet you use.



2. **PICK A PERSONALITY.** Sum up your personality in a word or two. This is a broad-stroke that helps to define how you see and interact with the world. If you struggle to come up with a personality, you can pick or roll from the following table.

D66 PERSONALITY		D66 PERSONALITY	
11	Anxious	41	Folksy
12	Articulate	42	Impulsive
13	Athletic	43	Insightful
14	Blunt	44	Intrepid
15	Boisterous	45	Meticulous
16	Compassionate	46	Outspoken
21	Competitive	51	Paranoid
22	Courageous	52	Plucky
23	Cowardly	53	Pragmatic
24	Cunning	54	Quirky
25	Curious	55	Refined
26	Cynical	56	Sarcastic
31	Daring	61	Savvy
32	Dashing	62	Self-Assured
33	Decisive	63	Shy
34	Devout	64	Stoic
35	Earnest	65	Sexy
36	Easygoing	66	Worldly

Tip: d66 means 1d6 × 10 + 1d6

3. **PICK A QUIRK.** Come up with something unique, funny, or special about yourself. Your quirk helps to make your character memorable and engaging. If you struggle to come up with a quirk, you can pick or roll from the following table.

D66	QUIRK	D66	QUIRK
11	Absolutely Loves Drama.	41	Is Probably Too Young to Be Here.
12	Believes Every Conspiracy Theory.	42	Is Terrified of Clowns.
13	Blows Up At the Slightest Inconvenience.	43	Is Utterly Unremarkable.
14	Can't Tell Anyone "No."	44	Is a Certified Sociopath.
15	Dabbles in the Occult.	45	Is a Terrible Liar.
16	Easily Gets Distracted— Oh Look a Bird!	46	Lives For the Spotlight.
21	Falls in Love At First Sight At Least Once a Day.	51	Loves Animals.
22	Fidgets Constantly.	52	Never Backs Down From a Challenge
23	Forgot Everything You Just Told Them.	53	Never Forgets a Face.
24	Has a Heart of Gold.	54	Reflexively Makes Dad Jokes.
25	Has an Unending Collection of Fun Facts.	55	Relentlessly Champions a Cause.
26	Identifies as a Pyromaniac.	56	Sleeps with One Eye Open.
31	Insists on Being Called a "Paranormal Investigator."	61	Sounds like Mickey Mouse.
32	Insists on Doing Things the Hard Way.	62	Subscribes to Every Branch of Mysticism.
33	Is Cool as Ice.	63	Swears Like a Sailor.
34	Is Deeply Superstitious.	64	Thinks They Know Everything.
35	Is Getting Too Old for This.	65	Won't Go Back to Prison.
36	Is Having a Midlife Crisis.	66	Won't Stop Talking.

Tip: d66 means 1d6 × 10 + 1d6

4. **MAKE YOUR CHARACTER SENTENCE.** Write your character sentence on your character sheet. It'll be in the form of "I'm a [Personality] [Archetype] who [Quirks]." Now is also a great time to pick your character's name.

5. **CHOOSE YOUR MOTIVE.** Your **MOTIVE** is the thing you want or believe in most. This is what drives you on a fundamental level. You might want to "Protect your community at all costs" or "Become wealthy beyond anyone's imaginings."

You will also always gain Advantage if your Action is in furtherance of your motive.

6. **CHOOSE YOUR FEAR.** Your **FEAR** stands in the way of accomplishing your motive. This might be a simple phobia, such as "Clowns" or "Closed Spaces," or an abstract idea, like "Not Knowing where I fit in" or "Becoming Irrelevant".

The Director can force you to act in accordance with your fear, even when you don't want to.

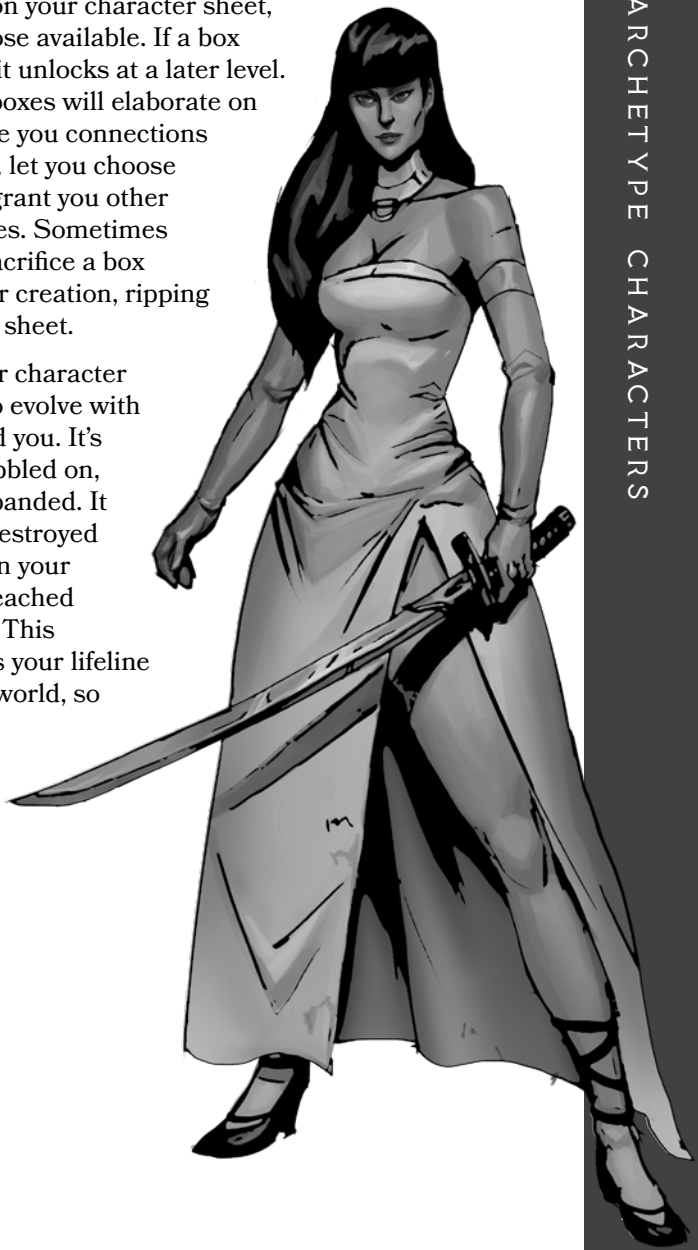
As a horror game, *Blood on the Lens* is a place to explore and conquer your fears in a safe space. If you choose a fear that affects you personally, discuss the matter with your Director and use an RPG safety system to ensure that the game remains comfortable and fun, no matter where the story takes you.

7. **ACTIONS AND REACTIONS.** You gain +1 to any three Actions or Reactions of your choice. Fill in the dots next to selected Actions and Reactions to show that you roll additional dice when using that roll. Ideally, these rolls should be related to your other character choices.

8. **APPEARANCE AND NOTES.** Fill out the Appearance box of your character sheet to determine what you look like to other people, what you're usually wearing, and what you're usually carrying with you. If anything else comes to mind, jot it down in the Notes box. Finally, pick your name and your pronouns (if you haven't done so already).

Roleplaying games are a space to try out identities like you try on clothes. Feel free to pick pronouns that don't match your own or explore identities that spark your curiosity. As with horror elements, it might be a good idea to use an RPG safety system to ensure that this space is as safe as possible for exploration.

9. **WRAPPING UP.** Finally, go over every remaining box on your character sheet, filling out all those available. If a box contains a star, it unlocks at a later level. Some of these boxes will elaborate on your history, give you connections to other players, let you choose a weapon, and grant you other character choices. Sometimes you'll have to Sacrifice a box during character creation, ripping parts off of your sheet.
10. **HAVE FUN!** Your character sheet is going to evolve with the story around you. It's going to be scribbled on, torn up, and expanded. It might even be destroyed completely when your character has reached their bitter end. This piece of paper is your lifeline in a dangerous world, so keep it close.



RUNNING THE GAME

This chapter is for Directors.

You're a master of close-up magic,
using dice instead of cards.

As the **DIRECTOR**, you're the screenwriter and producer rolled into one. You set the story's agenda, decorate the set, populate it with characters, and devise obstacles for the scene. Your film is going to be spine-tingling and react to the audience!

At first, this might seem a bit daunting. But never fear! Everything in this book is designed to make you into a superstar Director with as little work as possible. Simply:

1. **PICK A SETTING.** *Nowhere, USA, Blackpost, and Grismoor* (all included later in this book), give you ready-made, spooky locales for your film, composed entirely out of drag and drop elements for when you need to improvise.
2. **PICK A THREAT.** The *Threats* chapter gives you an outline worthy of a horror film, so you're not starting from scratch.

Lastly, the **INSOMNIA STORYTELLING ENGINE** offloads critical elements of the storytelling onto the players. (And if you're unfamiliar with the nuts and bolts of horror storytelling, the next chapter, **ROLEPLAYING HORROR**, will give you a primer.) It's your story and presentation that brings it all together, however. This chapter will walk you through how to quickly and easily run a *Blood on the Lens* game.

OVERVIEW

The fundamentals of *Blood on the Lens* are the same as telling a scary story around a campfire. You need constant, building tension, a sense of mystery, and a shocking scare. Ideally, it should also be wrapped up with a clean beginning, middle, and end, though you don't need to know where it's going ahead of time.

Every episode of *Blood on the Lens* centers on a single Threat, an adversary that might be a knife-wielding slasher, a paranormal haunting, or a slimy alien beast. It'll pick the players off one-by-one unless they can summon their courage, investigate the Threat, and figure out how to prevail.

Blood on the Lens has a loose structure of **EPISODES** separated cinematically into **SCENES** and practically into **SESSIONS** of play. Depending on your group and the length of your sessions, an episode may span one or two sessions, or rarely extend to three or four.

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

As the Director, you can shift the narrative and guide the players with invisible tethers of probability. Keep the following in mind as you begin your directorial journey.

DICE PROBABILITY

DICE	SUCCESS	DICE	FAILURE
1	Somewhat Likely (33%)	1	Likely (67%)
2	Moderately Likely (56%)	2	Somewhat Likely (44%)
3	Likely (70%)	3	Somewhat Likely (30%)
4	Very Likely (80%)	4	Unlikely (20%)
5	Very Likely (87%)	5	Unlikely (13%)

DICE TWIST

1	—
2	Unlikely (17%)
3	Somewhat Likely (44%)
4	Likely (72%)
5	Very Likely (91%)



YOU DON'T ROLL DICE

While each of the players will have a small pile of dice in front of them, you never need to roll dice for any reason. You can call for the players to make Reaction and Luck rolls in response to the world, but your choices aren't guided by fate as theirs are.

However, you may want to roll a die to arbitrate storytelling decisions. This especially helps when you want to remain truly even-handed with regard to the players. Which Action does the Threat take and who does it strike? Would the security guard be carrying a gun, or did they leave it behind? In such cases, you can roll a die in the same manner as you flip a coin, or you can call for a player to roll a Luck check—no explanation needed.

PLAYERS CHOOSE ACTIONS

The Actions on a player's character are the verbs by which they interact with the world. Players choose which Actions they use and how they wish to use them. Of course, this introduces an immense bias—players only like making rolls they're likely to succeed.

Therefore, you also adjudicate these rolls. It's often appropriate to call for a different Action roll or a Reaction roll. Once a player attempts an Action, they must make whatever roll you call for. For example, if a player wishes to Investigate a book, it might be prudent to establish if they know anything about the book's subject matter with a Think roll instead.

YOU CHOOSE REACTIONS

As players explore the environment, you'll periodically call for Reactions—especially Notice and Think. As they attempt to survive the Threat, you'll often call for React and Withstand.

You choose which Reactions are rolled and when. Players can ask for a Reaction roll, a nudge that they might Notice or Think of something important, but you have the final say.

FAILURE BEFORE TRAUMA

As a rule of thumb, you shouldn't impose Trauma unless a player has failed a roll. Rolling React or Withstand Reactions are the most straightforward means of dealing Trauma, but players can take Trauma for any failed roll, including for psychological reasons.



LUCK

You can call for a Luck roll whenever you want, for any reason. Notably, when a player has Sacrificed an Action, they use a one-die Luck roll instead, but you can also call for a Luck roll whenever a player tries something that doesn't fit neatly into any other roll.

To choose how many dice are rolled for Luck, use the Dice Probability table as a guide.

TWISTS

Whenever a player rolls doubles—two or more matching numbers on a roll—the result is a Twist. In addition to the Success or Failure, something unexpected happens. This could be literally anything tied to the Action or Reaction being taken. Firing a rifle might strike an unseen propane tank and set off an explosion, or result in a click and a jammed round in the barrel.

Ask each player, including the player that rolled the Twist, what happens. Players can opt out of offering suggestions, and you can offer one as well. Choose the one that is most interesting for the scene and most appropriate to the roll. As a rule, the most interesting Twists evolve the environment, introduce a new element or person to the scene, or shift the players' capabilities.

MODIFYING ROLLS

Last but not least, you can modify any roll with the following variant rolls. Advantage and Disadvantage are the most common, reflecting when a player is in a uniquely positive or detrimental position to attempt something.

You can also modify rolls to reinforce good roleplaying and clever tactics, to nudge the story in a particular direction, or to add texture to the scene. You should know your modifiers as well as the core Actions and Reactions of the game!

VARIANT ROLLS

Beyond the three most basic types of rolls—Actions, Reactions, and Luck—you can call for the following more elaborate rolls to make the story more dynamic and reactive.

ADVANTAGE AND DISADVANTAGE

If a player is in a uniquely beneficial or detrimental position, give that roll **ADVANTAGE** or **DISADVANTAGE**—adding a bonus die or removing a die (to a minimum of 1), respectively. You can grant more than one bonus die to a roll for Advantage.

Players always gain Advantage in the following circumstances:

- ◆ **FLOW.** When a player's Action directly follows and benefits from the previous player's Action.
- ◆ **MOTIVE.** When a player's Action is in pursuit of their Motive.

Remember that you only give out Advantage or Disadvantage when the outcome is in doubt. If a player wants to leap a tall building in a single bound, they automatically fail—no Disadvantage needed.

BLESSED AND CURSED ROLLS

The influence of magic or extreme circumstances calls for **BLESSED** and **CURSED ROLLS**. A Blessed roll is a Success on a roll of 4, 5, or 6, whereas a Cursed roll is only a Success on a roll of 6.

Usually, it's not necessary to mix Advantage, Disadvantage, Blessed and Cursed rolls; stick with one paradigm or the other for a given roll.

NO-RISK ROLLS

Declare a roll has **NO-RISK** whenever the stakes aren't that high. When players make Think rolls to establish their foreknowledge or Notice rolls to spot a clue, nothing at all happens if they fail! A No-Risk roll doesn't give Adrenaline on a Failure, or obviously threaten to harm the players. (Twists usually don't affect these rolls.)

Feel free to call for these rolls as often as you wish to keep the players engaged!

BIG ROLLS

When a player attempts to pull off the near-impossible, call for a **BIG ROLL**, one that needs at least two dice with a 5 or 6 to Succeed. A Big Roll that needs two dice is extraordinarily difficult, whereas one that requires three is next to impossible.

Let players know when their attempt amounts to a Big Roll before letting them roll. However, always let them try, no matter how improbable Success might seem.

GROUP ROLLS

When more than one player takes the same Action or Reaction, such as when a group makes a Sneak roll to slip past a security guard or everyone makes a Rush roll to ascend a rope, call for a **GROUP ROLL**.

Every player that participates makes a roll. If half or more of the players roll a Success, everyone succeeds; otherwise, everyone fails. (Twists don't affect Group rolls.) In a failed Group roll, compare the highest number rolled by each player. Only the player or players with the lowest number mark Adrenaline.

CHALLENGES

If you think something should take more than one roll to accomplish, call for a **CHALLENGE**. Choose the relevant roll, such as Force to push a car up a hill. Players can take that roll to accomplish the task, keeping track of Successes and Failures. After three Successes, the Challenge is a Success; after three Failures, the challenge is a Failure. Successes and Failures don't have to be consecutive.

You can increase or decrease the number of cumulative Successes or Failures to match the Challenge's complexity.

HIDDEN ROLLS

When the outcome of a roll might not immediately be apparent, call for a **HIDDEN ROLL**. The player rolls the dice inside a cup or mug and leaves the cup upside-down on the table. Flip the cup and reveal the roll only you would learn what happened!

Hidden rolls are best in the following scenarios:

- ◆ **STEALTH.** Pursued by a serial killer, you dive into a locker and hold your breath. Does the killer find you?
- ◆ **HIGH-STAKES BLUFF.** You string together a few bold-faced lies to a suspicious police officer. Do they buy it?
- ◆ **CHECK THEIR PULSE.** A character falls and lies still. Are they alive?

DIRECTOR TRICKS

In the Director's chair, you are the ultimate arbiter of rules. And importantly, you get to break them. The following elements are canonical, expected ways to shift the formula of the game, but aren't comprehensive. You can—and should—break any rule of the game in ways that serve the narrative.

DEVIL DEALS

At any time, you can offer a player a **DEVIL DEAL**: an impossible bargain of fate. You can concoct any deal you wish, but the following are excellent starting points:

DOOM FOR SACRIFICE. When a player must Sacrifice—destroy part of their character sheet—you can make them a counter-offer. You can Sacrifice something else in the game world such as a friendly nonplayer character, the character's de facto home base, or something they care deeply about, such as a pet. That thing becomes **DOOMED**. It isn't destroyed immediately, but is sure to be destroyed soon.

You can also counter-offer with tangible injuries—losing an eye or limb, for example—or with psychological scars—such as prolonged PTSD or crippling anxiety. Unlike Sacrificing an Action, these Sacrifices don't impose a penalty on the player (even if the Sacrifice results in a disability). Instead, they should inform the character's story going forward.

SUCCESS FOR FAILURE. When everything hinges on a single important roll—a Reaction to avoid certain death, or the final blow to dispatch a lethal—you can offer a deal: immediate Success, in exchange for a Failure later at any time.

BLACK MARKER

When permanent changes are left upon a player, you can reach for a **BLACK MARKER** or a black ink pen to etch these changes permanently on a character sheet. This is perhaps your most powerful tool, a complete interdiction of a player's agency. Use it wisely.

You can write anything on a character's sheet, or simply black things out. The following scenarios are among the most compelling:

BLACK OUT. Usually, players only lose portions of their character sheets when they choose to Sacrifice them. However, if something such as a location written on the character sheet is destroyed, you can **BLACK OUT** the entire box with marker. The player can still sacrifice this option in the future, removing it from their sheet, but they lose all benefits it might have offered in the meantime.

EVOLVING TRAITS. You can remove a player's Motive or Fear by blacking out the old one and writing a new one in its stead. Players, too, can choose to evolve their characters in this way as the story progresses, but when you use your pen or marker, it isn't an option—this choice is inflicted upon them in response to the story's motions.

CORRUPTION. Supernatural forces blight mortals that come too close to them, imposing a slow corruption that might wither away at weak players. Instead of imposing Trauma, you can leave a Black Mark on a character sheet. This is a circle or a thick line inside the box of an Action or trait. On its own, a **BLACK MARK** doesn't do anything, but as the player accumulates more of them, the marks might entirely blot out an Action or trait's box, which is functionally equivalent to you blacking out the box.



SCENES

The fundamental unit of storytelling is a **SCENE**, which includes a location, a dilemma, the players, and optionally some non-player characters that you control. Scenes might be investigative, social, or perilous, but they all follow the same basic flow:

1. Introduce the Scene.
2. Player Interactions
3. The Scene Evolves

INTRODUCE THE SCENE

Where are we? Why are we here? What elements look interesting? What stands in our way? A few sentences of exposition are all you need to raise the tension, set the stakes, or dangle a few tantalizing clues for the scene to come.

Director: Your flashlight sweeps across the cobweb-choked interior of the cabin, glinting off rusted implements hung by chains from the ceiling, something golden on the wall, and a splash of ruby liquid on the floor.

PLAYER INTERACTIONS

Now command of the story passes over to the players, who can freely use their Actions and abilities to interact with the scene. Any player can take an Action in any order, and multiple players can act at once. You may have to adjudicate what types of rolls are possible or suggest Actions in this phase, but the agency over the story rests firmly with the players.

You can also call for Reactions during this phase, especially when the scene calls for players to Notice something hidden or React to a Threat.

Kyle: I'm going to Investigate the desk.
[Rolls two dice.] A six! What do I find?

THE SCENE EVOLVES

How does the scene change? Success or failure, the scene evolves after every roll of the dice. The situation may grow more perilous, the players might discover something, or we may cut entirely to another scene.

Then everything resets back to introducing the scene.

Director: You find a heart-shaped locket hanging from a rusty nail on the wall. Before you can examine it closely, you hear a thud underneath your feet. Then, a trap door in the floor swings open and a gloved hand grabs the edge.

LIFE-OR-DEATH SCENES

In the game's most pivotal scenes, the flow of the game changes. Life-or-Death scenes require that players and the Threat take turns, moving around the table counter-clockwise. The players decide who acts first.

Keep the following in mind as you run such scenes:

ONE ACTION. A player can take one Action on their turn and move around 50 feet. Players can speak and perform minor interactions (such as opening a door or retrieving an item from a bag) without using an Action.

THE THREAT. The Threat acts *or* moves between every turn. Cinematically, the Threat can perform any Action you desire, but each comes with a few pre-written Actions. Remember to always call for a player to make a Reaction (often React or Withstand) before you impose Trauma due to a Threat's Actions.

LOCATIONS. For simplicity, we say that each player is **CLOSE** to the Threat, **FAR** from the Threat, or **OUT OF THE SCENE** altogether. A player can move between these ranges (Close to Far, Far to Out of the Scene, or vice-versa) on their turn.

TEN SECONDS. Within the fiction of the game, each full set of turns around the table takes about ten seconds.

MOMENTUM. Keep momentum up around the table as much as possible. The turn-taking rhythm threatens to be slow and methodical, even as the story hits a fever pitch. Use shorter descriptions and directly call on players to move things along. You can also grant Advantage on particularly prompt rolls.

THREATS

This chapter is for Directors.

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deeply discounted.
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Blood on the Lens presents each of its episodes as conflicts with a single entity that the players must survive, investigate, and hunt, lest they be hunted themselves.

OVERVIEW

All of the Threats detailed in this chapter leverage the following ideas and structures.

HUNT OR BE HUNTED

When a Threat is on the loose, one of two things will happen: either it'll pick off the players one-by-one, or the players will investigate it, uncover its weaknesses, corner it, and bring it down. None of these are small feats; each is fraught with peril, thrusting them into encounters with the Threat or its minions. In the course of investigation, the characters might need to procure special weapons or resources, pull on threads of inquiry to meet people familiar with the Threat, or simply spend a lot of time at the library. Every action brings them closer to an inevitable final confrontation, whether they're ready for it or not.

CRITICAL WEAKNESS

Many things can be learned as the players delve into investigation, from the Threat's origin, to how it kills, to the location of its lair, but the most important is undoubtedly the Threat's **WEAKNESS**. As invincible as any monster might seem, every entity has an Achilles' heel, some critical vulnerability that slows them down, undermines their powers, banishes them from time and space, or allows them to be slain. With the proper research, and a little bit of luck, the players might be able to find some detail which gives them a fighting chance.

INSIDIOUS LAIR

Whenever the Threat has finished consuming or abducting a victim—and whenever it is forced to flee—it retreats to its **LAIR**, a shadowy bastion where it heals and grows more powerful. Within its lair, the Threat wields all the tricks of familiar territory. However, it is also the most vulnerable to being cornered, trapped, and slain.

HOOK, MYSTERY, REVELATION

Each Threat in this chapter is presented with the outline of a three-part episode—beginning, middle, and end—arranged as a set of story hooks, an overarching mystery, and a number of revelations to uncover as the investigation unfolds. The **RUNNING THE GAME** chapter provides additional guidance on how to run episodes using this format.

Furthermore, each Threat can mix-and-match with any setting you wish. This means that certain details—like “the town” or “the authorities”—are painted with a broad enough brush to grant the necessary flexibility. Feel free to change smaller details to suit your selection of setting, NPCs, and factions. Also, experiment with unconventional pairings of Threats and settings. Perhaps a string of daemonic creatures visits the sci-fi Blackpost colony, or an extraterrestrial invasion sets its sight on Nowhere, USA.

HOOKS. For the Threat’s slow, insidious reveal, each comes armed with at least three story hooks, which inform different aspects of the mystery that follows. Don’t simply pick one—use all three! When all of the plot’s elements center on the Threat in different ways, the players will organically point their investigation in the correct direction as well.

MYSTERY. The overarching mystery centers on how the Threat hunts, the clues it leaves behind, and the investigation’s unexpected detours. Sometimes, the mystery has all the hallmarks of a detective story or a monster movie; other times, it involves deciphering esoteric patterns appearing in the world or reckoning with intangible forces from beyond space and time.

Because the mystery is almost entirely player-directed, this section of the Threat should be taken as a loose guideline, molded to the whims of your players and the demands of your story.

REVELATIONS. It wouldn’t be a mystery without secrets to uncover. As the characters investigate, they’ll pinpoint the Threat’s lair, realize previously unseen aspects of its nature, unravel its motivation, and ultimately determine how it can be killed. Each revelation is a modest achievement, a step toward understanding and ultimately achieving victory over the Threat at hand.

DOOM CLOCK

Detailed in the *Insomnia Storytelling Engine* chapter, the Doom Clock is a tool the Director can use to build tension as the episode progresses. Each monster includes a Doom Clock table with six recommended events. You can also substitute these events with those in the *Insomnia Storytelling Engine* chapter or your own.

BATTLING A THREAT

Each Threat is detailed with a few statistics that define how they act, how difficult they are to kill, and how to characterize their supernatural strengths and weaknesses.

TRAUMA. Each Threat has a given amount of Trauma it can sustain before being defeated. This amount of Trauma increases with the number of players, from three to six. You can usually extrapolate the Trauma for larger and smaller groups of players by adding or subtracting three.

TRAITS. Each Threat's statistics include one or two special traits, usually including a description of its Weakness. Most often, a Threat's weakness counteracts another trait that renders it invulnerable (or nearly so).

ACTIONS. The Threat acts between each player's turn, performing any Action you desire. When you don't have a grand, cinematic moment in mind for the Threat's Actions, you can choose a predefined Action or randomly determine one with a die roll. (You can also ask each player to roll a die to determine the monster's Actions before their turn.)

EVOLUTION. No battle with a Threat remains static throughout. At least one moment in each battle should fundamentally reshape the encounter. Each Threat, therefore, also features an Evolution—a twist that takes place during its encounter. These range from the relatively benign, such as revealing the monster's face, to dramatic changes in form and function.

MINIONS

Some Threats are accompanied by a host of lesser horrors known as Minions. Whereas the Threat is a singular force upon which the entire Episodes centers, Minions are individually surmountable. Therefore, Minions always try to use overwhelming numbers to their advantage.

ADJUSTING THE THREAT

You can double the Threat's overall Trauma or cut it in half to match the players' level of power.

Furthermore, when a Threat calls for a Reaction to avoid Trauma, you can have it deal two Trauma instead. A Success (one 5 or 6) avoids one Trauma, whereas a Big Success (two 5s or 6s) avoids both Trauma.

Alternately, if the Threat is dealing too much Trauma to the players, you can choose for it to spend its turn moving evasively, imposing Disadvantage on the players, or shifting the environment in its favor.



RUNNING MINIONS. Like the Threat, Minions always act between the players' turns. Distribute the Minions around the table and keep track of where each Minion acts. You should always be able to fit them evenly between the players. When a Minion is defeated, it no longer takes its turn and players will start taking turns back-to-back until no Minions remain.

TRAUMA AND NUMBERS. Each Minion can only take a certain amount of Trauma, usually one or two, before being defeated. With more players, however, more minions attack, as detailed in the Minion statistics.

ACTIONS. You can choose how Minions act from a predefined list in its statistics or roll to determine them randomly.

MAKING A MONSTER

You can easily design your own Threat, even on the fly, using the following guidelines.

EXPECTATIONS. Usually, a battle with a Threat takes three to five rounds, dealing an average of two Trauma to each player.

TRAUMA. The Threat's overall Trauma depends most on the number of players opposing it. By default, start the Threat with 3 Trauma for each player, increasing or decreasing by a few points if you want it to be tougher or weaker.

WEAKNESS AND STRENGTH. The prevailing mystery relies on the Threat having a Weakness to be uncovered and exploited. Therefore, most Threats also need a "Strength" feature that renders them nigh-invulnerable until the Weakness is found. The simplest of such features is simply ignoring Trauma.

ACTIONS. You can pick the Threat's Actions each round or assign them to the faces of a die and roll them randomly. The Threat should deal no more than four Trauma each round. On other turns, it can move evasively, act to impose Disadvantage on the players' attacks, or shift the environment in its favor.

EVOLUTION. By the midpoint of the fight, the Threat should do something to shake up the encounter and throw the players off balance. This doesn't need to be a physical transformation or a cinematic reveal—often, a dramatic shift to the environment, such as starting a fire or collapsing a ceiling atop the players, is all that's needed.

THE SLASHER

UNDEAD

Content Warning: Death, Gore, Kidnapping

A remorseless killer on a protracted rampage, the slasher's rough-hewn hood conceals the terrible face of undeath beneath.

HOOKS

The slasher's hideous visage can be introduced in a number of ways. Use these hooks to introduce players to this Threat.

URBAN LEGEND. Teenagers are fond of telling the story of the slasher by firelight, wooing and making scary noises as accompaniment. The details of the urban legend always differ, shifting to match the times as it has passed through the decades, but the curious nursery rhyme which accompanies it hasn't. All one has to do is go into a pitch-black room with a candle and recite the following lines before extinguishing the flame and waiting in silence for five minutes:

Dark of night, dark of night, what do you see?
Not a thing, not a thing, nothing's here with me!
Candle light, candle light, fire in the mirror!
Don't be scared, don't be scared, nothing left to fear!
Douse the flame, douse the flame, think about your friends!
In the dark, in the dark, coming to their ends!
Can you hear, can you hear, heartbeats in your head?
Listen close, listen close, here comes Mister Red!

HISTORICAL RECORD. Amateur local historians are soon celebrating an unorthodox anniversary: every twenty-three years, like clockwork, there's a killing spree. Sometimes, the killings are condensed into a single tragic night, other times they take place over a span of days or weeks, but they always claim dozens of victims (usually children and young adults). Someone is almost always sentenced under the barest of evidence, and memorials are usually erected in memory of the victims. It might be a coincidence or a case of cherry-picked news reports, but the sheer consistency makes it a tantalizing subject for speculation.

MURDER! Someone close to you has been butchered in their home. Within hours, the authorities are grilling you about when you last saw them and showing you grisly depictions of the crime scene: you didn't even know a person could be carved up into so many unrecognizable parts.

Another 24 hours later, someone else is killed in the same manner. Despite the authorities' best efforts to keep people calm, folks around town grow frantic as they conclude that someone or something is hunting them for sport. For you, however, it's personal—and you have revenge on the mind.

MYSTERY

Once the slasher awakens, it butchers one person each night, or a pair if it happens upon a lone couple. Before striking, the slasher lingers in the shadowy periphery, stalking its prey until nightfall. This provides a rare chance to glimpse the slasher at a distance: its profile is disturbingly human, wearing a long trench coat, workman's gloves, and a rough-hewn burlap mask with one eyehole. The oversized knife slung over its back is the tool of choice, brandished only when the killing begins.

Each crime scene it leaves behind is a bloodbath, recounting a desperate chase, a chaotic struggle, a decisive strike, and a deliberate hacking to bits, starting with the head. Nobody escapes. The slasher always pilfers a trophy from the corpse, usually its head or some other defining feature, which it mounts on its belt for all future murders. The trail of blood leading away from the killing points somewhere distant, a location which can be derived with a map and a few data points.

The slasher methodically executes its killings to be as unique as they are gruesome, using whatever tools that prove to be most lethal. It isn't possessed of high thoughts or grand ambitions: it kills because it is compelled to, and because it enjoys its victims' suffering.

While lacking heads makes it harder to identify the bodies, a pattern of victims gradually emerges. They are a circle of friends, classmates, or coworkers familiar with the slasher's urban legend, and they invariably realize they are being hunted before the authorities do. They stoke their own fears and suspicions, playing a game of whodunit with the web of acquaintances they have left, trying to place someone they know beneath the slasher's mask. Soon, fight or flight sets in: the remaining survivors rush to fortified or remote places, clutching any weapons they can find. This rarely impedes the slasher for long.



DOOM CLOCK

Use these events to build tension as the episode progresses.

CLOCK	EVENT
1	STRING OF MURDERS. Two people were killed within 48 hours.
2	A SURVIVOR. Someone witnesses the slasher's killing spree and describes what they saw.
3	GRUESOME WARNING. The slasher leaves a grisly totem, such as a decapitated head hung from a tree, specifically for the players to find.
4	SINISTER TRAPS. Where the players expect a survivor or a trove of clues, they instead find a sadistic mechanical trap
5	KIDNAPPED. The slasher abducts a player and brings them back to its lair.
6	KILLING SPREE. Insane with rage, the slasher works its way through the community, killing dozens indiscriminately.

REVELATIONS

As the characters uncover clues and unravel the mystery, they might uncover any of the following revelations about the slasher:

UNDEAD KILLER. Encountering the slasher quickly reveals that, despite its lumbering, it possesses inhuman strength and durability. Nothing truly injures the slasher, though a few things might slow it down. Its pallid flesh and revolting stench provide additional clues that the slasher is not a masked killer exacting revenge, but is actually an undead creature.

SUMMONED. Not everyone involved in the string of killings is strictly innocent. Someone known to the victims chanted the slasher's rhyme with serious intent (whether or not they believed it would work), and beckoned the undead monster into existence. It was this individual's thoughts which guided the slasher to its targets. Should all these targets be butchered, the slasher will depart and resume its slumber for another twenty-three years.

MURDEROUS RITUAL. Research suggests that the slasher has performed its killings for hundreds of years, stemming from an ancient curse invoked as revenge for some wrongdoing forgotten to history. No magic can break this curse, for there are no remaining practitioners of this variety of necromancy.

However, there is one other way to end the killer's spree early: if the slasher can be tricked into killing its summoner, its connection to the mortal realm will be broken forever. Knowing this, the slasher will never willingly attack its summoner, nor even interact with them after appearing out of the blackness to begin its murder spree.

WEAKNESS: HOLY WATER, IRON SPIKE. With enough research, or by interrogating the oldest people who remember the rhyme, the characters can discover that the slasher's rhyme has two additional lines:

Now he's done, now he's done, All your friends are dead!

Holy water, iron spike, goes right through the head!

These reveal the slasher's weakness, by which it can be "slain," ending its killing spree early (though the slasher will still awaken when called in another twenty-three years.) Holy water is only mitigation for the slasher's invulnerability, and an iron spike through the heart or head is the only way to kill the slasher for good.

LAIR: KILLER'S BASEMENT

The slasher always sets up shop in someplace below ground, usually an abandoned basement filled with rusted tools and broken antiques. There, it shackles kidnapped victims whom it is not yet ready to kill, displays its trophies, and sharpens its knives. The slasher resides in its basement in daytime, pensively waiting until nightfall. Once the sun goes down, it is possible to infiltrate the basement, but doing so is perilous, as the slasher could return at any moment.

SLASHER

TRAUMA

7



10



13



16



DEATHLESS. When the slasher reaches its maximum Trauma, it only dies temporarily. At the start of its next turn, the Slasher returns to life with 6 fewer Trauma.

WEAKNESS. If the slasher is splashed with holy water, its Deathless trait doesn't function for the rest of the session.

WEAKNESS. If the slasher is tricked into killing its summoner, it dies and its Deathless trait doesn't function.

- 1** – **2** **MENACING APPROACH.** The slasher moves to a Far player. If an obstacle, such as a wall, stands in its way, it demolishes the obstacle on approach. The player has **DISADVANTAGE** on their Action rolls during their next turn.
- 3** – **4** **BUTCHER.** One Close player must succeed on a **REACT** roll or suffer one **TRAUMA**.
- 5** – **6** **VICIOUS THROW.** The slasher grabs one Close player and throws them through an obstacle, such as a door or window, destroying it. The player must succeed on a **WITHSTAND** roll or suffer one **TRAUMA**.

EVOLUTION: UNDEAD VISAGE. When the slasher has taken half or more of its Trauma, its mask is removed or ripped away, revealing a hideous face of undeath. The player who most recently dealt Trauma to the slasher must succeed on a **WITHSTAND** roll or suffer one **TRAUMA**. Each other player that can see the slasher has **DISADVANTAGE** on their next Action roll. (1/Session)

Content Warning: Bats, Darkness, Illness

A blood-drinking undead abomination hailing from antiquity, the vampire's curse hangs over the populace as it stalks the night and drinks its fill.

HOOKS

The vampire's haunting presence can reveal itself in a number of subtle ways. Use these hooks to introduce players to this Threat.

LOW MOON. The full moon looms low and large in the sky, seeming to grow wider each night. At first, it might be an optical illusion, the bright lunar phase causing the moon to appear more prominently than it might otherwise, but soon it is unmistakable: the moon is colossal, hanging so close that you can see each and every crater on its pockmarked face. It's even visible throughout the day, casting a shadow that delays the morning and lengthens the night.

HEMOPHILIA. A minor health crisis has tightened its grip on the area: dozens of people have reported bleeding for hours from minor wounds, a textbook symptom of hemophilia. This minor medical annoyance becomes life-ening whenever someone sustains a serious bodily injury and starts bleeding uncontrollably. What makes this crisis utterly bizarre is that hemophilia is genetic, not contagious, and that the issue seems to be affecting more and more people each day.

LIVING SHADOWS. You spot movement in the corner of your vision, but turn around and there's nothing there. Movement again; nothing again. When you think you're at last losing your mind, you see it: shadows moving of their own accord—shifting around when they think nobody's watching. You try to close your mind to it, but the very idea makes your skin crawl. The shadows are alive, and it seems they want something from you.

MYSTERY

The vampire's arrival is signified by ominous signs and omens: a low, orange moon, the sense that the shadows are suddenly alive, and a sudden abundance of nocturnal creatures—bats, most of all. Shortly after, the killings begin: usually one person a night, desiccated into a blackened husk, like a mummy. Should anyone chance upon the vampire as it feeds, they are cut down with prejudice, usually hacked to pieces.

Apart from the bodies left behind after its meals, the vampire leaves few clues in its wake. Bloody footprints vanish after a few steps, and nothing can capture the monster's image. The scant few witnesses and survivors, however, report an uncanny spectacle: a silent figure in medieval armor bearing a greatsword, floating near the horizon at dusk.

DOOM CLOCK

Use these events to build tension as the episode progresses.

CLOCK EVENT

- 1 **BLOOD MOON.** The community has been gripped by a wave of hemophilia, rendering even small injuries life-threatening. Simultaneously, the moon hangs red and low in the sky.
- 2 **BLACKENED HUSK.** A victim is discovered, withered into a blackened husk.
- 3 **REIGN OF SHADOWS.** Living shadows stalk the streets.
- 4 **ENTHRALLED MESSENGER.** The vampire infects the mind of one of its victims, who seeks out the players to deliver a message: a time and place for an audience with the vampire. Clearly a trap.
- 5 **NO DAWN.** The sun refuses to rise past the horizon, blanketing the community in an endless night.
- 6 **EXTERMINATION.** An army of living shadows rounds up innocent people to be devoured by the blood-starved vampire.



REVELATIONS

As the characters uncover clues and unravel the mystery, they might uncover any of the following revelations about the vampire:

NOBLE OF ANTIQUITY. Research indicates that this vampire is the last of its order, perhaps the last of its kind. It traces a once-proud heritage to historical kingdoms, when it once reigned as a lord with legions of peasants under its command. Despite how far it has fallen in the centuries hence, it still considers itself a personage of noble blood. All others, save royalty, are merely cattle upon which to feast. Therefore, it spares anyone of royal blood.

The vampire sleeps and eats sporadically, slumbering for decades, then feasting voraciously for weeks.

SANGUINE MAGIC. When the vampire awakens, it commands an eerie blood magic to cover its tracks and loosen the blood of its victims. This magic predates other arcane disciplines, perhaps tracing its origin to prehistory.

MINION: LIVING SHADOW

When the vampire perceives a threat to its midnight hunts, it directs living shadows to strike at its foes. These foul shades are the remnants of those consumed—body and soul—by the vampire in ages past. As commanded, they seek out and strangle those who might discover the vampire's weakness, and defend the vampire's lair while it hunts.

2 TRAUMA

NUMBER OF MINIONS



- 1–3** **FADE.** The shadow disappears into the darkness and reappears at the start of its next turn.
- 4–6** **NECROTIC TOUCH.** One Close player must succeed on a **WITHSTAND** roll or suffer one **TRAUMA**.

Moreover, the vampire's immortality doesn't equate to eternal youth. The passing centuries have withered it into a terrible husk, such that it can no longer create more of its kind.

VAMPIRIC BEAST. Though the vampire appears humanoid in most respects, the facade crumbles if it is starved of blood for too long, revealing its true form: that of a monstrous bat creature. Once transformed, it will engage in a killing spree ended only by its death or the consumption of an ocean of blood.

WEAKNESS: SILVER. Through research, experimentation, and observation, the characters can learn that the vampire isn't susceptible to classic vampiric weaknesses. It outright ignores garlic, crucifixes, and running water, and, while it is nocturnal, sunlight doesn't harm it. A stake (or any other object) through the heart is painful and inconvenient, but not outright lethal.

Silver, however, proves fruitful, as it is possible to poison the vampire with silver-laden blood. Such poisoning is similar to heavy metal poisoning in humans, but curiously only works with dissolved silver, causing the vampire's organs to falter, interrupting its regeneration.

Perhaps this is why the vampire's image doesn't appear in mirrors, as ancient mirrors were often composed of polished silver.

LAIR: THE DARK SPIRE

Guided by predatory instinct, the vampire makes its lair as high as possible: the peak of an abandoned tower or spire will usually suffice. From such a vantage point, it can select its nightly meal (or meals, should its appetite compel it), and it can look down upon the mortals it sees as loathsome peasants.

VAMPIRE

TRAUMA

4



7



10



13



1 – 2

GRAB. The vampire grabs one Close player. A successful **FORCE** roll made by any player helps them escape its grasp.

3 – 4

BITE. The vampire deals one **TRAUMA** to a player it has in its grasp and reduces the Trauma it has taken by one.

5 – 6

ANCESTRAL BLADE. One Close player must succeed on a **REACT** roll or suffer one **TRAUMA**.

EVOLUTION: METAMORPHOSIS. When the vampire has taken all of its Trauma, it undergoes a horrific transformation—bones break, skin rips, and it reforms into a monstrous bat-like creature. It uses the statistics of the **BAT**. (1/Session)

BAT

TRAUMA

5



8



11



14



RESISTANT. The bat ignores the first 5 or 6 rolled on any Weapon roll targeting it.

WEAKNESS: SILVER. If the bat ingests silver or suffers Trauma from a silver weapon or projectile, its Resistant trait doesn't function for the rest of the session.

1 – 3

SCREECH. The next player has **DISADVANTAGE** on their Action roll.

4 – 5

THRASH. One Close player must succeed on a React roll or suffer one **TRAUMA**.

6

BITE. The bat deals **TWO TRAUMA** to a Close player.

SAFETY AND FEEDBACK

This chapter is for players and Directors.

Remember, don't drink and dice.

It is strongly recommended that you play *Blood on the Lens* using a TTRPG safety system, whether you employ the following **PAUSE-BREAK** system or another system such as Lines and Veils or Script Change. Safety systems aren't intended to blunt the experience, but sharpen it, allowing players to explore more scenes more viscerally and freely, without pulling their punches when the tension heightens.

The Pause-Break system serves several purposes simultaneously:

1. To give the Director useful and **ANONYMOUS** mid-game **FEEDBACK**.
2. To give the players and Director a tool for **SECRET COMMUNICATIONS**.
3. To let players pause the game and **TAKE A BREAK**.
4. To let players **SKIP OR OMIT** unpleasant content.

Furthermore, no matter the system, responsible groups should engage in some pre-game discussions about what is and isn't acceptable at the table.

THE PRE GAME

Before starting a game, the Director should discuss expectations with the players, either individually or as a group in a **PRE-GAME** meeting. This only needs to take five or ten minutes, but gives everyone a chance to get on the same page and collectively set a **RATING** (e.g. PG, PG-13, R, NC-17, etc.) for the game as a whole. Furthermore, this gives players a chance to lay out boundaries and set hard **NO-GO ZONES** for content that they find personally objectionable. All cinema contains invisible rules about what they'll depict on screen, and the pre-game gives players a chance to contribute to those rules.

If the group performs a "**SESSION ZERO**"—a session entirely dedicated to brainstorming characters and introducing the campaign—the Director should find time to privately meet with each player and discuss expectations. Individual discussions can be a little more frank and impart better understanding than those in a group. Plus, it gives each player some private time to discuss their character, an invaluable moment to solidify those choices for the upcoming campaign.

PAUSE BREAK SYSTEM

At the start of the session, each player gets a **BLANK INDEX CARD**. A player can use this card at any time to **PAUSE THE GAME** by passing the card to the next player. If you are handed a card, place your own card with it and pass the stack to the next player, and so on until the stack reaches the Director.

Each player has the chance to write a **SECRET MESSAGE** to the Director in the cards, folding their card in half when they do so. You can pass your card or the stack under the table to help players with secret messages remain anonymous.

When the Director receives the pile of cards, it's time to take a break! The game **PAUSES**—even if it was in the middle of a scene—for the players to take a break and for the Director to comb through the cards. Most often, this gives everyone a chance to use the restroom, but this pause also might require the Director to meet with one or more players to discuss their messages.



SECRET MESSAGES

Players can sign their secret messages to the Director or leave them entirely anonymous (as might be helpful when providing feedback or asking to omit unpleasant content). The following secret messages are the most common:

BLANK CARD. This card doesn't mean anything! If everyone submitted a blank card, it means it's time to take a break and use the restroom.

NOTES TO THE DIRECTOR. You can write any message to the Director pertaining to secret actions in the game. If your character stole something without the knowledge of another player or intends to do something truly underhanded or surprising, this is the best way to communicate that information to the Director!

FEEDBACK (★). Mark the card with a star if the note on the card is simply feedback for how the Director is doing. Offer a few encouraging words of advice or let them know they're doing great. No good Director turns down honest feedback!

EMERGENCY LEVER (!). Write an exclamation point on the card if the Director is engaging or about to engage with content you'd rather avoid. This card applies when something is deeply triggering or just mildly uncomfortable to you. You can write out your objection specifically or leave a large X if you'd prefer not to explain things. If you'd like to discuss things, you can sign your name—an invitation for the Director to pull you aside during the break—or you can leave it anonymous, which indicates they should move the story along and ask no further questions.

SAFETY ON VIRTUAL TABLETOPS

Effective safety systems for TTRPGs might look very different when playing remotely using digital tools. If possible, prioritize systems that let you comment to the Director anonymously and that give you wide leeway in expression, so you can communicate whether uncomfortable content should be skipped past, acknowledged outside of roleplaying, or omitted from the story altogether.