

Ruinous Tales of Gothic Madness

A 24-hour Role-Playing Game by Brainhole

24-HOUR
RPG 2015

In the evening, Emily had passed some melancholy hours with Madame Montoni, and was retiring to rest, when she was alarmed by a strange and loud knocking at her chamber door, and then a heavy weight fell against it, that almost burst it open. She called to know who was there, and receiving no answer, repeated the call; but a chilling silence followed. It occurred to her—for, at this moment, she could not reason on the probability of circumstances—that some one of the strangers, lately arrived at the castle, had discovered her apartment, and was come with such intent, as their looks rendered too possible—to rob, perhaps to murder, her...

— Anne Radcliffe, *Mysteries of Udolpho*

Introduction

Welcome to a nightmare world of overwrought gothic melodrama, where demented aristocrats indulge their horrific appetites, bandits lurk, supernatural beings creep about, guilt and shame are as dreaded as daggers, and when the story stalls, someone dies.

Death: the Final Arbiter

There is no gamemaster; everything is decided by a consensus of players. The only restriction is that each player decides her/his own characters' actions (though everyone else may help decide the results of those actions).

If, at any time, it takes more than three minutes to reach unanimous consensus, or any other deadlock arises that cannot be resolved in three minutes, everyone rolls, and the character belonging to the player with the lowest total immediately dies a mysterious death.

This is the only way any player's character dies. Otherwise, characters are simply wounded, unconscious, too far gone in shame to leave their rooms, swooning with guilt and fear, or caught in the throes of unutterable psychic agony... until they feel better.

After a week or two of game time, if the other players agree, a player whose character is dead can generate a new character (likely a relative or ex-lover of the dead character) who will arrive at the scene to attempt to uncover the truth about the other character's mysterious death.

Rolling

Take 2 six-sided dice of different colours. Decide which is positive. The other is negative. When you roll, subtract the negative die from the positive die. This is your result. *All rolls in this game work this way.*

Character Generation

Each player's character needs a Name, an Occupation, and a Preoccupation. Elaborate names reflecting the spirit of gothic fiction are recommended. Sir Peter Noteworthy, Reginalda de la Glace, the Baron Lothar von der Oesterfluss, or Edwina Smythe-Harburyford would be appropriate.

Occupation

You may choose your own Occupation, or roll on the following table:

<i>Roll</i>	Occupation
-5	Banker
-4	Disgraced ex-clergy
-3	Disgraced ex-military officer
-2	Clergy
-1	Military officer
0	Landed gentry
1	Student
2	Disgraced ex-student
3	Poet
4	Doctor of Obscure Occult Sciences
5	Disgraced ex-poet

Occupations provide no game-mechanical advantages, but they provide valuable insight into the types of melodramatic cliches appropriate to the character.

Preoccupation

You may choose your own Preoccupation, or roll on the following chart:

<i>Roll</i>	Preoccupation
-5	Lack of sufficient funds
-4	Marriage
-3	Lack of sufficient funds for marriage
-2	Marriage as a way to obtain sufficient funds
-1	A relative
0	Death
1	An unrequited love
2	Unrequited love for a relative
3	A dead lover
4	A dead relative
5	Unrequited love for a dead relative

Attributes

Characters have three attributes: Body, Mind, and Soul.

Body includes physical strength, toughness, and agility.

Mind includes wit, knowledge, and puzzle-solving ability.

Soul includes all kinds of intangibles: charisma, intuition, perception, and willpower.

Attributes are generated using a point-buy system. The cost is as follows:

<i>Attribute</i>	1	2	3	4	5
<i>Point Cost</i>	1	3	6	10	15

You have 18 points to spend. So, for instance, you could spend all your points to have 3s in Body, Mind, and Soul; or you could spend 17 points and be a soulless, mindless brute with 5 Body, 1 Mind, 1 Soul.

Leftover points can be spent to reroll the dice during the game. One point buys you one reroll.

Equipment

You begin with anything your character might reasonably be expected to have upon her or his person, several handkerchiefs embroidered with your initials, and a snuffbox.

The Setting

Roll three times on the following table.

<i>Roll 1-6</i>	Adversary	Location	Region
1	Mad monk	Ruinous abbey	Windswept moor
2	Cruel countess	Ruinous castle	Dismal swamp
3	Tormented duke	Ruinous manor-house	Snow-capped mountains
4	Vicious landlord	All-but-abandoned village	Dark forest
5	Eccentric scholar	Secretive town	Rocky coast
6	Cunning dutchess	Inn	Gloomy cliffs

You are all staying at the indicated location in the indicated region, and the Adversary is up to something nefarious, but none of you are sure exactly what. (Each of you expect that it's somehow related to your Preoccupation, however.)

Non-Player Characters

Non-Player Characters generally have only one stat, which is used for all attributes. For instance, the cruel countess may have a butler (2). This means that the butler's Body, Mind, and Soul scores are all 2. Things are just easier this way.

Where this doesn't make sense, don't use it. A wolf (3) likely has a Body score of 3, and might even have Mind 3 for the purposes of tracking down players in the woods, but a wolf's Mind is not really comparable to a person's, and it would not have Mind 3 for purposes such as beating the countess at a game of whist.

Your main adversary is always a 5, and always has a henchperson with a score of 4. Average people are Person (2). Whenever a new character is introduced, players decide on its attribute value. If the players cannot agree, everybody rolls and whoever has the lowest number dies mysteriously.

Doing Things

Players take turns doing things in whatever order they choose. If they can't choose, and three minutes pass, everybody rolls and whoever has the lowest number dies mysteriously.

When there's a chance that what someone's character is doing will fail, the player should roll the dice. Subtract the negative from the positive. This is your Roll Result. Add this to the appropriate attribute for the task. If the result is greater than the task's difficulty, you succeed. If it's lower, you fail. If they're equal, things get complicated (how to interpret this is up to the other players, but it should neither be a clear-cut success nor a real failure).

<i>Difficulty</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<i>Description</i>	Routine	Easy	Tricky	Hard	Quite hard	Really hard	Long shot

Example: Late one night, as Roderick Pendlesmythe tries to leave the palace of Countess Pazmany with a sack full of stolen silverware, he encounters a locked door. He attempts to pick the lock. The players decide that the task is Hard (4). Roderick's Mind score is 3. He rolls the dice: +5 and -4, for a total of 1. His Mind score of 3 plus his roll of 1 gives him a 4, just equal to the difficulty. This means that things get complicated. The other players decide that the door opens, but not because Roderick successfully picked the lock: the doorknob fell off, falling to the floor with a loud crack that threatens to awaken the Countess's servants.

Opposed Actions

If another character is attempting to thwart an action, instead of using an assigned difficulty, use that character's attribute as the difficulty number.

Example: The Countess's butler investigates the noise, and confronts Roderick, asking what he's up to. Roderick swings at the butler with his sack of ill-gotten gains. Roderick's Body score is 3, and the butler's is 2. Roderick rolls +2 and -5, for a total roll of -3. Roderick's Body of 3, plus his roll of -3, gives him a 0. The butler easily steps out of the way of Roderick's clumsy swing, shouting for help.

If several characters are competing, simply generate a total for each. Highest total wins.

Example: Nyla (Mind 2), Louisa (Mind 3), and Horace (Mind 3) are playing cards. Each rolls and generates a total. Nyla rolls a +5 for a total of 7, Louisa +1 for a total of 4, and Horace -4 for a total of -1. Nyla wins.

Some actions may be a combination of factors. How to account for these is left to the players' discretion, but typically a combination of an attribute and bonus/penalty (or a halved attribute and bonus/penalty) will be appropriate.

Example: Louisa (Body 4) tries to shoot a highwayman (Body 3) with her musket. The highwayman zigzags and ducks, trying to make himself more difficult to hit, but the range to the target (about 50') is also a factor. For ranged attacks, use half the defender's Body score (1.5, round up to 2), plus a range modifier (in this case, the players decide on 3). The total difficulty is 5.

Actions and Preoccupations

If you can connect the thing you're doing to your Preoccupation, gain a +2 bonus.

Example: Nyla (Mind 2) decides that persuading the countess (Mind 5) to invite the vicar for dinner will provide her an opportunity to ask about the state of her cousin's soul, allowing her to better deal with her Preoccupation (unrequited love for a dead relative). Nyla gains a +2 bonus to her Mind roll.

But if an opponent uses your Preoccupation against you, suffer a -2 penalty.

Example: The vicar (2), it turns out, is in cahoots with the countess, and wishes to impede Nyla's investigations of the countess. At dinner, he tries to convince her that her fixation with her dead cousin is evidence of a chronically morbid character that renders her unsuitable for society. Normally this would pit the vicar's Mind 2 against Nyla's Mind 2, but because the vicar's action is related to Nyla's preoccupation, he receives a +2 bonus.

Helping Another Character

If one character wants to assist another, any one of several methods might be appropriate. It's up to the players to determine which.

The simplest approach is to allow a helper to add half of her or his attribute (round up).

Example: Nyla (Body 3) is having trouble shifting a boulder (difficulty 5). Horace (Body 2) decides to help, and the players decide to use this method. Now Nyla can add half of Horace's body score to the total, giving her a +1 bonus.

A more complex approach may be needed when helping is less certain, or takes a different form than the main task. In cases like this, the helper should first make a task roll to help. Half of the result points (round up) are then applied to the main task. *This happens whether the results are positive or negative.* (Inept help is worse than no help.)

Example: Horace (Soul 4) is trying to swipe important papers from the Kommissar's desk (a difficulty 5 task). Nyla (Mind 3) decides to distract the Kommissar with witty conversation.

Nyla rolls to distract the Kommissar. The players decide that this is a difficulty 3 task, since the Kommissar has a Mind score of 3. Nyla rolls +5. Her total is 8, beating the task's difficulty by 5 points. Half of five is 2.5, rounded up is 3, so Horace gets a +3 bonus on his attempt to swipe the papers without the Kommissar noticing.

Injuries and Healing

When someone is hurt (physically, mentally, or psychically), that character gains wounds. When a character's wounds exceeds the related attribute, the character loses consciousness.

To calculate the number of wound points, look up the amount by which the attack succeeded (the Success #) on the damage table, and add the damage rating of the weapon.

Example: Roderick swings again at the Countess's butler. This time, he rolls +6 and -2, for a +4, giving him 7. This beats the butler's body score of 2 by 5 points. Looking up 5 on the damage table, we find a result of 2. Roderick's sack of silverware is an improvised weapon, so the players decide that it gets no damage bonus. The butler takes a 2-point Wound, which, with his Body score of 2, means he's now unconscious.

Success #	1-2	3-4	5-6	7-8	9+
Damage	1	2	3	4	5

Weapon damage bonuses range from -1 (bare hands) to +5 (nearly always fatal). Typical values are 0 for improvised weapons, +1 for clubs and knives and such, +2 for a sabre or axe, +3 for a pike or claymore.

Mental and psychic wounds are also possible. Whenever a character insults or slights another, or torments them, or accuses them of vile deeds, these attacks take their toll as well.

Example: The Countess (Soul 5) meets Horace (Soul 2) in the drawing room, and obliquely suggests that Horace's parentage is not so noble as he had thought -- that he is, in fact, the bastard son of a gamekeeper. This is an attack on Horace's Soul. The Countess rolls a -2 for a total of 3, and Horace rolls a 0, for a total of 2. The Countess inflicts 1 point of psychic wounds on Horace's gentle Soul. Another point, and Horace will have to withdraw to his room in shame to sulk, unable to do anything until his dignity has recovered.

Healing and Recovery

Each wound point must be healed separately. For each day of rest, make a healing roll.

A healing roll is a task with a difficulty equal to total level of wounds suffered. In other words, for a physical wound level of 3, the character would roll, add her or his Body attribute, aiming for a result greater than 3. On a success, the wound level is reduced by 1. On a failure, the wound level *increases* by 1.

Example: *Louisa FitzHugh is in bad condition. She lost a brawl, and now has 3 points of physical wounds. After a day of rest, she rolls to heal. Her Body score is 4, and she rolls -1, for a total of 3: not enough to succeed, but at least she doesn't get any worse. She rests for another day and makes another healing roll, this time rolling a +2 which, with her Body 4, gives her a 6. Her wound level is now reduced to 2.*

Another character may tend a wounded character using the *sum* of her or his Mind and Soul attributes. The difficulty of tending a wounded character is equal to the wounded character's wound points. The Success # (positive or negative) is applied to the character's next healing roll.

Example: *Roderick returns and attempts to nurse Louisa back to health. His Mind is 3, and his Soul is also 3, so his attribute total is 6. He rolls -3, giving him a total of 3. This is one point higher than Louisa's current wound level of 2, so she gets a +1 on her next healing roll.*

If Roderick had rolled -5, his total would have been 1. This would be one point lower than Louisa's wound level, so her next healing roll would have had a -1 penalty due to his clumsy ministrations.

Helping in this way is also effective mental and psychic wounds. This represents the salutary effects of encouragement, witty repartee, and pleasant company on one's confidence, intellect, and reputation.

Supernatural Forces

Whatever nefarious deeds the players' adversary is plotting, there are almost certainly supernatural forces involved. Ghosts, demons, vampyres, or other stranger things are bound to emerge in the course of play. However, players are unlikely to confront them directly until the adventure's climax. Until then, they will creep about in the dark, howling or clanking their chains, and perhaps dragging off into the darkness characters who have difficulty agreeing about what should happen next.

Final Thoughts

It's possible for this game to get bogged down with all the characters sitting in their rooms healing from wounds and swooning from shame. When this happens, roll. If the result is positive, the adversary immediately leaves for France, and an ally (3) arrives who will assist the players' characters in their recovery. If the result is negative, the adversary escalates his/her plans, doing something worse than has happened thus far. The players decide what that is, and as always, if no agreement is reached in three minutes, someone dies.

Ruinous Tales of Gothic Madness - Character Record Sheet

Name:

Occupation:

Preoccupation:

MIND	BODY	SOUL
Mental wounds	Physical wounds	Psychic wounds

Equipment: