THE DARKEST HOUSE ™

CROSSING THE THRESHOLD
A PLAYER'S GUIDE to THE DARKEST HOUSE

by MONTE COOK

INTRODUCTION

Your have this guide because you're about to undertake the task of entering the Darkest House. It isn't going to be easy, but it is going to be fun.

The GM has a guide of their own called *Secrets of the House*. However, you will get to discover those secrets for yourself through exploration and investigation. This guide, then, is just going to help you ready your character and introduce you to the Darkest House's idiosyncratic mechanics. You see, the house is so vast and so all-encompassing that it has its own system for handling task resolution, combat, and everything else that comes up in the game. We call this the House System. When you read this guide, you'll also learn about the House Die that you roll with each action, which dictates the escalating actions of the house itself. You'll learn about the ever-increasing Dooms that might begin to weigh you down, but the crux of it is that you'll *choose* to carry that burden.

MORE STORY THAN MECHANICS

The House System is fairly simple, so that at no time will it get in the way. Roll some dice and add your Rating. That's how you do everything. Except that in truth, even that simple mechanic isn't really the crux of the experience. Perhaps more than in many other games, the focus is on things that happen to and can affect the characters *without mechanics*.

The Darkest House is about character, not character sheets. Go in with an open mind, a willingness to go along with the mood, and be ready to answer questions about your character that you've maybe never considered before. Characters that survive The Darkest House come out deeper and richer. But some don't come out at all.

ONLINE GAMING TIPS

Before we get to that, let's talk about some tips for playing online, which is the type of play that The Darkest House is specifically designed for. Even if you've got the basics of online play (and it's not hard), incorporating these tips can help your online session run more smoothly.

✦ **Be aware of the challenges unique to online play.** People sitting at home in front of a computer are likely surrounded by distractions. Kids might demand attention. You might be tempted to check your email or social media. We're trained to multitask while we're at our computer (even though it's really not good for us), and it's hard not to. Try to focus on the game and what the GM and the other players are saying rather than allowing yourself to drift off into another activity.

✦ **Be patient.** Because it's hard for players to have small side conversations, even about minor issues, they'll have them front and center, and it will take up everyone's time. That's just the nature of the beast. During an in-person game, you might be able to turn to Mary and ask what the range is on a particular spell while Marjorie is resolving her character's actions, but online it's much harder—almost impossible—to do that kind of thing concurrently. Also, the distance between players is noticeable when the group is trying to decide what to do next. It's harder for people to feel like their opinion is being heard. It's harder to come to a consensus. So games just take more time.

✦ **Wait for the break.** Your GM should give you at least one break during the game. Try to wait to get a snack, use the restroom, or attend to other, non-game business until that time if possible.

✦ **Manage your screen.** You need to be able to see the GM and other players' faces, but you need to be able to see your character stats as well. You can switch windows back

and forth if you want to, but resizing them so you can have both open and visible is ideal. You might want to have this guide open for reference purposes, but it can be minimized most of the time.

✦ **Get into the spirit of things.** This is a horror-themed adventure, heavy on mood and atmosphere. You'll have more fun if you aren't resistant to these things, and you'll help everyone else have a better time if you do as well.

THE HOUSE SYSTEM

Rather than being designed for a specific game system, The Darkest House has its own internal system called the House System. The House System is easy to use and easy to understand, although likely quite different from the system(s) you use most of the time.

This is intentional. Because the Darkest House experience isn't about stats and numbers, it's about mood and story (both dark). The characters will almost certainly leave the house with some permanent changes that are going to affect any ongoing campaigns.

Some gamers might balk at how simple the system is. They want more granularity and robust options in their game. I understand. But the House System does two things:

It allows both players and GM to really focus on the story and the mood.

It tells the players in a very overt way, "Things are different here." It makes that statement in a language all players will understand, in a tone they will all hear: via game mechanics that govern how their character works. Thus, if the game's mechanics are the laws of physics for your game, the laws of physics work differently in the Darkest House.

I know many of you will say, "I don't want to change. My group likes the system we're used to." And if that's your desire, well, okay. Games are meant to be enjoyed and you should do what you want. Use your system as normal. But all the inhabitants and challenges in this product have House System Ratings. The great thing is, the rules for conversion work both ways. The simple stats you'll get in the Darkest House will be enough for you to convert to your group's favorite game system.

Thus, your 5e character can tromp around in the Darkest House using the stats they're used to, and the challenges they face will have familiar resolution mechanics.

EVERYTHING HAS A RATING

Imagine everything in the world was rated on a scale of 1 to 10. 1 is the worst, and 10 is the best. The worst door in the world is maybe a light curtain, while the best door in the world is a titanium vault door. All other doors fall somewhere in between, so that an interior door you have in your house is a 3, while an exterior door on your house is probably more like a 5. A really sturdy iron door might be an 8.

And when I say everything, I mean *everything*. Not just objects, but actions, characters, creatures, and entities.

Usually, if an object has a Rating, that Rating is used to determine the difficulty of an action. In other words, the difficulty of doing something to the object. If you're trying to break something with your hands, breaking a piece of dry spaghetti is a Rating 1, while breaking a vault door is a Rating 10. In this case, you're not really rating the objects, you're rating the action of breaking them, and judging how hard it would be. A lock with a Rating of 5 is harder to pick (or jimmy, or force) than a lock with a Rating of 3. The object determines the Rating of a task involved in overcoming it.

And of course, creatures, inhabitants, and entities in the house have Ratings too. When engaging with creatures, inhabitants, and entities in the house, their Rating determines the Rating of the task involved in opposing it. Attacking a foe with a Rating of 3 is a Rating 3 task.

In general, higher-rated characters are more likely to succeed, but higher-rated tasks are harder to accomplish.

The GM will provide the Ratings of the NPCs and the things in the game. You just need to worry about your Rating.

CHARACTER RATINGS

Here's where the conversion part of all of this comes in. Because you can insert existing characters into the House System, and if they enter the Darkest House, you should.

Most RPG systems have some kind of ability scores, various skill scores, offensive and defensive values, and so on. As mentioned earlier, the House System simplifies all of that into a single Rating, on a scale of 1 to 10.

Fortunately, many games already have a numerical rating in the form of levels or ranks or what have you. This is handy because you can measure the character's level to the maximum level attainable to figure out where they might fall on a 1–10 rating scale. So if your system rates characters on a scale of 1 to 20 levels, just cut the level in half and you have the Rating.

The following chart can help with this process. If the original system has numerical levels or tiers, use the most appropriate column to approximate this level to a House System Rating. If the original system has numerical skill ratings but not levels (or anything similar to levels), take the general average of the character's skill scores on the scale similar to one of the columns to approximate a House System Rating. So, if the system has percentile scores for skills, take a general average of the truly useful skills and look at the 1–100 column to get an approximate Rating.

House System	1–20	1–4	1–6	1–100
1	1–2	1	1	1–10
2	3–4	1	2	11–20
3	5–6	2	2	21–30
4	7–8	2	3	31–40
5	9–10	2	3	41–50
6	11–12	3	4	51–60
7	13–14	3	4	61–70
8	15–16	3	5	71–80
9	17–18	4	5	81–90
10	19–20	4	6	91–100

If the original system uses points of some kind to build a character, use the number of points a player would need to build the current character and compare it to the number of starting points and a maximum (or a high but realistic number). For example, if characters start with 150 points, and could get as high as, say, 500 points, but the character in question was probably built with about 200 points (about 40% of 500), we would call that a Rating of 3 or 4.

No matter what system you're using, if you're not sure which number to use between two different conversion results, use the lower one. When in doubt, round down, not up.

If the original system doesn't have anything like these numerical values, you'll have to just approximate like you would with anything else. On a scale of 1 to 10, where does the character fall in terms of ability, skill, prowess, toughness, and so on? If you're still unsure, make them Rating 4 and just keep going.

All of this requires a hefty dose of attention and logic. Because evaluating Call of Cthulhu characters by comparing them to all characters in that game and evaluating all 5e characters by comparing them to all characters in that game are two very different processes. The toughest Call of Cthulhu character is likely not the equivalent of even a moderately tough 5e character. And yet, a really tough 5e character is not the equivalent of a moderately tough Champions character.

So, sometimes you'll want to compare the character to the broad range of the world they come from. A highly skilled cybernetic-enhanced street samurai from Shadowrun might be the equivalent of a vampire from Vampire, but exist in a very different context than a Gumshoe investigator (on one end of the spectrum) or a Mutants and Masterminds character (on the other end).

Consider these rules of thumb:

✦ If the character is basically a "real world" human, or very close, their *maximum* Rating is 4.

✦ If the character is basically a superhero or the equivalent, their *minimum* Rating is 5.

✦ If the character is a heroic fantasy character, an enhanced science-fiction character, or has any sort of paranormal abilities, their Rating can be anywhere from 1 to 10.

✦ No matter what system you're using, if you're not sure which number to use between two different conversion results, use the lower one. When in doubt, round down, not up.

SMALL MODIFICATIONS

Now, a single Rating might not fully model a character. A character might be Rating 3 but they're so good at stealth that they're a Rating 4 when sneaking quietly. A character who has vast mental powers but is relatively frail might be Rating 5, but only a Rating 4 when it comes to physical activities. Feel free to make as many exceptions like this as it seems like the character needs, but you'll rarely want to give them an adjusted Rating that is more than one away from their main Rating.

WHAT ABOUT MY STUFF?

A sword is a sword is a sword. A laser pistol is a laser pistol is . . . you get the idea. A character entering the Darkest House brings whatever they have with them at the time.

Armor and defensive equipment can modify a character's defense Rating or confer Boons to defense rolls. In the case of a physical attack, the target's Rating can be increased by armor: +1 for light armor like leather or something that offers only partial covering, or +2 for most other armors.

Your character might find a way to make use of some lockpicks, a bag of tools, or a handheld scanner, but that's really all narratively driven. This character conversion is much more interested in your character, not their belongings. In the end, the weapon doesn't matter as much as the warrior wielding it.

WHAT ABOUT ALL MY SPELLS, MAGIC ITEMS, AND OTHER SPECIAL ABILITIES?

At the discretion of the GM, abilities, spells, and magic items may be represented in the House System mechanically and/or narratively. Any ability that allows a character to do something special, like fly, turn invisible, see through walls, or control minds works just as it usually would. Those kinds of things are more narrative than mechanical.

Some special abilities may increase a character's specific Rating. For example, a character may have a supernatural defense acting as quasi-mental armor, increasing their Rating by 1 or 2 when avoiding mental attacks or shock.

Any ability that makes a task easier is a Boon. So if you have a strength-enhancing ring and you try to tip over a heavy bookcase, you have a Boon on that action.

Abilities that inflict damage or unwanted conditions on an opponent are handled like any other attack. In the House System, a character rolls to affect a target or targets just like they would a typical attack—regardless of their original system's having the defender roll saving throws, resistance, or what have you.

If spells or special abilities normally have some limitation on usage, such as "Use three times per day," they keep that limitation. If they have a cost in terms of stats, power points, or something of that kind, either just bring those points (or whatever) over to the House System or simply assign them a reasonable number of uses. If they cost the user something in terms of stamina or mental well-being, treat the cost as a minor wound.

As you work with your GM, remember that this is a narrative conversion more than a mechanical one. Narratively, your character should be able to do what they could do before, and their powers should work like they did before. Do what seems reasonable at the time and don't dwell on it too long. In a narrative conversion, the overall feel is far more important than the particulars.

OKAY, BUT I NEED TO CONVERT MY HIT POINTS, MY ATTRIBUTES, MY SAN SCORE, MY SPEED, MY MOVES . . .

Obviously, every game system is going to have its own way of doing things, but the House System already tracks how you make attacks, how you suffer damage—both physical and mental—how you resolve tasks, and so forth, so any mechanics dealing with such things don't need to be brought over. It means you don't need health or hit points, Armor Class, and a lot of other things that the original system uses.

If something happens that is stat-related or task-resolution-related (including combat), use the House System.

HOW ABOUT AN EXAMPLE OF CHARACTER CONVERSION?

Let's take a Cypher System character and convert them. We'll use Tacha, a Swift Explorer who Works Miracles. If you're not familiar with the Cypher System, that means pretty much just what it sounds like—she's swift, she's capable, and she can miraculously heal people. Tacha is tier 2 (out of 6). She comes from a modern fantasy setting.
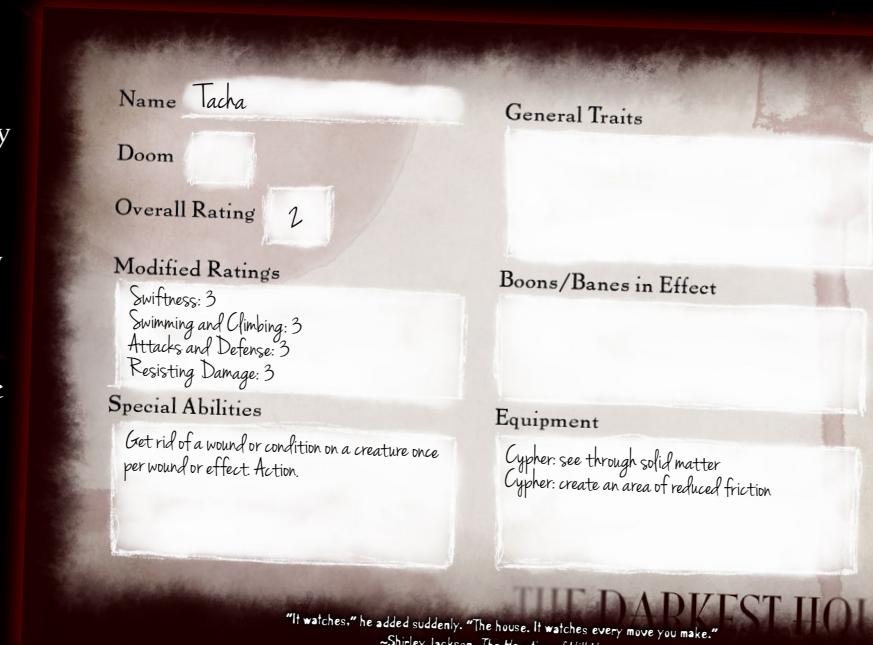
Right off the bat, we look at the 1–6 column of the Character Rating Conversion Table and see that as a tier 2 character she's either Rating 2 or 3. Let's start with Rating 2.

Now let's see if there are things we need to know other than her Rating (we certainly expect that answer to be yes). We look at her stat pools, and they're in the mostly normal range (nothing extremely high or low) so we'll ignore those. She's Swift, so that gives her better initiative and running abilities, and it's right there in her character sentence, so we'll give her a Rating of 3 for all things having to do with speed. Further, as an Explorer, she's trained in swimming and climbing. We'll give her a Rating of 3 for both of those

things as well. She's also skilled in geography, but frankly, that's never going to come up in the Darkest House, so we don't care. (We can give her a Rating of 3 for geography if it's important to the player.)

Tacha has some special defensive and offensive abilities that make her better at combat. Rather than figure in all these rather involved abilities, we'll just lump them all together and say she's a Rating 3 for attacks and defense. She also wears light armor, so we'll give her Rating 3 for resisting damage too.

She can heal people with her touch and alleviate unwanted conditions such as diseases. Since the House System is all about Ratings and—hey, what do you know—wounds and conditions have Ratings just like characters do, we'll say that for every wound or unwanted effect that is on a creature, Tacha can use her action to try to get rid of it. She'll just make a roll, using her Rating and the Rating of the wound or effect. These things normally cost her Intellect points to use, but that's a stat we're not converting, so instead, we'll say she can only try to use her power once per wound or effect. That puts a nice manageable limit on it without having to track points or anything.

Name **Tacha**

Doom

Overall Rating **2**

Modified Ratings
Swiftness: 3
Swimming and Climbing: 3
Attacks and Defense: 3
Resisting Damage: 3

Special Abilities
Get rid of a wound or condition on a creature once per wound or effect. Action.

General Traits

Boons/Banes in Effect

Equipment
Cypher: see through solid matter
Cypher: create an area of reduced friction

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"It watches," he added suddenly. "The house. It watches every move you make."
~Shirley Jackson, *The Haunting of Hill House*

Tacha's got a couple of special items, one that allows her to see through solid matter for a limited time and one that creates an area with reduced friction, making it really slippery. We'll just keep those as-is, and refer to the descriptions of those items when we need them, as neither really involves game mechanics much—they're both actually pretty narrative.

So now we have Tacha, who is Rating 2, Rating 3 for swimming and climbing, swiftness, attacks, defense, and resisting damage. She can heal and remove unwanted conditions. Done.

HOW ABOUT ANOTHER EXAMPLE OR TWO?

This time, we'll use Arduk, a dwarf fighter from 5e. He's 5th level. He comes from a traditional fantasy setting.

Level 5 in a system that goes from 1 to 20 converts to a Rating 3. That's our baseline.

His ability scores suggest that like lots of dwarves, he's tough. We'll give him Rating 4 for resisting wounds. He's also got low Dexterity and very low Charisma, so we'll say he's only Rating 2 when it comes to things requiring nimble hands or acrobatics, as well as anything having to do with interacting with others. His skills suggest he should also be Rating 4 for perception and athletics. (There are some very minor bonuses he has to fairly inconsequential skills, so we're going to ignore those—they're all just wrapped up in him being Rating 3, basically.)

He has a high Constitution (increasing his Rating when resisting wounds by 1) and he wears plate armor, which adds 2 more to his Rating. It means he's actually Rating 6 for resisting wounds (wow!).
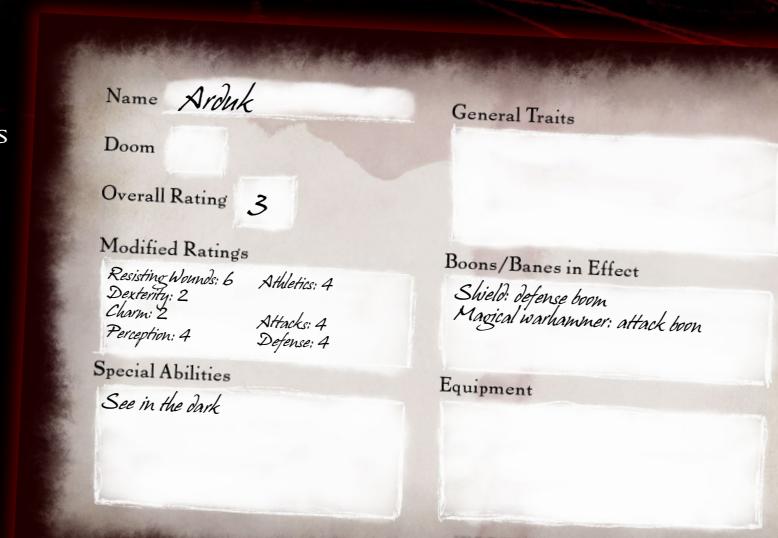
He's got some abilities that give him a bonus to his Armor Class (that's defensive), and add to some combat maneuvers, so like with Tacha before, we'll lump all these together and decide he's Rating 4 for attacks and defense. He can see in the dark, too, but that doesn't require any conversion. It just works the same. Also, he's got a shield and his warhammer is magical, so both attacks and defense will get a Boon when the player rolls.

In all, Arduk is Rating 3, Rating 2 for anything involving dexterity or charm, Rating 4 for perception, athletics, attacks, and defense (and attacks and defense have a Boon), and Rating 6 for resisting damage. Done.

Now, what about Arduk's companion, Stevin, a 5th-level half-elf sorcerer?

Well, looking at the Character Rating Conversion Table, they also have a baseline Rating of 3. They're great at interacting with people (20 Charisma and similarly high scores in related skills). We'll say they have a Rating of 4 for social actions. They've also got a +7 stealth score, so let's give them Rating 4 for that as well. Of course, their hit points and physical attacks are fairly low, so we probably should make them Rating 2 when resisting damage and avoiding physical attacks.

As a sorcerer, they've got spells and spell slots. Regarding spell slots, we should just use the system as-is. They can cast each level's spells in the House System as often as they could in 5e. But let's go through them all and see how the House System would handle them.

Name _Arduk_

Doom

Overall Rating _3_

Modified Ratings
Resisting Wounds: 6
Dexterity: 2
Charm: 2
Perception: 4
Athletics: 4
Attacks: 4
Defense: 4

Special Abilities
See in the dark

General Traits

Boons/Banes in Effect
Shield: defense boom
Magical warhammer: attack boon

Equipment

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All houses in which men have lived and suffered and died are haunted houses.
~Mary Roberts Rinehart, *The Red Lamp*

Witch bolt: This is a magical attack that uses the base Rating of 3 when cast. If it hits, Stevin can continue to use their following actions to continue inflicting the same damage.

Magic missile: This is a magical attack (using their Rating of 3) that doesn't miss. They just roll the damage die against the target when it's cast.

Shield: Since this is a very short-lived but potent defense, I would say Stevin gets a Boon to defense rolls and their Rating is increased by 1 on the turn it's cast.
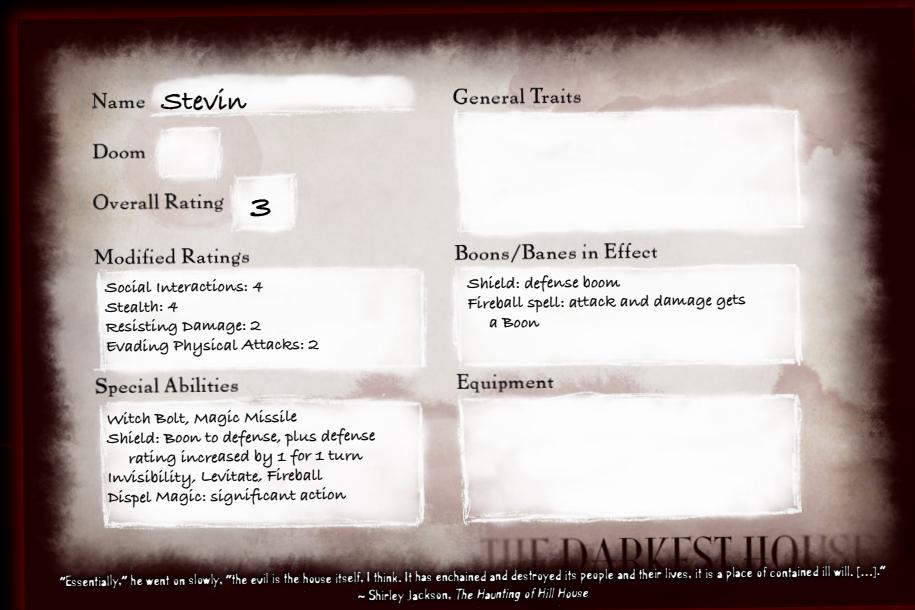
Invisibility: Works as written.

Levitate: Works as written.

Fireball: This is an attack (using their Rating 3) that can affect a bunch of targets in an area. Since this is a potent attack spell, I'd also say that the attack and damage rolls get a Boon.

Dispel magic: Casting this is a significant action and is resolved as a task using their Rating and the Rating of the magic they're trying to dispel.

So that's Stevin: Rating 3, Rating 2 for resisting damage and evading physical attacks, Rating 4 for social tasks and stealth. And they can cast their listed spells as described. Done.

Name **Stevin**

Doom

Overall Rating **3**

General Traits

Modified Ratings

Social Interactions: 4
Stealth: 4
Resisting Damage: 2
Evading Physical Attacks: 2

Boons/Banes in Effect

Shield: defense boom
Fireball spell: attack and damage gets
    a Boon

Special Abilities

Witch Bolt, Magic Missile
Shield: Boon to defense, plus defense
    rating increased by 1 for 1 turn
Invisibility, Levitate, Fireball
Dispel Magic: significant action

Equipment

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"Essentially," he went on slowly, "the evil is the house itself, I think. It has enchanted and destroyed its people and their lives, it is a place of contained ill will. [...]."
~ Shirley Jackson, *The Haunting of Hill House*

TAKING ACTIONS AND ROLLING DICE

Whenever PCs do anything significant where the outcome is in question—attack with a knife, shoot a gun, persuade an NPC to help, try to bash down a door, leap over a pit, figure out the historical significance of an item—the action is resolved with a roll.

To resolve an action, you roll two six-sided dice (2d6), add the dice together, and then add your character's Rating. In order to succeed, you need to beat the given target number, which is always 7 plus the Rating of the task.

Let's look at an example: let's say a task has a Rating of 3, which means the target number is 10. If the PC has a Rating of 3, then you need to roll a 7 or higher on your 2d6 roll in order to succeed. This means the character—or in fact, any character facing a challenge with a Rating equal to their own—has just over a 50% chance to succeed. If the same character tries something with a Rating of 5, the target number is 12 and they're still just adding their Rating (in this case 3). So now they need to roll a 9 or higher. That's a much lower chance to succeed (just over 25%, actually).

If a task is rated 6 or more above a character's Rating, it is impossible. For example, if the aforementioned Rating 3 character attempts a task with a Rating of 9, they need to reach 16 (9 + 7), and that would mean they would need to roll a 13 on 2d6, which isn't possible. You might have a chance if you call upon the house for help and use a House Die, but you'll likely know that the task would normally be impossible before you even try.

Likewise, any task rated 6 or more lower than the character is impossible to fail. A Rating 9 character attempting a Rating 3 task can't fail, because the lowest they can possibly roll is a 2. The idea here is that characters can routinely handle tasks well below them in Rating, but some tasks are too difficult for them to even have a chance of success.

THE PLAYER ALWAYS ROLLS

In the House System, players do all the dice rolling. That means that when a player wants to affect an object or an NPC (pick a lock, punch an enemy, sneak past a monster), they roll with the target number determined by the Rating of the object or the NPC.

If something is trying to affect a PC, the player also rolls. So if a foe casts a spell on a PC, attacks them physically, or tries to fool them with an illusion, the GM doesn't roll to see if the NPC succeeds. The player rolls to see if the PC resists, dodges, or sees through the deception. The PC is always the active character, never the passive one. If the PC leaps over a pit, the player rolls for the jump, but if a boulder tumbles down the hill, the player rolls to get out of the way.

This is important because of the House Die mechanic. The GM should never roll to determine the actions of the house—the players should. The players in the Darkest House need to engineer their own doom.

Of course, that means that if an NPC has a Boon affecting their action, the player rolls as if the PC has a Bane. Likewise, if an NPC has a Bane affecting their action directed against a PC, the player rolls for their character with an additional die as a Boon.

This method of playing also leaves the GM to focus more on the story.

Should two NPCs act against each other, or an NPC attempt an action not opposed by a PC, simply look at the NPC Ratings. Highest Rating always succeeds. A Rating 7 NPC always breaks open a barrier with a Rating of lower than 7. Ties (equal ratings) always go to the defender.

THE HOUSE DIE

But wait. The house watches everything that happens within it. The house hates you. It resents your success. This means that every time a player rolls the dice for an action (not damage), they also roll an additional, special die. This is called the House Die. If a character succeeds, and the House Die is *higher* than either die, the house acts. It's definitely not good.

Usually, the House Die has no effect on whether or not the character succeeds. It only determines if the house acts.

There is one exception, however. If a character is desperate, they can "call upon the house" for aid, either consciously or subconsciously. If a character does this, the House Die is *added* to their normal result. There is no limit to how many times a player can do this, but when they use this option, two things happen.

1. The house acts. It's bad.

2. The character gains a Doom. Dooms always come back to haunt a character.

The two regular dice can be the same color or not, size or not, etc., but the House Die should be significantly different from the other dice. The most obvious choice would be to roll a die darker in color for the House Die, like a dark blue or a black.

BOONS AND BANES

Sometimes, circumstances make accomplishing things easier. Sometimes, they make them harder. These circumstances are called Boons and Banes, respectively.

Boons can come from getting help from a friend, having a particularly good tool, fighting a distracted opponent, and so on. Anything that helps or makes things easier for the PC to succeed is a Boon. Having a Boon means you roll an additional d6 and discard the lowest die.

Banes are anything that makes actions or tasks more difficult, like thick fog, a serious injury, a creature clinging to your arm, and so on. A Bane means you roll an additional d6 and discard the highest roll.

   The Boon or Bane die doesn't need to be distinguishable from the normal dice, but it does need to be distinct from the House Die.
   You never roll more than three dice (not counting the House Die) when taking an action. Thus, multiple Boons or Banes do not give more than one additional die. But it's still important to keep track of how many Boons and Banes a character has for any given action, because Boons and Banes cancel out. If a character faces a Bane due to circumstances, but wields a sword that grants a Boon, the player just rolls their regular 2d6 when attacking with the sword. However, if in addition to the Boon from the sword, the character has a Boon from a magic spell, the player rolls an additional die, because the Bane cancels only one of the two Boons that is affecting them.
   As an example, consider Arduk and his magical warhammer. Let's say he has a Boon for all attacks. If he is fighting in thick fog, it's hard to see, so he also has a Bane. The

Boon and the Bane cancel out, meaning he'll roll 2d6 and the House Die to attack in this scenario.

If Arduk has a magic spell cast upon him to improve his attack with that warhammer, he now has two Boons. Boons do not stack so this doesn't have any additional effect normally, but when he is in thick fog (or affected by any other type of Bane), he still has a Boon, because the Bane cancels one of the Boons, but not both. So he rolls an additional d6 and discards the lowest result.

Because the players always roll, that means that Boons and Banes applied to NPC actions reflect that the player rolls an additional die when resisting the NPC's action. However, in this case, an NPC Boon means the player rolls the extra die and discards the highest die, because the NPC has an advantage. An NPC Boon is essentially a PC Bane. Similarly, an NPC with a Bane means the player discards the lowest die, acting just like a Boon. Since Boons and Banes cancel each other out, that means that if an NPC with a Boon (a PC Bane) acts against a player with a Boon, they cancel out.

While it might be tempting to grant someone a modification to their Rating rather than giving them an extra die and discarding the high or low roll, circumstances should always result in Boons or Banes. Changes to Rating should typically be made only when you are initially creating/converting the character.

DOOMS

When a character gains a Doom, the GM should make a clear and obvious note of it. If possible, the player's online screen should show their ongoing Doom tally, perhaps next to the character's name. (Or, a player could write it on a pad or dry erase board visible to their camera, so that all can see it.) The feeling of increasing danger as Doom tallies rise should become palpable during the game.

When a wounded character falls unconscious and then checks to see if they eventually die from a wound, they must subtract their Doom total from the roll. Fortunately, each time the character's Doom tally affects them in this way, they can remove one Doom from their total.

Players can also choose to lower their character's Doom total by 1 by spending a Doom. In this situation, they give the GM permission to do something terrible.

EVERYTHING IN TURN

When PCs act, if time matters, they all act in turn, along with the NPCs. The Darkest House room descriptions state states whether the NPC acts first. Otherwise, assume the PCs act first. In this case, on their turn, the characters can each perform one action—make an attack, move about 30 feet, go through the door and close it behind them, use a special power, grab an item, hide behind a couch, and so on. Anything that could be done in about 10 seconds or so can be done on a turn, but don't worry about keeping careful track of time.

TASK RESOLUTION SUMMARY

When a character attempts any task, they compare their Rating with the task Rating.

- ✦ If the task's Rating is 6 or more lower than the character's Rating, they automatically succeed.
- ✦ If the task's Rating is 6 or more higher than the character's Rating, they automatically fail.
- ✦ In all other cases, the player rolls 2d6 and adds their Rating. Their goal is to roll equal to or above 7 plus the Rating of the task, as determined by their opponent or the obstacle they are attempting to overcome.
- ✦ If a character has a Boon or a Bane, they roll an additional die (so 3d6 in total). If the Boon is in effect, they use the two highest rolls. If a Bane is in effect, they use the two lowest rolls.
- ✦ Anytime dice are rolled for an action, the House Die must be rolled. The House Die has no effect on success or failure, but if the House Die is higher than either of the normal dice, regardless of any other outcome, the house acts. Remember that anytime you roll the House Die, you can choose to add it to your normal result to improve your chances. If you do, you gain 1 Doom and the house acts automatically, regardless of the result.

So in effect, a character is always rolling three dice (with the exception of damage rolls), and four if there is a Boon or Bane in effect.

THERE ARE TWO WAYS TO GET HURT

Rating even determines health and toughness, both mentally and physically. This is another way in which the House System might deviate from what you're used to. Because of the house's nature, it distinguishes between physical harm and mental harm. Mental harm could be spiritual, emotional, or intellectual in the same way that physical harm could be a bleeding wound, a concussion, or a broken bone. It's all grouped together and abstracted.

That said, even though all damage is abstracted mechanically, narratively the GM is encouraged to describe the wounds—physical and mental—with as much detail as seems appropriate.

CALCULATING DAMAGE

To calculate damage, you roll 1d6. This is called the damage die. You add the attack's Rating to the result. Then, you subtract the Rating of the victim, with modifications (like armor).

If the result is a positive number, the victim suffers a wound with a Rating equal to the result.

If the result is 0 or less, the victim suffers a scratch, a glancing blow, a graze, or something similar—but this has no mechanical effect. They're more or less unharmed.

Thus, Wound Rating = 1d6 + attack Rating – defense Rating

You never roll the house die when rolling damage, but damage can have a Boon or a Bane.

Because players always roll the dice, this means that not only does a player roll the damage die when they make a successful attack, *they also roll the damage die when they fail to dodge or resist an attack made against them*.

In this case, they roll a damage die, add their foe's attack Rating, and then subtract their own Rating for resisting attacks to see if they get hurt.

Again, in The Darkest House, players bring upon their own downfall.

Mental damage works exactly the same way. Obviously, such wounds aren't about being scratched or hurt, but being affected by shock, fear, trauma, or instability (and eventually, unconsciousness or even catatonia).

PHYSICAL DAMAGE

When a PC or NPC is struck in combat, falls from a height, is burned with fire, or anything else that would cause bodily harm, calculate physical damage.

Out of combat, there might not be an attack roll if the danger is something like a fall, choking fumes, and so on. The player just rolls the damage die and adds the attack Rating and then subtracts their own Rating to see if their character is affected. If it seems like an attack, though, such as a falling rock, treat it like an attack and confirm a hit before determining damage. Either way, the GM determines the Rating of the attack. A fire might have a Rating of 4, for example, while a particularly hot or raging fire would have a Rating of 6.

A Few Sample Ratings for Physical Dangers

DANGER	RATING
Fire	4
Raging fire/lava	6
Fall	1 per 5 feet
Falling heavy object	4
Falling massive object	8
Intense cold	3

Some game systems give more powerful characters the ability to withstand more damage, while others grant them the ability to avoid damage instead. (And some give them either or both.) A "tough" character's Rating is higher for comparing to a damage die. A character skilled at dodging attacks might instead have a modifier to their Rating for defending against attacks. So you can tweak these Ratings to give the feel to which you are accustomed.

WEAPONS AND DAMAGE

A character's Rating is the dominant factor in their accuracy and damage in combat. However, in some cases, the weapon used should affect this as well. Some weapons are inherently more accurate (like a quick, small knife or a magical sword) and may add a Boon, and some are less accurate (like a very heavy axe), which might give the attacker a Bane.

MENTAL DAMAGE

Damage to one's mind or soul is less straightforward to envision, but it's handled in exactly the same way as damage to one's body. A terrible shock, a blast of psychic energy, or a horrific experience can all inflict mental damage.

The supernatural inhabitants of the house routinely use powers to affect and attack the minds of others. That's pretty straightforward.

Shock and horror depend on context. If the PCs come from a realistic setting where ghosts and monsters are rare, encountering even the minor spirit in the Boundless Room, for example, might be a terrible shock. But if the characters hail from a world where spirits and the supernatural are common, the shock might be nil.

The encounters presented in the Darkest House have shock/dismay value target numbers already provided for you; however, the values presume the PCs have some experience with the supernatural. For PCs with little to no knowledge of the supernatural, it makes sense to increase the Rating of the mental attacks related to shock/dismay, at least at first, as those characters are more likely to be affected by the experience. Even with those provided, the GM can rule whether the danger presented by the shock/dismay is appropriate to the PCs' original context.

Obviously, mental "armor" is far less common than physical armor, but some characters might have some kind of supernatural defense adding +1 or +2 to the character's Rating to avoid mental attacks or shock.

A Few Sample Ratings for Mental Dangers

DANGER	RATING
Experiencing something creepy	2
Experiencing something terrifying	4
Witnessing a friend's death	6
Experiencing something utterly impossible	7

ACCUMULATING DAMAGE

A wounded character always has a Bane for each wound sustained. But remember that Banes do not stack and their effects are not cumulative. Having multiple Banes only matters when it comes to canceling the effect of one or more Boons.

Players should keep track of wounds sustained, and the Ratings of each wound.

Every time a wounded character sustains a new wound, they must roll as they would with any task, against the Rating of their most grievous wound (regardless of when it was sustained). If they fail, they fall unconscious or are otherwise completely unable to act due to their injuries.

An unconscious (or similarly debilitated) character with a wound rated higher than the character must, a minute or so later, roll against the wound with the highest Rating. The player must also subtract the number of Dooms the character has gained up to that point. If they fail the roll, they bleed out and die. As a rule of thumb, the amount of time before they must make that roll should be "about a minute." In truth, the GM should call for that roll when it feels most dramatic. And if the unconscious character receives any medical attention before that moment, they don't need to make the roll. The unconscious character need only make this roll once, and loses 1 Doom if they survive.

Both physical and mental attacks are handled this way. However, mental wounds are tracked separately from physical wounds. Mental and physical wounds don't relate to each other in any way. A character doesn't die from mental injuries, but instead becomes catatonic or some other, equally utterly debilitating state.

While the characters are in the Darkest House, the GM should pay attention to when they get wounded, as that accumulated damage can trigger Pain and Wounds.

Normally, the house mentally attacks anyone who sleeps or is unconscious within it, but to keep things simple, this doesn't happen when a character is knocked unconscious from wounds. The house only attacks when a character is rendered unconscious in a different manner, such as from a magical effect, a drug, etc., or choosing to go to sleep.

NPCs AND DAMAGE

Rather than handling damage to NPCs as you would with PCs, simply add up all the Ratings of the wounds inflicted upon an NPC, and once that total reaches three times the NPC's Rating, they are defeated (slain, unconscious, or destroyed). So, an NPC with a Rating of 4 needs wounds with Ratings that total at least 12 before they're defeated, such as a Rating 6 wound, a Rating 4 wound, and a Rating 2 wound. This makes things a bit easier to track, but it also likely makes NPCs a bit more fragile. Of course, the GM is free to use a threshold of four times (or more) the NPC's Rating for all NPCs or only for the particularly tough, powerful foes.

If an NPC ever suffers a wound with a Rating that is 3 (or more) higher than their own Rating, the NPC is immediately dead, destroyed, or perhaps knocked unconscious, depending on the circumstances. This means an NPC with a Rating of 3 can withstand multiple wounds (up until the total of all the wound Ratings is 9), but a single wound with a Rating of 6 will kill them outright.

NPCs can heal a single wound with a Rating less than their own Rating after a minute or so of rest, but a wound with a Rating higher than their own might take one or more days (depending on how the GM wishes to handle the situation). Magical NPCs might be able to heal even faster.

HEALING

Hurt characters should rest. When a character takes no actions, sits or lies down (or leans on a wall or something), and is in no immediate danger for at least a few minutes, this is considered resting. There is no limit to how many times a character can rest.

When a character rests, they roll for each wound they currently bear, with the Rating of each task equal to the Rating of that particular wound. Success means that the character recovers from that wound and can now ignore it. Failure means the wound remains, and the character cannot try to recover from that wound again by resting until 24 hours have passed. So, if a character fails to recover from a wound, they'll have to note when they can try again. Hopefully, for the character's sake, this won't happen too often because not only does this increase the danger of future combats (where that wound will come into play again), it also means that's a Bane they won't soon be rid of.

Medical attention, such as aid from a character with some sort of skill and appropriate equipment like bandages, allows a wounded character to attempt to recover from a wound that they failed to heal without having to wait 24 hours. Further, the healer can use their Rating to roll to overcome the wound's Rating rather than that of the wounded character (if the wounded character is unconscious, you must use the healer's Rating).

Magical healing often just works, completely erasing one wound, usually starting with the lowest-rated wound a character has. In this case, highly advanced tech devices, such as a tissue knitter or something like that, are no different from magical healing.

The House System is likely more deadly or dangerous than many systems (and perhaps less deadly than a few) because it has such a high degree of randomness. A powerful character might drop unconscious after just two hits with a bad roll. Likewise, a character might shrug off many wounds. A tough character may find the effects of one truly debilitating wound just won't ever go away. It is not as predictable as a linear, arithmetic progression like a hit point tally. This is intentional.

SUMMARIZING ATTACKS AND DAMAGE

PC Attacking

✦ When a player makes an attack, they roll 2d6 and add their Rating. Their goal is to roll equal to or above 7 plus the Rating of the opponent. Boons and Banes may mean rolling an extra die, and players must also roll the House Die. Remember that any time you roll the House Die, you can choose to add it to your normal result to improve your chances. If you do, you gain 1 Doom and the house acts automatically, regardless of the result.

✦ If successful, the player then rolls the damage die (1d6) and adds their Rating. Then, they subtract their opponent's Rating. The result (if positive) is the Rating of the wound the NPC sustains.

✦ If the wound sustained has a Rating of more than 3 above the NPC's own Rating, they die immediately. Otherwise, they die when they have sustained wounds with Ratings totaling at least 3 times the NPC's Rating.

NPC Attacking

✦ When a player is attacked by an NPC, they roll 2d6 and add their Rating, hoping to roll equal to or above 7 plus the Rating of the opponent to avoid the attack. Just like before, Boons and Banes may come into play, and players must also roll the House Die. Remember that any time you roll the House Die, you can choose to add it to your normal result to improve your chances. If you do, you gain 1 Doom and the house acts automatically, regardless of the result.

✦ If not successful, the player then rolls the damage die (1d6) and subtracts their Rating. Then, they add their opponent's Rating. The result (if positive) is the Rating of the wound the PC sustains.

✦ If the PC is already wounded and they sustain a new wound, the player must roll against the Rating of their most grievous wound. If they fail, they fall unconscious or are otherwise completely unable to act due to their injuries.

EXAMPLE OF ATTACKING IN PLAY

While exploring the Darkest House, Stevin the half-elf sorcerer (Rating 3) uses a *witch bolt* spell to attack a horrific fleshy thing crawling out of a small hole in the wall. Stevin's player rolls 2d6 and gets a 6. They add their Rating of 3 to get a 9. The target number for the attack is 7 plus the horrific thing's Rating of 2, for a total of 9. Stevin hits! (Of course, Stevin's player is rolling the House Die as well, but let's not worry about that right now.)

Then they roll the damage die, and get a 4, and add their Rating to get a 7, and then subtract the creature's Rating to get a 5 (4 plus 3 minus 2 equals 5). The thing gains a Rating 5 wound—a devastating blast!

So devastating, in fact, that the wound is 3 higher than the target's Rating of 2, which means that it is an automatic kill so it explodes into a disgusting, bloody mess.

However, what poor Stevin doesn't realize is that another of the creatures has squirmed out of a hole in the ceiling. It attacks by dropping down on Stevin's neck with a Boon from the surprise. Now Stevin's player has to roll for defense. They roll 2d6, but because the attacking fleshy thing has a Boon, the player rolls with a Bane. That means they roll 3d6, discarding the highest die. They roll a 4, a 1, and a 6. Discarding the 6, they get a 5 total and add their Rating of 3 to get 8. Because the creature's Rating is 2, its target number is 9.

That's not good enough to defend, so now the player must roll to determine damage. They roll 1d6, and get a 3. They add the fleshy thing's Rating of 2 and the total is 5. They're not good at resisting damage (they're a bit frail), so their defense Rating for this action is only 2. 5 minus 2 is 3, so Stevin sustains a Rating 3 wound on their neck. Ouch!

If that same creature had dropped down on the neck of Stevin's dwarven friend Arduk, who's tough and wears plate armor (Rating 6 for resisting damage), he would have shrugged off the damage as nothing but a minor irritant—the creature just couldn't significantly pierce that armor.

CREDITS

Designer	Monte Cook
Creative Director	Monte Cook
Developer	Sean K. Reynolds
Editors	Shanna Germain and Teri Litorco
Managing Editor	Shanna Germain
Proofreader	Ray Vallese
Art Director	Bear Weiter
Cover Artist	David Seidman

Cartographer
Hugo Solis

Artists
Helge C. Balzer, Domenico Cava, Jason Engle, Eran Fowler, Doruk Golcu, Aldo Katayanagi, Gabriela Novotná, Angelo Peluso, Roberto Pitturru, Maichol Quinto, Martin de Diego Sádaba, Matt Stawicki, Nino Vecia, Dan Watson, Bear Weiter, Ben Wootten

Voice-over
Alarice Boehm

Sound FX
ParadoxMirror
Sound Ideas

Music
Nicolas Gasparini (Myuu)
WASTED WONDERLAND
(PIANO VERSION)

Sound Design
Bear Weiter

Application
Lead Developer	Jeremiah Tolbert
Additional Development	Brandon Ording
Producer	Charles Ryan
Layout	Charles Ryan, Seamus Ly
Additional Layout	Bruce R. Cordell

Handwriting for Remnants
Bruce R. Cordell
Shanna Germain
Teri Litorco
Sean K. Reynolds
Olivia Ryan
Jennifer Walls
Bear Weiter

MonteCook Games