

PLAY-TEST: A System You Cannot Beat

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So a pack of kindred show up in your dreams whispering dark secrets of power and guile. You snap awake in a cold sweat, rush to the box of cards and quickly slam key elements together. It is 2am; your significant other would not appreciate your excellent idea, even if she was awake and played this crazy game. The other thing you have in mind is probably illegal in the lower 48, but you don't want to sleep. If you call three V:tES players, they may want to play, but chances are just as good they'll not appreciate your enthusiasm in the small hours of the night. What can you do? This deck seems too good to be true. Well kindred, use my play-test system, but be warned: you cannot win. Why – because a real game is always worse than a dry run.

You will need a single die-6 as well as the normal blood markers. I try to create a physical environment identical to a real game: vampires upside down and library shuffle exactly as if in a real game. Practice your meta-game NOW, good practice pays off during the pressure cooker environment of a real game. Don't face predator or prey; look at cards with eye movement only, unless you intend to scare other players. Embrace stoicism, do not smile or frown – be inscrutable. This is all part of my practice sessions, just as vital as the actual format. Ancient Romans were known to study themselves in the mirror each morning to understand how others perceived them. This is about a third of the game; do not miss a chance to practice!

Next, roll the die to determine seating. A roll of 1-5 indicates place. If a 4 or 5 is rolled, that indicates number of players. On a 1-3 or 6, a follow-up roll of 5+ indicates a 5-player game. It might matter to an 'X' voting deck or a combat deck that is very card intensive. Everything matters. Have you begun to understand? You cannot win.

A crusty Methuselah will tell you the first few turns represent a honeymoon period; you might get slammed, but more often get away with outrageous risks. Therefore, this system graduates the threat level. If you do not go first, a d6 roll of 6 indicates a master card (MC) play that causes a loss of 1 pool unless you cancel it. This roll is made each turn of the game following your discard phase. On a MC roll of 4+, a master card is played so you can cycle a card that cancels master cards. Any other out of turn masters can be played on a roll of 6 only. By the way, each time you play a master, it gets canceled on a 6, with all that implies. Remember – you cannot win. Having done your turn, you do the following threat rolls in this sequence:

Turn 1 and later...

- **Master Card:** On a 6 that you do not cancel, take a pool loss.

Turn 2 and later...

- **Rush:** On a 6, a random minion of yours gets attacked, enemy combat rolls are at +1.

Turn 3 and later...

- **Bleed:** On a 3+, you get bled. If yes, roll again, you are bled again on a 4+, then 5+, then a 6 until a 6 is not rolled.
- **Politics:** On a 6, take 1-3 vote damage unless you have >d6 votes (or 2d6 by mid-game)
- **Other Blocks:** You see further block chances on a 6 for your prey or a 5+ after the above sequence. If on predator, you restart bleed checks at the 5+ level after the combat is resolved.

Try to block as normal. Political actions are blockable on a 3+, whereas Rushes and Bleeds are automatic – until they start stealthing. Other blocks require an initial 1 intercept. The opponent will stealth all actions except Rushes on a 5+ if they are being blocked. Any time they play more than one stealth and make it past you, a 6 taps all your vampires that tried to block. Rush attacks only stealth on a 6 and never causes the vampires who attempted to block to tap. Eagle's Sights will still work. If using something other than stealth and intercept, I sometimes use a d8 and require an 8 for the opponent, but it has to be creative and/or rude. Even so, you will not win.

Here are the specifics of each threat vector:

BLEEDS: If a bleed is coming, determine its veracity by rolling the d6:

- 1 = a 1 bleed that cannot get any higher
- 2-4 = a 1 bleed that can be modified after your block choice
- 5 = a 2 bleed that can be modified after your block choice
- 6+ = a 2 bleed that can be modified plus another roll at +1 before the block

If you do not block the bleed and rolled a 2+ above, then roll again for the modifier:

- 1-4 = no modifier
- 5 = +1 only
- 6 = +1 and roll again (do not throw d6 at wall when bleed gets over 5)

POLITICS: Each turn, roll that d6, on a 6 a vote will spank you for 1-3 damage if you don't have enough voting power to resist. By mid-game this gets tougher. For true Meths, play that the Political threat also does 1 damage on a roll of 5; I often use this addition if I have no votes showing. Whether you block it or not, blocks comes BEFORE you know how much. After, roll for another vote. Continue until a 6 is not rolled. Do not cheat. Remember, you cannot win.

RUSH: Once again, continue to roll this threat vector until a 6 is not rolled after each battle.

This is a good time to mention other threat vectors. After all rushes are done, roll for each vampire in torpor or card you control which has a (D) weakness. On a 5+ it is attacked, no block indicates destruction. Continue until all are gone or a 5+ is not rolled.

COMBAT

Unless you play Obedience or something equally cute, fights will happen. The general rule is this: IF YOU WANT IT, THEY OPPOSE IT. Everything is answered on a 6: maneuvers, presses, damage, and added strikes. For really nasty combos, I use a d8 response of 8.

Use your imagination and do not sweat the little stuff. Here is the chart for strike damage:

- 1 = S:CE
- 2-4 = 1 normal hand damage
- 5 = 2 normal hand damage
- 6 = d6 damage, Further roll of 4+ means it's agg
- 7+ = d6 AGG take it like you love it

Remember, if you want to go long, they like short. If you press, a 6 presses back. Consider all enemy vamps to be 2d6 in age with 1d6 blood on them. When you play something critical, it is canceled on a

6. This includes Taste of Vitae, Decapitate, Disguised Weapon, etc. The enemy is limited, so this tends to make up for the frontal assault mentality of your opponent. Rush combats give the enemy a +1 on all rolls, so be careful out there.

WHAT ABOUT MY ATTACK VECTORS?

This is as good a time as any to mention something about this system in relation to my play style. New players tend to defend too much, whereas old Meths often attack out of proportion to defensive needs. There are several reasons for this, but I will briefly touch on one in relation to this play-test system.

Defense requires resources in at least four divergent arenas: bleed, combat, politics and gimmicks. Even if your current predator happens to focus on the one your deck specializes in, chances are they still attack it better than you can defend. The more I play V:tES, the more offensive I become – in both regards. Not because I prefer to attack; defense is a losing proposition, even if you win every battle. This system forces me to seriously defend or my deck perishes before the offense combos can be activated.

If you are a new player, tune your deck in battle, not in solitaire. This allows the honing of social skills as well as OJT from crusty old claws that know many nasty tricks. Do not use my system if any of the following phrases came out of your mouth the last game:

- I didn't know that card existed, is it a rare?
- How much errata does this game have and where is the list of changes?
- That interceptor keeps putting me in torpor, but I will rescue the vampire again.
- Well, I'm dead next turn, I might as well attack my prey just for fun.
- I lost because I borrowed X's deck, mine are much better.
- My V:tES group uses 4CL and two edges. How does your group play?
- Some of these cards are confusing. Who can Röttschreck be played on?
- Etc.

If you have moved beyond the above stage, to a truly Malkavian insanity for V:tES, read on.

HOW TO BLEED: Begin your attack as normal. You cannot see the apparent defenses. The enemy blocks a 1 bleed on a 4+, for each point above this, add +1 to the die roll, but a 1 roll is always a declined block (Ex: A govern bleed is blocked on a 2+, even if you put a Conditioning on it first). Anything non-stealthy that helps you get through gives the die a -1 per effect. Misdirection gives a -x for pool you spent. A 6 roll always blocks – regardless. All stealth is intercepted on a 5+, check for each stealth event. Blocks are resolved as normal combat.

Other (D) actions are blocked on a 4+ as well. Remember that stealth needs a further 5+ check.

Resolve blocks with the combat chart. If they torpor me, I burn my vamp on a 6, just for fun.

If a (D) action succeeds, such as Far Mastery or Dominate Kindred, I give myself 1 pool. Other actions simply modify block checks or bleed threats for the following turn, be creative.

POLITICS: When your votes are not blocked, assume 1d6 votes oppose you until mid-game, and then 2d6. Even if the count favors your referendum, all votes fail on a 5+. For each cute effect such as Bribe, you can re-roll the 5+. Parity shifts are curious, for each pool not taken, add 1 vote. With KRC, each damage you take adds 1 vote as well. Be creative and don't cheat – you will be tempted.

SO YOU LIKE TO FIGHT: Keep an open mind. Combat decks are always a difficult run. Try bleeding with action cards to get the system to react to you. Don't be surprised when they S:CE or torpor you as well. My friend Mike Nilsen watched me play-test his Tzimisce combat deck; Dragos and Corine kept going to torpor and even got burned by 5 agg hits. He said, "No deck could really do that, this system is too strong." I looked askance at him, "You forgot, you cannot win."

FAQs

I bled and got the edge, how do I get pool for it or use its voting power?

The edge is always lost after your predator attacks; throw it for vote.

The system is too weak, am I doing something wrong?

Either your deck is strong, you only tried the system a few times or you are cheating.

The randomness seems to create an attacker that has a tuned deck, is this my imagination? What should I do when this happens? What is the capitol of Denmark?

Ah, young Skywalker, at last you embrace that which is the force! Redistribute the odds to accentuate your observation. EX: When I keep getting Rushed but not bled, I shift the bleed checks to start at 5+ but the Rush phase to a 4+. When working with attack vectors already at a 6, use a d8 result of 8 to affect the shift. If results shift, modify your dice again to reflect this. Maybe your predator died or has bigger fish to fry.

NOTE: Restructure the table to shift the system in your favor slightly. Pick the type of predator that suits your deck. This is not just a loophole to play-testing for those bright Meths out there.

Copenhagen.

All my deck concepts worked perfectly, when do I get 6 pool or a VP?

You cannot win. This has been mentioned at least once before.

Can I amend this system slightly, rename it, and claim it as my own?

My answer is NO, but this will probably not stop anyone from doing this, going on to garner fame and fortune among their peers, marry into a powerful family and earn the undying respect of kindred the globe over. Just send me a postcard, I don't ask much...