

PLAYER ROLES

In each round, there are two creatures and one therapist. Players take it in turns to rotate between these roles, so that they each spend one out of every three rounds as the therapist and the other two as some kind of creature. The player who most recently went through a breakup starts off as the therapist, unless you all agree otherwise.

CHOOSING CREATURES

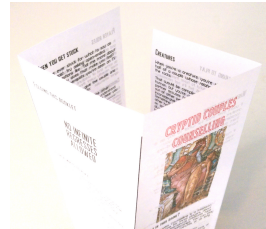
Each round features a new couple, composed of two creatures that you think would make an interesting combination. You can choose creatures and combinations to be funny, poignant, challenging, or merely fraught with problems: it's a question of taste, but light-hearted and funny is generally the easiest and most enjoyable tone to aim for.

Although the game is called Cryptid Couples Counselling, creatures can also be mythological or theological beings, literary characters, aliens, or anything else that all players feel is appropriate and entertaining: King Midas, sirens, Davey Jones, gorgons, angels, Dr Jekyll, hydras, the Mad Hatter, the Loch Ness monster, leprechauns, Vulcans, or Father Time are all perfectly acceptable ideas—just make sure that all players are familiar with the creature you choose!

Generally, players should either choose their own creatures each round or come to a consensus as a group, especially if they're new to the game. However, if you want more of a challenge, you can:

- Have the therapist assign creatures to the other players each round.
- Have each creature player choose for their partner.
- Each write down some ideas you like on slips of paper at the start of the game, fold them up, and draw them blind from a bowl each round.

FOLDING THIS BOOKLET



Fold into a gatefold. Cut off any excess paper.

OTHER WAYS TO PLAY

If you want to explore human-creature couples, you can swap one creature role out for a human role so that every couple has a human in it, or just treat humans as a kind of creature.

I recommend that creatures be presented in couples. Here's why:

- Your attention is already split between two people; the game doesn't benefit from players competing for the spotlight.
- A couple doesn't develop factions; the game doesn't benefit from people ganging up on each other and taking sides.
- Two creatures is plenty; the game doesn't benefit from multiplying the supernatural weirdness.

If you want to explore polyamorous relationships, they should generally be triads including at least one human.

GENDER & SEXUALITY

This game refers to some characters by their traditional gender (e.g. Gingerbread man); feel free to gender-swap.

Also, feel free to play same-sex couples, asexual creatures, etc.

CRYPTID COUPLES COUNSELLING



WHAT IS THIS GAME?

Cryptid Couples Counselling is a freeform roleplaying game for three players, about the difficulties supernatural creatures face in their romantic relationships. You can play for as little as a few minutes, or as long as several hours.

If you don't know what 'freeform roleplaying game' means, you can think of this game as improv comedy or one of those warm-up exercises they do in theatre/drama class—the kind where you mirror your partner's movements or pretend to be a duelling samurai in slow motion.

THE AIM OF THE GAME

This isn't the kind of game where you keep score or determine winners and losers. Sometimes it can be great fun to find a way to resolve the differences or defuse the conflict in the relationship, but that's absolutely optional. Not all relationship problems can be solved in a few minutes of therapy, and it's often more fun to come up with problems than it is to fix them.

So, let me state it clearly here: the goal of the game is just to enjoy the process of playing it—make your friends laugh, be creative, and have fun.

PREPARING TO PLAY

No special preparations or equipment—like dice, or cards—are required to play. You might find it helpful to have these instructions to hand, but it's not necessary; you just need at least one player who already knows how to play.

Ideally, you should play in a comfortable, moderately-sized room resembling a therapist's office: a chair across from a couch with a coffee table between them, or three armchairs arranged like a T-junction with two of them facing each other and the third perpendicular.

This helps create the right mood, and makes it a bit easier to play with body language and physical space or props. However, there's no reason you couldn't play it in a hall, a field, a car, or anywhere else you can hold a conversation without too much distraction.

I strongly recommend playing in person, because you can have more fun with body language, physical space, etc. However, there's no compelling reason you couldn't play this game virtually using a phone or an online app.

ROUNDS

Cryptid Couples Counselling is made up of multiple rounds of play, much like the multiple 'hands' of many traditional card games. Each round represents one session of couples therapy or relationship counselling—whatever you prefer to call it.

I've found that rounds tend to last about five minutes each. However, the length of a round depends entirely on how much the players are enjoying it: keep going for longer if you're enjoying it, or cut it short if a certain combination of characters really isn't working for you.

CREATURES

When you're a creature, you're playing one half of a couple whose relationship is on the rocks.

That would be complicated enough for a human, but you're a vampire whose partner accuses her of sucking the energy out of other people. Or a sasquatch who inconsiderately refuses to shower. Something like that, anyway. And your other half is probably a sphynx who insists on speaking in riddles, or maybe the eggs always go missing from the fridge because you're married to the Easter bunny.

As a creature, your main job is to portray your character in an amusing, interesting, moving, or generally entertaining way. Together with the other creature, you're the centre of attention—the therapist is there to help and support you. In a way, you can think of yourself as actors in a scene of improvised theatre.

Play every creature as capable of intelligent thought and comprehensible speech. Remember, the point of the game is not to be ultra-realistic. It's obviously fine to adopt an unusual accent, voice, idiom, pattern of speech, or whatever. But don't go throwing ink over everyone because you're playing a kraken—that's a bit too 'method' for this game.

PLAYING AS A CREATURE

Each round, take a few moments after both creatures have been chosen to think about of them and what their relationship might be like. In particular, think about how the answers to these questions about your partner creature might be sources of frustration, insecurity, or similar negative feelings for your creature.

Here are a few helpful questions that can form the basis of relationship grievances: What is it famous for doing? Where does it live or come from? What does it eat, or how does it otherwise sustain itself? What is its personality like: aggressive, reclusive, kind? What is it averse or vulnerable to? Is it nocturnal?

As a creature, you should aim to identify at least one complaint, grievance, gripe, or problem with your partner. Don't accept that you're the bad guy in the relationship—throw back a resentment in their face, make a criticism of them, or find something to blame them for.

WHEN YOU GET STUCK

If you're ever stuck for what to say as a creature, remember the questions you considered at the start of the round—are there any thought-provoking points you haven't explored yet?

If that doesn't work, one solid tactic is to apply a dysfunctional defence or coping mechanism. Here are some good choices:

- Deflection: change the subject.
- Projection: accuse your partner of thoughts or behaviour that are really yours.
- Acting out: seek attention through bad behaviour.
- Displacement: get angry, sad or worried about someone or something other than what's really upsetting you.
- Denial: point-blank refuse to accept your partner's accusations or criticisms.

CREATURE SUGGESTIONS

Easter Bunny
Tooth Fairy
Santa
Father Time
Sandman
Grim Reaper

Gingerbread man
Cheshire Cat
Dr Jekyll
Bloody Mary
Davey Jones
Frankenstein's monster
Godzilla
King Kong

Bigfoot/Sasquatch/Yeti
Kraken
Mermaid
Chupacabra
Nessie
Gargoyle
Drop Bear

Vampire
Werewolf
Witch
Mummy
Zombie
Banshee
Ghost
Cursed doll

Pandora
King Midas
Gorgon/Medusa
Satyr
Succubus
Hydra
Phoenix
Sphynx
Chimera
Harpy
Siren
Genie/Djinn
Golem/Homunculus

Fairy/Pixie
Gremlin/Imp
Leprechaun
Nymph/Dryad

Unicorn
Dragon
Troll
Elf
Dwarf

Reptilian
Grey
Vulcan
Xenomorph
Gremlin

Superhero

THERAPIST

When you're the therapist, you're playing a professional relationship counsellor or couples' therapist.

It's hard enough to understand and mediate the difficulties of other people's relationships at the best of times. It doesn't help when your clients include Jack Frost, who literally has a heart of ice, or John Henry, whose hammer will be the death of him one day.

As the therapist, your main job is to help the other players by guiding and structuring the conversation. You're playing a role, but you're not the centre of attention. In a way, you can also think of yourself as a kind of director or editor: you help to keep the conversation interesting by finding what works and encouraging them to delve deeper, or directing them away from a topic that isn't working, giving them some prompts to work with when they momentarily run out of ideas, and so on. Try to find common ground and avoid taking sides.

PLAYING AS THE THERAPIST

You can choose to develop a specific therapist character, who you return to on your therapist turns, co-author an identity with the other players, or switch between different therapists each round. Of course, any combination of these is fine—one player might choose to inhabit a consistent therapist persona whenever it's their turn, while another might change each round.

Don't feel bad about being a cliché—that contrast between the familiar stock-character of the Freudian psychoanalyst and the inhuman weirdness of a reptilian shape-shifter can be a source of humour in itself.

It can also be amusing to make intentional slip-ups or conversational missteps as the therapist, like asking a phoenix about its relationship with its parents (after all, it's born from its own ashes). Put your foot in your mouth occasionally, but use this technique in moderation.

The therapist should always be a normal human—the couples will be colourful enough on their own, and part of the fun of the game is seeing a human therapist struggle to counsel alien and mysterious creatures they don't really understand.

WHEN YOU GET STUCK

If you're ever stuck for what to say as the therapist, try asking open-ended, general questions like "Tell me more about that," or "How does that make you feel?" Think of the therapists you've seen on TV or in films.

If that doesn't work, give the couple one of these exercises to do:

- Mirror back to the other partner what you understand them to be saying—"I hear you saying that you feel _____ because I _____."
- Take it in turns to each mention something that your partner does for you or your relationship that you're grateful for.
- Share a few things you wish that your partner would do, could not do, or that you would like share with them (e.g. activities you enjoy that you could do together).
- List five things that you love about your partner

ENDING THE ROUND

If you really feel like everyone's said everything there is to say in the current round, then you can always bring it to end: "we're out of time for this week." As the therapist, you have final say over when the round ends, but generally it's fairly obvious to everyone when a round should end.