



Catalyst, like most role playing games, has two roles: players and a game master. The players' role is creating a character and guiding them through the Catalyst universe. The game master (GM) is responsible for creating a particular instance of the universe for the players. Together, they form a symbiotic relationship for telling amazing stories. The GM gives challenges to overcome, forcing the players to think, grow, and discover. The players respond to the presented narrative with knowledge and behavior brought over from the real world, forcing the GM to adapt and expand theirs. One of these roles is clearly more demanding.

Running a campaign as a game master demands more time and energy. Before you take on this responsibility, ask yourself if this is what you want. The joy of this role is seeing players engaged in your campaign. A good GM makes players care about other characters, use all their skills and powers in creative ways, and invest themselves in the outcomes of their decisions. They prepare an experience for other people and are rewarded with players immersed in a world by their words.

Does this appeal to you? If you are worried about inexperience, don't be. Pick up a campaign guide and read this advice; you will be fine. If being a GM sounds like homework and you would rather drop in and roll dice, stay a player. There is no obligation to lead a campaign, even if you are your group's most seasoned Catalyst veteran.

There is a great deal written about being an effective GM. Stack Exchange, RPG Geek, and even Cherry Picked's role playing blog all provide advice. This guide sets the tone with some overarching guidelines, but focuses on leading a Catalyst campaign. Like any game worth its salt, practice improves your Catalyst skills. Learn your personal style and your group as you direct your story. Be adaptable and open. Soon, you and your players will be telling amazing stories worthy of humanity's darkest hour.

## General Advice

It is extremely clichéd, but the cardinal rule is to have fun. Catalyst, and every other RPG, is a game. Play, have fun, roll some dice, speak in a goofy voice, draw up battle plans, laugh about the inevitable nonsense, and bond with your friends. Learning the rules of an RPG is not a homework exercise. Game mechanics exist to frame your entertainment, not inhibit your joy. The game manual you hold in your hands results from a group of humans iterating over a concept until they found it as enjoyable as possible. Your play springboards from there to fill niches they could not have foreseen. Make the game yours.

Game masters are the catalyst to this fun gaming experience. It is everyone's job to contribute to the story and make hanging out with friends enjoyable, but the game master is under a particular pressure. An amateur GM believes this stress stems from their campaign; that they have to write an epic story wrought with moral dilemma and brain-melting puzzles. That is certainly part of it; though, as is mentioned later, the players should contribute equally to the campaign design and plot development. The hidden role a GM must focus on to succeed is not that of a creator, but of a director.



The director decides what needs focus, how things are framed, and what is logistically possible. They control the pacing. This is what makes the experience. No amount of witty dialogue or clever combat outweighs the drag of a slow game. Keep players engaged and moving. Give them constant interaction with the world in new and exciting ways.

Do not be a drill sergeant about play. Learn your group and understand what makes them happy. If they like shopping or getting lore tidbits from minor characters, spend time doing that. If they want to draft an amazing plan before embarking on a quest, that is time well spent. Same goes for out-of-game interactions. If your group loves joking around and telling stories from past games, laugh with them. The point is to have fun with your friends.

What is not fun is having someone screwing around while everyone waits. Draw them back into the game if they are monologuing about their real-life day. Expedite their in-game arms dealing if nothing interesting can be gained. Pressure people to choose an action during a fight so everyone else can play. None of this is the players' fundamental fault or responsibility. Sometimes you have to be the bad guy at the table. Be respectful and always act with optimal group happiness in mind.

The other contentious side of pacing is ruling over game mechanics. You decide on the secret goals players need to accomplish with their choices and rolls. You also settle ambiguities in the rules. In these open worlds, players always push the boundaries of the mechanics. You are judging the interactions of rules and narration. This means answering questions such as does that spell hit both enemies, does the bridge collapse when struck, how does that character react to an illusion, and other subjective scenarios. Here, you are the ultimate authority. Your group may argue or complain. How much you listen to depends on you and your group. Do not let them undermine you, but do not be unfair.

Fairness guides your role. Giving player characters lucky breaks when they are down makes their controllers happier. Creating more difficulty and adversity when things are going too well keeps everyone engaged. The quickest way to sandbag the campaign and ruin everyone's time is to abuse the game master's power. There is an unfortunate framing RPGs present of game masters versus players. You are not trying to win the game against the players. This genre is not about victory points or win conditions. No one wins or loses Catalyst. You are telling a story. Have some fun with it.

## **Campaign Design**

Before you start plotting your campaign, familiarize yourself with Catalyst. GMs of any system typically evolve from skilled players. They are comfortable with the world. A Catalyst GM views the demon invasion as fact. They know about the plague and magic. All of the world's constants are known. Deviating from the lore confuses players and must be done with particular intent. Any player reading a line of lore from the manual should see it realized in your campaign.

Beyond knowing the static history of every Catalyst session (and fleshing out the intentionally ambiguous details), GMs are trusted to enforce the rules. Know how combat works. Understand how growth points are spent. No one expects you to remember what every spell and ability does, but be able to quickly find the information in the manual. Bookmark the vein diagrams, ability tables, spell and ability appendices, conditions, weapon tables, and the auxiliary damage page.

Learn this information to efficiently and consistently answer players' questions. Every player should know their character and their abilities, but an open-world invites corner cases and unexpected situations. Players defer to the GM's wisdom when such a problem arises. Catalyst is a game and, as such, there are no wrong answers. Whatever is fun and fair keeps your group engaged and happy.



Once you are comfortable with Catalyst's rules and lore, craft your story. Design a loose plot which the players follow as the campaign progresses. Much of Catalyst's universe is intentionally left ambiguous. While you refresh yourself on the world, find the foundations from which you build your story. Fill in the specific setting and threat to the players.

One of Catalyst's strengths is the contemporary setting. The game takes place in our world and in our time. Take advantage of this: draw upon your life. Have the campaign set in your hometown, your favorite vacation spot, or the city in which you and your friends reside. Use real locations or places commonly encountered in everyday life, such as sporting goods stores, local landmarks, or your neighborhood café. All of this enhances players' understanding of the setting and situations without lengthy descriptions. They can now focus on the important parts of the story, like demons invasions and the fate of humanity.

Most in-world survivors of the Catalyst apocalypse are simply trying to survive wherever the demons forced them to exist. The players cannot idle while the world slowly marches forward. They need a reason to be the center of your story. They do not have to save the world, but exciting events should occur around them and because of them. What drives this action is a threat to the players.

Catalyst is a dangerous world full of demons and death. While demonic armies and plague are an inherent part of the lore, their impact on the players is up to you. Are demons constantly raiding the players' city or are they a looming background threat? Is humanity cooperating or competing? Is the plague still infecting people or did it already take its toll? Figure out the story's antagonist (or antagonistic force). It can change, grow, or be ambiguous to the players, but something must be pressing them onward.

While you are developing this problem, consider the passage of time since the demons' arrival. This is an important detail for players to get in the right mindset. If weeks have passed, the players should be more hopeful and able to find supplies in abandoned settlements. If years have passed, survival is more challenging, but little should surprise or scare the seasoned players. Match the timeline to the threat; the plague, demon armies, and human factions all change and evolve after the initial portal openings.

With the world embellished, it is time to integrate the players. Your threat challenges them to act, but remember the story focuses foremost on the players. Make sure they know their place in the world. Explain the campaign's setting starting with broad overviews, then zooming into the players. Your story forces certain histories or elements onto the characters, such as needing a reason to be in the starting city. Alert them of such requirements during character creation. Let players seamlessly integrate their characters into your world with their backgrounds and skillsets.

Once you understand where the players are starting and what forces drive them forward, begin plotting out your sessions. A session is a block of a campaign to be played during a single sitting. This needs a natural progression of action. Setting the session around a particular set-piece or character arc helps. Give players an objective to complete that pushes the greater story forward. Catalyst allows for flexible resolutions of problems, so the less guidance you provide players, the more creative their solutions can be. Rather than forcing a fight, stealth sequence, or conversation, present an open environment for the players to choose the skills they use to progress. Work with them to figure out how they want to play Catalyst.

As players advance through your story, learn their style and adapt your campaign. If they value combat, either present engaging battles or twist the fights' narrative to impact future violent tendencies. Whether you are accommodating them or challenging them, your story's choices are for the players. Do not avoid your original plot lines or intentions; reach them using the players' natural impulses and play styles.



## Helping Players

Players bring your campaign to life. All the planning is for naught if a group never puts pencil to paper and makes characters. The introduction to your story as players design and discover their characters sets the tone for the entire campaign. This is where anyone new to Catalyst has their first impressions of the game (or even role playing). Treat the first session, particularly character creation, with the reverence it deserves.

Explain both Catalyst's general setting and your campaign's particulars to players before they develop their characters. They need context before they can be expected to immerse themselves. Highlight your expectations of the characters. If the story casts them as experienced mercenaries, they cannot have characters crippled by fear at the sight of blood. Stories set years after the invasion should not have characters ignorant of magic. There is a misguided intuition to let players blindly create characters; giving them absolute freedom. This makes the world less important since the characters are not intrinsically part of it. They will always be one step removed of this reality. Understand these characters grew up in your campaign's universe. They naturally evolved into whatever starting roles the story demands.

With context established, your players start detailing their characters. If everyone is seasoned enough to make their own characters without your guidance, let them. Use this time to further explain the campaign and set the first scene. If anyone is new or not comfortable with the game's mechanics, provide help and support. Know where everything goes on a character sheet and be ready to help new players organize their information correctly. The Catalyst manual has a walkthrough for character creation, narrated by an in-universe Johnny Danger. Follow this guide with your players. Walk them through each step, letting slower players catch up before proceeding.

The Catalyst Player App helps players build characters quickly without fear of doing something against the rules. Consider having a version on your phone to lend to new roleplayers. Anything improving the initial exposure helps these neophytes relax and enjoy the game. The app also has the side-effect of keeping these players off other apps and mentally in the story. It is not a replacement for GM assistance or understanding the game mechanics. Assist app users as you would normal players.





Character creation starts with the cosmetic detail of their name and then expands into game-affecting territory. While their name has no bearing on Catalyst's mechanics, it does begin to establish the character's personality. Give them some time to think about it, but make it clear to players they may change names later in the process. Compliment and encourage players' decisions, especially if they come up with something non-traditional. Not enforcing "real" names for characters may seem counterintuitive to new Catalyst GMs. The dark tone of the demon apocalypse works better against a lighthearted backdrop of silly pre-invasion characters. This is why most of the backgrounds are more colorful than what real life affords the average person.

Once names have been considered, move on to sex and age. Sex has a tight relationship with the character's name, so be sure to point out the attribute bonuses each sex grants. Someone roleplaying a different sex than their actual one for mechanics-based reasons creates interesting roleplaying opportunities. This is a good point to describe what attributes do. Give a brief summary of the seven attributes and mention every player starts at the human average of 7. Also discuss traits and their relation to attributes. Once they have picked their sex, move on to age. Players will either pick what fits their character or select something based on your description of attribute benefits.

Along with attribute adjustments, age dictates how many backgrounds a character has. Which picking backgrounds, start players on the first page of the Backgrounds appendix and let them read each one to find their favorites. Point out the age limits of each category so they are aware which backgrounds can be chosen. Expand upon your earlier description of attributes to talk about skills and abilities. Point out where those go on the character sheet, using the sample characters as references. Discuss skills starting at 0 ranks and the meaning of having an ability. Some backgrounds give an extra rank to a character's aptitude vein. Players should be aware this universe has magic: summarize this bonus as "getting more magic," promising to explain veins and aptitude better during the next phase.

After backgrounds are selected, players choose their character's magical aptitude. Point players towards the manual section describing the different veins and the personality archetypes for those veins. Verbally give the group the executive summary of each vein. While it is certainly not necessary, encourage players to pick different veins. This gives the party more overall utility while making each player feel unique and valuable. Make sure to notify the players about their aptitude bonuses, orison, and the initial one rank in their chosen vein.

The hardest part of character creation for new players is spending growth points. Every level gets easier for them because it is the exact same process, but the first time is intimidating. If they have had time to read the manual, deciding where to spend points is easier. If that player has not (the likely scenario), sit down with them individually while others skim the manual. Ask the player what role they see themselves fulfilling within the party. This gives you a baseline for the skills they want and need. Show them their aptitude's vein diagram and see what excites them. Use this time to gauge their reactions to different game concepts. Be sure to have other new players listening in so they start formulating ideas too.

Your role during character creation is guiding players towards characters they will enjoy playing. Help them avoid minor pitfalls. Try to get skills and vein to even numbers so they roll more dice. Lead them towards some skills and spells with combat functions. Encourage characters learn something useful out of combat to get deeper into Catalyst's storytelling. Play up whatever background elements the players find fascinating. Help them make their unique, personalized character and make that character valuable.



The final steps for character creation are rote and mechanical. For traits, briefly explain how Catalyst rounding works (always round down at each step). Offer to calculate traits for people, even if they seem confident and competent. The app also does this for players. Then, issue out cards. You can hand everyone the basic cards at any point, giving them something to fiddle with during earlier phases of character creation. Make sure players get all the cards for spells and active abilities. Let them explore the details of their particular powers themselves and become acquainted with the Catalyst manual's reference sections.

While it's not explicitly stated as a step in character creation, players usually start with equipment. Your campaign specifics define what is reasonable to own. Typically, they should have a mediocre weapon, basic clothing, anything implied by their abilities (lockpicks, runestones, etc.), and personal items which may or may not affect anything in the game (pictures of family, cigarettes, etc.) Keep in mind the overall Catalyst universe: humanity is all but destroyed. Gifting players with luxury items, nice weapons, or abundant ammo implies their status far exceeds the average survivors.

Helping players make their characters serves a hidden motive for the GM. Knowing their capabilities lets you tailor the campaign to them. Give engineers engineering problems to solve. Create terrain with vantage points for snipers. Tap someone's tragic backstory for a clever character arc. This story is to be told by you and the players. The more nods towards the players you provide, the more incredible the tale becomes.

Maintain this tight, narrative connection with your players from session to session. Keep helping them with the game mechanics. Remind them of skills or spells they could use when they are stuck. Help them spend growth points once again after gaining a level. Be a positive influence for their Catalyst experience. Moderating rules mid-game places the emphasis on speed, but be fair to players in the process. Take the time before or after sessions to discuss rules or character interactions that caused disagreement. Learn their expectations of your story and Catalyst. Once you are all onboard with how demons behave or how the Tremor spell works, you can focus on enjoying the game.

## Combat

Catalyst is about survival. Demon hordes, paranoid humans, and mass extinctions lead to violence. The nature of a battle demands time from your campaign. Many Catalyst abilities and spells revolve around combat. Players who are geared towards these scenes await opportunities to show off their skills. The time spent fighting is well spent on meaningful and challenging fights.

Realize including a battle in your campaign is a powerful move. Mandating a battle, instead of it being a consequence of a player decision, is an even weightier action. Depending on how long your sessions are, you may only have time for one or two fights. Inconsequential battles waste time and frustrate players. Players with non-combat powers grow to resent excessive fights and feel their characters are worthless. If stealth, persuasion, or cunning plans are conceivable, let the group attempt them. Failure could lead to a fight, but that leaves a different implication. Players then feel energized to improve their characters and concoct better plans instead of spending their next growth points only on melee and firearms.

Always frame combat with other scenes and setups. Battles should be noteworthy for both their contributions to the story and the technical challenge. Think about the environment. Give players and enemies places for cover, ranged weapon fights, spell casting, melee clashes, and whatever crazy tricks you can encourage. Catalyst takes place in our world. Use the dramatic scenery we see in our everyday lives. Grocery stores, riverboats, mountain passes, freeway overpasses, and airplanes can all host a pitched skirmish against demons.



Develop interesting enemies to fill your battlefield. Diversity is your friend. Mix up every angle for your fights to keep players intrigued. Consider these components: enemy number, enemy strength, effective distance, attack type, magic veins, unique restrictions or powers, synergy with other combatants, equipment, and arrival time into the fight. In particular, play around with different combinations of spells and weapons throughout the foes' ranks. You have too many options available to repeat fights.

Write down the details of your opponents beforehand. Know their relevant stats, particularly vitae, vigor, damage, and check rolls. Catalyst campaign guides use this format:

Enemy Name			
Strength:	Willpower:	Vitae Capacity/Drop Point: /	Speed:
Dexterity:	Perception:	Vigor Capacity/Drop Point: /	Spell Capacity:
Fortitude:	Charisma:	Firearms Check:	Acrobatics Check:
Intelligence:	Reaction:	Melee Check:	Vein Check:
Weapons (Damage):			
Spells:			
Abilities:			
Special:			

Remember when you are designing these enemies, their stats do not need to be “real.” Adjusting traits and violating spell prerequisites is alright for game masters. Only go through the process of spending growth points like a player character if you are uncertain how powerful an enemy should be. Figure out your players' capabilities and go from there. If players are rolling 2d6 for vein checks, then they cannot defeat attributes above 12. Having enemies roll 1d6 checks against level 4 characters rarely succeeds and is viewed as an inconsequential threat. As a rule of thumb, players can defeat their own characters. Players are crafty, clever, and lucky: plan to push them when developing their adversaries.

The biggest time sink in combat is rule lookups. Know the basics. The combat reference sheet has the attack check goals and vein check modifiers to remind players what they need to roll against. The player app also has this functionality for the chosen card by tapping the card after revealing it. Show your players where this information is. Ensure they write their check dice on their character sheet. Encourage them to jot down spell and ability descriptions. Help them organize the details so they focus on the exciting fight you planned.

Now, you need to setup the action with the players. Establish the locations of the players, enemies, and any non-sentient material (buildings, cars, rocks, etc.) either side could utilize. Most groups prefer sketching the field on paper or a whiteboard, then using tokens, dice, or coins to represent their characters. Some prefer pure narration. If you do the former, the group is looking for a crunchier, more technical experience. Establish distance scales and be exact about movement and ranges. The narrated version is inherently less accurate and can easily be fudged for dramatic effect (that spell hits both demons, you are barely out of range, etc.) Be sure to have players contribute to the initial setup. The real-world setting of Catalyst gives players expectations about the locations in your story. Let them express these to give the scene more color and save you the trouble of independently designing the whole set.

After the narrative establishment, roll reaction checks. This includes every enemy. Write down the results in a notebook and order the characters' names in the reaction order. This minor step saves notable time during the fight. Anything you do to speed up bookkeeping maintains the tense pace of Catalyst fights.



Write down your characters' vitae and vigor next to their reaction order. Since these numbers frequently change, leave room to write new values. Players should not see these and not be aware of specifics. Use lore-driven narration to convey state ("Its vitae is still above 0 because it's not visibly damaged" or "She looks winded from that spell").

Feel free to change vitae and vigor as you need. Help the players have a good time. If the group is hopelessly dying, reduce their opponents' vitae. If the players are waltzing through your climactic encounter, give an enemy enough vigor for a rank 5 Ignite. Players should follow the rules; this creates their tension. Your characters are entirely your discretion from the very beginning. Do not lock players into your bad decisions.

Have your cards ready and know your spells and abilities. A new player looking up their spell's effect is fine, but you have no excuse. Be an example for players. Prove they can be organized and prepared by doing so yourself. If you run out of cards, either print more off of the Cherry Picked site or use note cards. Be consistent on the placement of each character's cards. This saves you the explanation of who is doing what once players notice the pattern.

Often, characters act similarly during a fight. Combine and separate units as you see fit to save yourself time and energy. If there are two demon crossbow-wielders standing next to each other, have them act in unison. Roll one reaction check so they go at the same time. Play one card for both, but track their vitae separately. If one gets injured and needs to run, start playing two cards as usual. This technique lets the players fight larger numbers of enemies without bogging you down nearly as much.

Be sure to manage communication as you play cards. Players can only strategize with each other during their turn and only with in-character, two-second outbursts. Catalyst's simultaneous action choosing is intended to reduce meta-gaming, but that is only enforceable by the GM. Be sure to play by the same rules. Your opposition characters cannot psychically know what the others are doing. They could plan pre-battle strategies (like using Pain and Smash in the same turn), but be reasonable. The players are at an obvious communication disadvantage to your single mind. Act as each individual would.

While you are battling against the players, evaluate everyone's enjoyment. Stunning the same player repeatedly and directing damage at them is a great tactic, but is probably not fun for that player. Spread damage around and keep everyone on their toes. Stun someone who has a follower or construct they can still control. If things are going worse than you anticipated, pull your punches. Get out of cover, lower your vitae, defend more, reload your guns before they are empty; whatever it takes to balance the scales.

Do not forget the post-fight cleanup. Players should track ammunition consumption. That mechanic gives you a balancing element towards guns (particularly powerful ones) and creates tension for players as their resources dwindle. Everyone, including your GM characters, needs to roll fragility checks on their gear. This is another balancing and tension mechanic that only works if it is actually done.

All of this management and observation assumes you can keep up with the fight. Writing down everything relevant ahead of time helps, but actually controlling several enemies is always challenging. The diversity advantage goes away if you forget who has what or what magical effects are in what areas. Learn your limitations as a GM and slowly work to improve them.



It will help everyone to have a tutorial fight early in the campaign. Make the stakes real and the combat fit into the story, but have a low number of foes and keep their spells and abilities simple. Whether the players are new to Catalyst or seasoned veterans testing their new characters, they will appreciate the easy struggle. Ramp things up in the next fight. Challenge both yourself and the players as you learn their strategies, competencies, and play styles. Know your characters and know your players. With that, battle is easy.

## **Unconventional GMing**

Catalyst's suggested format follows the usual RPG setup: one game master working with a handful of players. This lets a story incubate in one mind, then be delivered to a regular, contributing group. The game master consistently codifies the lore and supporting characters. The players deeply develop their characters in the purity of this world. However, this approach puts more pressure on the GM than the players. Catalyst works well with a couple GMing techniques mitigating this stress and making an easier directing experience.

Consider the role of a game master: director, judge, narrator, and supporting cast. This does not need to be a single person. Having a co-GM design the story lessens the demand on a single person to deliver. It allows dialogue between non-player characters to be natural and unstilted. The most advantageous aspect of having partner is quicker battles. An extra mind tackling the card choices, enemy positioning, and stat management makes a big difference. Fights play out more organically because you no longer wield absolute control. Fights can have more enemies and more diversity with another set of hands. While you may have disagreements or discrepancies with your partner, the overall experience benefits from the time you save.

Similarly, rather than placing all the duties on a single GM (or pair), the person in the hot seat can rotate. Catalyst's survivalist setting and the grand scale of the world's problems lend themselves to small stories of heroism. Having a series of these vignettes told by different people gives the world intrigue. Players never fully know what the game has to offer them: the next GM could interpret the story in a radically different way than their predecessor anticipated. Tell a story with every player taking a turn to GM for a couple sessions. Have their characters come in and out of the plot as needed. Perhaps the first person establishes an overarching goal the last person must resolve. Whatever the setup, this model ensures everyone contributes to the story as a player and director.

Both these suggestions shift the perception of the GM as an overlord figure to something closer to what they should be. Everyone is a part of an RPG story. If you can handle a campaign by yourself, that is great. Lead people through your world. If you need help, your players are there to help you.

## **Your First Session**

It is the evening you start your new Catalyst campaign. You have been planning all week in your spare time. You feel excited to share your work with the group. Maybe you are passionate about tabletop games and one of the players is new to the hobby. This is your chance to impress them.

Everyone sits down to start Catalyst. Set the scene for them. Give the executive summary of Catalyst: talk about the demon invasion, the Red Death, and the state of humanity. Explore your campaign's specifics, particularly the time and place. Inspire everyone's character.

They are making characters together to bond in this world and Catalyst's. You have the manual at hand and are guiding them through the process. Maybe someone else has a copy being passed around or you sent the PDF version to everyone. Maybe the new person should use the player app to aid their first role-playing experience. However the information gets distributed, you stay with the group until they make their characters.



Get players into the spirit by talking about their character's backstories. Tell them any campaign-specific restrictions before having them tell you how they know each other. Encourage agreement. "Yes, and" is your mantra during these introductions. You are setting the tone for the rest of the game.

You launch into your tale. You explained the broad setting, now get into specifics. Describe the room containing the players. If there is another character there, describe them to a T. Lock your players into the storytelling mindset. Get them to speak in character or, at least, narrate what their character does. Help the group decide how play commences; how the story is told.

Once they understand the genre, you start presenting opportunities to advance the story. Introduce their source of conflict, whether it is a dying plague victim, a demon raid, or a crazed cultist disturbing their peace. Give them chances to use their skills and spells, reminding players of what they can do and how the different checks work. Keep the check goals low and encourage players to try things. Have reference material at hand to thumb through and let them learn where information is. For now, keep the challenge light: a new story is daunting enough.

Now players are rolling dice. They are narrating their actions. You have the perfect opportunity to slip in a little fight. Of course, if the group is still overwhelmed by the whole experience, hold off on battle. Save it for next session when everyone sees role playing as something comfortable. But if the players are ready, break out the cards.

This is an easy fight. You roll reaction checks, pick your cards, and monitor the situation. Ask if people need pictures or more explanations. Make everything seem more dramatic: elaborate on the murderous intent in the demon's eye, the sight of flesh knitting back together from vitae, or the scent of blood filling the room. Make sure players know what their cards and actions do. Let them mulligan bad choices during this fight. They should feel good about the game, though perhaps not their characters' lot in life.

After fragility checks are rolled and bodies looted (or abandoned), normal narrated play resumes. The consequences of battle become apparent to the players. Aside from your plot-impact, vitae is slow to regenerate. Injured players remain in that state as they continue. Bullets are forever lost and gear is damaged. Encourage paranoia and caution. Reckless players are predictable and less fun; scared ones make a decent blend of wise and terrible decisions.

You look for a nice stopping point. Watch your players for signs of fatigue. Ending the game with everyone still awake and alert leaves them wanting to continue. Afterwards, write down any interesting events to remember for future sessions: player choices, character background elements, character names, etc. Consistent details bring the world to life.

You reflect on what happened. Just as you shell out experience to players, gain some for yourself each session. Look at your notes and think about what worked and what did not. Focus on those high notes for the next round. Use them to reach the next session of your campaign. If every session is more fun than the last, you are doing a phenomenal job. You are taking on the role few desire and using it to its full potential. Everyone respects and appreciates your efforts. Together with your loyal players, you decide the fate of humanity against the demon horde.

