

BEAST



DREAM

INTRODUCTION

This game is for a **Game Master** (GM) and one or more players. Beast Dream allows players to experience the heart of the journeys seen in Pokémon, Digimon, and other monster training, collecting, and battling games, but with the creative freedom a pen and paper game affords. Many of the game rules are based on Blades in the Dark by John Harper, so familiarity with that game will be helpful (but unnecessary) for both players and GMs, but the tone of this game is vastly different from Blades.

The only materials you need to play this game are pencils, paper, and several six-sided die.

Beast Dream is also a **SWORD DREAM**. The SWORD DREAM movement began with the OSR (Old School Revival/Renaissance) community. It focuses on inclusivity, kindness, support, creativity, and empowering more voices. Every SWORD DREAM or *DREAM game follows the 9 Principles which can be found [here](#). These principles are a work in progress as we learn more about what works best to support our goals.

In Beast Dream I want to explore the following concepts for this SWORD DREAM:

- Provide a fun experience for a GM and any amount of players
- Encourage the building of bonds between players, characters, and beasts
- Remove physical harm and trauma as consequences for failure
- Create modular systems that encourage designers and players to express themselves in the world, beasts, and moves they create
- Capture the magic I felt playing my favorite video games as a child

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PLAYERS

Players create a character that will go on a fantastical journey in a world of beasts. Characters are typically called **handlers** because of their connection to beasts, but feel free to use a different term for yours (ranger, explorer, or trainer are other good fits). They choose a look and name for their character and then choose one quality that's their strength (2 dice), one that's neutral (1 die) and one that's their weakness (0 dice). There are three qualities: Heart, Cunning, and Drive. Each action that your handler takes is influenced by one of these three qualities. Then you pick a move from the handler move list. The first move you pick is your **specialty**, and you will keep this move forever.

Once you've made your handler, you then pick your first beast, either by creating it yourself or choosing a beast from the GM's bestiary. More information can be found in the Beasts section. Though you will be collecting more beasts throughout the game, your first beast is special. You have a special bond with your beast. Your first beast begins with a bond of 1. Nicknaming your first beast is important but not necessary.

It's up to the GM whether you begin the game with your first beast or if you have to accomplish some small task to get it. Once you are bonded with your first beast, your adventure can begin in earnest.

Talk back and forth with the GM, narrating or describing your handler's actions and reactions. When your actions are difficult or create conflict, the GM may ask you to roll to determine the outcome of the roll. Read more about that in the **Action Rolls** section. Your actions will have consequences, but by pushing yourself you can change outcomes and resist some of the consequences. Read more about that in the **Push and Stress** section.

Rolling the Dice

Beast Dream uses six-sided dice. You roll several at once and read the single highest result.

- If the highest die is a 6, it's a **full success**—things go well. If you roll more than one 6, it's a critical success—you gain some additional advantage.
- If the highest die is a 4 or 5, that's a **partial success**—you do what you were trying to do, but prepare for trouble: danger, harm, reduced effect, etc.
- If the highest die is 1-3, it's a **failure**. Things go poorly. You probably don't achieve your goal and you suffer complications, too.

If you ever need to roll but you have zero (or negative) dice, roll two dice and take the single lowest result. You can't roll a critical when you have zero dice.

All the dice systems in the game are expressions of this basic format. When you're first learning the game, you can always make a simple roll to judge how things go. Look up the exact rule later when you have time.

To create a dice pool for a roll, you'll use one of your three qualities and take dice equal to its score (2 dice for a strength, 1 die for neutral, and 0 dice for a weakness). Certain moves may increase your dice pool, and situations may increase your dice pool at the GM's discretion.

Action Rolls

When you take an action that poses significant danger or risk, you make an **action roll**. The GM determines the appropriate position, you choose which quality you are rolling, then the GM determines the appropriate effect. You can roll any quality you want, but the GM may determine that one quality is less effective than the other based on the action.

When you act with empathy and compassion, roll **heart**. When you act with guile and wit, roll **cunning**. When you act with passion and determination, roll **drive**.

Position is the narrative stakes of the action. There are three positions: controlled, risky, and desperate. If you're in a **controlled** position, the possible consequences are less serious. If you're in a **desperate** position, the consequences can be severe. If you're somewhere in between, it's **risky**—usually considered the “default” position for most actions.

Effect determines how much your action roll will accomplish on a success.

Controlled—You act on your terms. You exploit a dominant advantage.

- **Critical:** You do it with increased effect.
- **6:** You do it.
- **4/5:** You hesitate. Withdraw and try a different approach, or else do it with a minor consequence: a minor complication occurs, you have reduced effect, you suffer lesser harm, you end up in a risky position.
- **1-3:** You falter. Press on by seizing a risky opportunity, or withdraw and try a different approach.

Risky—You go head to head. You act under fire. You take a chance.

- **Critical:** You do it with increased effect.
- **6:** You do it.
- **4/5:** You do it, but there's a consequence: you suffer harm, a complication occurs, you have reduced effect, you end up in a desperate position.
- **1-3:** Things go badly. You suffer harm, a complication occurs, you end up in a desperate position, you lose this opportunity.

Desperate—You overreach your capabilities. You're in serious trouble.

- **Critical:** You do it with increased effect.
- **6:** You do it.
- **4/5:** You do it, but there's a consequence: you suffer severe harm, a serious complication occurs, you have reduced effect.
- **1-3:** It's the worst outcome. You suffer severe harm, a serious complication occurs, you lose this opportunity for action.

There are three effect levels: super effective, standard, and not very effective. If your effect is **super effective**, you achieve more than usual. If your effect is **not very effective**, you have a partial or weak effect. If your effect is **standard**, then it accomplishes what you'd expect it to accomplish.

Since NPCs don't roll for their actions, an action roll does double-duty: it resolves the action of the PC as well as any NPCs that are involved. The single roll tells us how those actions interact and which consequences result. On a 6, the PC wins and has their effect. On a 4/5, it's a mix—both the PC and the NPC have their effect. On a 1-3, the NPC wins and has their effect as a consequence on the PC.

Here's an example of an action roll in play. Jan's handler, Robin, chased an elusive beast to a mountain range. The beast sits watching her from atop a cliff, and Robin decides she wants to climb the cliffside to reach the beast. The GM, Ray, asks Jan if Robin has any special moves or equipment that would help her scale the cliffside, and Jan says "no." Ray decides that this is a risky action because climbing is dangerous, and failure could result in the beast fleeing. They decide that the effect is not very effective because Robin is climbing without any assistance or training. Jan decides that she's okay with this, and Ray asks her what quality Robin is using to perform the action. Robin is unwavering in her dedication to catching up to this beast, so Jan decides she is rolling with Drive, even though that's her neutral quality. She takes one die and rolls. The result is a four, a partial success. Because the action was risky and the result was not a complete success, Ray decides that the consequence is that when Robin is climbing up the cliff, a hand slips and she hits the side of the cliff with her side, cracking her phone. Because the action was not very effective, Ray tells Jan that Robin makes it to the top of the cliff, but it takes a while and by the time she pulls herself over the ledge, the beast has scurried away a short distance.

Group Actions

When you lead a group action, you coordinate multiple members of the team to tackle a problem together. Describe how your character leads the team in a coordinated effort. Do you appeal to them gently and encouragingly, do you push them to go above and beyond, or do you guide them with strategic plans and ideas?

Each handler who's involved makes an action roll (using the same quality) and the team counts the single best result as the overall effort for everyone who rolled. However, the handler leading the group action takes 1 stress for each handler that rolled 1-3 as their best result.

This is how you do the "we all sneak into the building" scene. Everyone who wants to sneak in rolls their action, and the best result counts for the whole team. The leader expends push for everyone who does poorly. It's tough covering for the stragglers.

The group action result covers everyone who rolled. If you don't roll, your handler doesn't get the effects of the action.

Progress Tracks

A **progress track** is a way to measure progress on an ongoing effort against an obstacle or other trouble. Draw out a track like below and mark boxes off the track whenever you successfully make progress.

Generally, the more complex or difficult a task, the more boxes are in the track. The GM will decide the total number of boxes before you start making progress on it. Typically, progress tracks will have no less than four boxes (the exception being certain battle tracks, see in the Beasts section), with the most complex having no more than ten boxes. Typically, a successful action with standard effect will mark off one or two boxes, while a not very effective or super effective action will mark off less or more.

Fortune Rolls

Sometimes you take an action that has a chance of failure but without much risk or danger involved. When that happens, the GM might call for a fortune roll. A fortune roll works a lot like an action roll, but the only consequence of failure is that you do not succeed, or receive less of a benefit.

Here's an example of a fortune roll in play. Daniel's handler, Hawk, wants to find out where he can buy a bottle of Goleon Elixir as a gift for his traveling companion, Robin. The GM, Ray, asks Daniel how Hawk plans to find this information. Daniel says Hawk will ask around town. Because there's no real risk to this, Ray decides that this can be resolved by a fortune roll. Hawk rolls with Heart, his strength, because he's using his charm to get answers, and the highest result is a six! Ray tells him that he finds an old man that knows a trader who happens to be in town this week, and the trader always carries Goleon Elixir in stock.

What demands an action roll or a fortune roll is up to the GM's discretion. In the last example, if the town was on lockdown while the guards searched for a gang of beast-thieving outlaws, then asking around would come with some risk involved and Ray could have asked for an action roll instead. Similarly, in the last example, if Hawk wanted to get the elixir as a surprise for Robin, then Ray could decide that the risk involved was Robin discovering the surprise ahead of time and ask for an action roll.

Push and Stress

Handlers have a special ability called **Push** that allows them to exert themselves to gain an advantage or avoid consequences. A handler has eight Push to spend.

Spending Push is risky and can lead to overexerting yourself. If you spend all of your Push, you become **Stressed** and are temporarily taken out of the action. When you are Stressed, you feel overwhelmed and it takes a toll on you. Lose one of your Moves or reduce your Bond with one of your beasts by 1. You cannot lose your Specialty. Describe how your partner beasts and your friends help you get back on your feet as soon as there's a break in the action and regain all of your Push.

You also regain all of your Push when you can safely relax.

There are three ways that any handler can spend Push.

Pushing Yourself

Before you roll, you may choose to spend two Push to roll an additional die (when you roll your weakness, you are considered to be rolling 0 dice, so roll 1) or to increase the effect (from not very effective to standard or from standard to super effective). Describe what your handler does to go beyond their normal capabilities.

If you are playing a game with a single handler, you can optionally choose to allow pushing yourself for one Push.

Here's an example of pushing yourself in play. Jan's handler, Robin, chases an elusive beast to a mountain range and wants to chase after it up a cliffside. Because she doesn't have any special moves or equipment that assist her in climbing, Ray, the GM, decides that her attempt is not very effective. Jan knows that only a standard or better roll will fully close the distance between Robin and the beast, so Jan decides that Robin pushes herself to turn this into a standard action. She still only rolls one die, since she's rolling with a neutral quality, but she rolls a four and gets a partial success. She cracks her phone on the climb up as the consequence, but she finds herself face-to-face with the elusive beast she has been chasing.

Here's another example. Gail's handler, Sparrow, finds a wild beast that's panicked and attacking everyone that comes near it. Gail decides that Sparrow will attempt to calm it down and approach it. Because it's a dangerous beast, Ray, the GM, decides that this is a desperate action, with standard effect. Gail really wants this to work out, but she can't justify using any quality other than Heart for this action, which is just her standard quality, so she pushes herself to get an extra die. She rolls and to her relief rolls a 6 as her highest result! She soothes the beast and manages to get close to it.

Aiding Another

If there are more than one handlers and an ally is attempting to perform an action, you can spend 1 Push to aid them, allowing them to roll an additional die. Describe how your help them succeed. Teamwork is important, and it's easier to aid a friend than to push yourself.

Here's an example of aiding another in play. Gail's handler, Sparrow, is attempting to calm a panicked beast that's wreaking havoc on an otherwise-peaceful forest. Jan knows that this is an important roll, so she decides that her handler, Robin, helps by getting low to the ground to appear as harmless as possible and cooing gently to mimic a friendly beast she once met. Sparrow rolls with Heart, her standard quality, but thanks to Robin's help, she rolls two dice and manages to roll a 6!

Resisting Consequences

When something bad happens, as a result of a failed roll, a partial success, or as a consequence of inaction, a handler can choose to spend Push to resist the consequences. Unlike other methods of spending Push, the cost of resisting consequences is left to chance, so it is very risky. When the GM declares any consequence, you can choose to resist that consequence. Decide how your handler resists it, and roll 1d6. Spend Push equal to 6 minus the result of your roll.

Before you roll, the GM may decide that you can only resist a part of a consequence with a single roll if the consequence is particularly large. You can choose which part of the consequence you resist, and if you want you can resist again to resist the remainder of the consequence.

Here's an example of resisting a consequence in play. Jan's handler, Robin, rolled a mixed success on a risky action while attempting to climb a cliffside to catch a beast. As a consequence, Ray, the GM, declared that while climbing she accidentally slammed her pocket into the cliff, cracking her phone. Robin has important information and apps on that phone, so Jan decides to resist the consequence. She decides that Robin moves just in time to avoid hitting the phone, and rolls 1d6. The result is a 4, so she spends two Push and the phone remains intact.

Coin and Gear

Handlers shouldn't travel with just their beast companions and the clothes on their backs. Gear and the coin to buy it with are important for any handler.

Coin is an abstraction that represents a small sum of whatever currency is used in your world. Don't worry about coin when buying day-to-day items; as long as you have coin then you can afford basic necessities without spending enough to impact your amount of coin. Coin is for buying important things like adventuring gear, healing items, capture devices, and more.

Potential and Advancement

Potential is the measurement of your experience and your potential to grow as a handler. You mark potential when you roll a desperate action or when you roll a risky action using your weakness. You also mark potential at the end of the session for each of these questions you can answer with a yes.

- Did I make a new friend?
- Did I defeat a powerful enemy?
- Did I encounter or learn about a new beast?

After you answer these questions, if you have marked Potential equal to 4 plus the number of Moves you have, you earn an **advancement** and reset your Potential to 0.

Advancement is the primary way handlers become stronger. When a handler earns an advancement, they increase their Bond with a beast of their choice by 1. Handlers grow closer to their beasts as they grow stronger. Handlers can then choose one of three options in addition to the increased Bond.

Handlers can **learn a new Handler Move**. This provides them with more options and abilities. More on this in the next section.

Handlers can choose to **retrain their Specialty**. If they already know a move that is not their specialty, they can make that move their Specialty and their old Specialty becomes a normal Handler Move.

Handlers can choose to **permanently transform a beast**. This only works if they have a beast that can permanently transform, if that beast has 1 or more Bond with the handler, and the beast meets any other transformation prerequisites listed in its tags.

Handler Moves

Here are some basic handler moves. Game Masters should come up with more if they want more variety in their games.

Connections: You know people. Once per session you can call on a connection to get a piece of useful or valuable equipment or information without spending coin.

Domineering: You are skilled at capturing beasts. Spend one push to treat a beast's capture score as if it were 1 less.

Fast Friends: You make friends quickly. All beasts you capture or befriend begin with a Bond of 1. If this move is your specialty, increase your bond with your first beast by 1.

Type Hunter: Choose a type. Your first attack in a battle against a beast of that type has improved effect. This move can be taken multiple times, but you cannot choose the same type twice.

Optional: Advanced Moves

When you have five or more moves, the Game Master may allow you to take Advanced Moves. These moves are generally stronger or more useful than regular moves, but they cost a lot of Potential because of how many moves you have. They might require you to have other moves as a prerequisite. If an advanced move has another move as a prerequisite, you must lose the advanced move before you can lose the prerequisite move.

Character Growth: Treat your weakness as if it were a neutral quality.

Faster Friends (Prerequisite: Fast Friends): All beasts you capture or befriend begin with a bond of 2.

BEASTS

Beasts are the heart of Beast Dream. Every handler has at least one partner beast, and depending on the setting of your game you could have dozens or more. Beasts inhabit every niche of your world, and friendly beasts helping with construction or delivery could be just as common as wild beasts. Beast battles are also an important element of Beast Dream. Read more about that in **Beast Battles**.

Beasts have four numbered stats. **Bond** represents the trust and history between the handler and the beast. The highest Bond a beast can have is 3. Bond can be spent, and unless stated otherwise, all spent Bond recovers at the end of the session. **Tier** represents how powerful the beast is in battle. Tier ranges from 1 to 4 (in special instances such as enhanced or legendary beasts this number can go higher). **Skill** represents a beast's level of training, and this starts at 0 when you capture or befriend a beast and can go up to 2. **XP** (or experience) is the progress in training a beast has before its Skill increases.

Beasts also all have a **type**, which represents their elemental affinity and their strength and weakness to other types. A beast has at least one type, and can have up to two. Finally, a beast has a set of **tags** that describe its special abilities. For example, a beast with the Swim tag might be able to ferry people across the water, or a beast with the Strength tag might be able to lift boulders or smash walls.

Beast Action Rolls

Like handlers, beasts can make action rolls when they perform dangerous actions under the direction of their handler. The action roll uses the beast's skill rather than a handler quality, and the GM takes into account the beast's tier and tags to determine effect. For example, a beast with the Swim tag would have improved effect when trying to swim through dangerous rapids. You can resist the consequences of a beast's action roll as normal, and you can also choose to **spend the beast's Bond in place of Push**. You can spend one Bond or Push to encourage, motivate, or guide your beast and substitute one of your qualities for the beast's skill for a single roll. Usually the consequences of a failure or partial success impact the beast performing the action roll rather than the handler. A beast recovers Bond at the end of the session.

Here's an example of a beast action roll in play. Daniel's handler, Hawk, befriended a Vulpage at the start of this session that he nicknamed "Willow." Because Willow is untrained, its Skill is at 0. Later in the session, Hawk attempted to find a beast's nest that he knew was buried nearby. He asked Willow to search in the bushes and crags that are hard for a human to reach. Ray, the GM, decided that this was a controlled situation, with standard effect. Since Willow's Skill is at 0, Daniel rolled 2d6 and took the lowest result, which was 2, a failure. Willow got stuck in a thorny bush and Hawk had to find a way to get it free.

Here's another example of a beast action roll in play. Gail's handler, Sparrow, befriended a Starbright a few sessions earlier. Since then, she chose to increase her bond with Starbright to 1 when she advanced, but Starbright's Skill has not increased, remaining at 0. When giving chase to a bandit who stole a parcel that she was tasked with delivering and a few other supplies, the bandit threw the parcel off a cliff to buy themselves some time to get away. Sparrow tasked Starbright with catching the parcel before it landed. Because the parcel was so important, Gail decided to spend her 1 bond with Starbright to substitute its Skill of 0 with her Drive of 2, and rolled a mixed success. The parcel was successfully saved by Starbright, but the distraction allowed the bandit to make a break for it.

XP and Skill

A beast's Skill begins at 0, and can be increased up to 2 by earning XP. When a beast has a Skill of 0, it can earn XP by performing risky or desperate actions using its Skill. When a beast has a Skill of 1, it can earn XP by performing desperate actions using its Skill. When a beast has a Skill of 2, it can no longer earn XP. If its handler substitutes one of their qualities, then the beast does not earn XP from the roll, but if the beast's handler pushes themselves or another handler aids the roll, then they still earn XP.

A beast needs XP equal to 3 plus its Tier in order to increase its Skill.

Beast Battles

Beasts fight, either for a cause, for self-defense, to hunt, or simply for the love of the fight. When these battles occur, you have the option to play them as any other scenario, or you can run racing battle tracks.

A **battle track** is a special progress track that represents the vitality of the beast currently in battle versus the vitality of the opponent's beast. A beast's battle track has a number of boxes on it equal to twice its tier. For example, a tier 2 beast has four boxes, and a tier 3 beast has six boxes. When you battle, you choose the action your beast takes and roll an action roll. On a miss, you fill boxes on your beast's battle track based on the position of the roll (3 for desperate, 2 for standard, 1 for controlled). On a success, you fill boxes on your opponent's track based on the effect (3 for super effective, 2 for standard, 1 for not very effective). On a partial success, you fill boxes on both tracks. When your beast's battle track fills completely, that beast is knocked unconscious and you choose your next beast to battle. The same goes for your opponent. If you fill all of your beasts' battle tracks, you lose the battle. If you fill all of your opponent's battle tracks, you win the battle. If you both fill your tracks at the same time, then the GM decides the winner using whatever method they want.

During a battle using a battle track, a beast can **permanently expend one of their bond** to unfill a number of boxes on your beast's battle track equal to its tier to represent it giving its all. This bond can be regained during an advancement, but it does not reset when their handler recovers push like other spent bonds.

Handlers should never fight beasts themselves. Their beast companions will always leap in front of danger to protect them if another beast tries to fight, and most beasts do not consider humans worth attacking anyways.

Here's an example of a beast battle in action. Gail's handler, Sparrow, caught up to a bandit that had stolen valuable supplies from her. When cornered, the bandit cartoonishly revealed that they work for someone, but would only reveal who that is if Sparrow can defeat them in a beast battle. Sparrow reluctantly agreed and chose to send her Conflagrouse, a flaming water fowl, to battle first because it is her strongest beast. The bandit led with their Psichuck, a psionic rodent, and the battle began. Both Conflagrouse and Psichuck had Tiers of 2, so they each had a battle track with 4 boxes. Sparrow ordered Conflagrouse to make an all-out attack, spending a Push to substitute Sparrow's Drive of 2 for Conflagrouse's Skill of 1. Because neither beast had a type advantage over the other, Ray, the GM, decided that the roll was risky and standard. Gail rolled 2d6, and the highest result was a 6, a full success! Conflagrouse swooped in and scorched the Psichuck, giving it no opening to fight back. Ray marked two ticks on the Psichuck's battle track. With a two tick lead, Gail decided to be more risky with her next action. Sparrow ordered Conflagrouse to attack again, but chose to not spend any push. Gail rolled 1d6, which resulted in a 4, a mixed success. The Psichuck managed to land a swift blow on Conflagrouse, but Conflagrouse dive-bombed the poor rodent with fire. Gail marked two ticks on Conflagrouse's battle track, and Ray did the same for Psichuck's. Since Psichuck's battle track was filled, Psichuck fainted and the bandit chose their next beast for the battle.

Beast Tags

Beasts come with a selection of tags that are meant to give the players an idea of the special abilities the beast has. A beast is assumed to have combat abilities using their type, so those are not included among its tags. At the GM's discretion, tags can also improve a beast's position or effect. For example, a beast with the Burrow tag might have an improved effect when chasing after someone in rough terrain because they can bypass the terrain by digging under it.

Status Conditions

Status conditions are an additional way to weaken opponent beasts in battle. If a beast has the tag "status," then when they attack, instead of dealing damage they can choose to apply a level of a status condition. On a success, the opponent has the condition applied. The GM can choose to apply a condition to your beast on a failed roll as well. The level of condition applied to your beast is determined by the position of the failed or partial roll, and the level of condition applied to your opponent's beast is determined by the effect of your successful roll. For example, a partial success on a risky roll against a beast with the status tag could result in a second level status condition on your beast, or a success on a super-effective roll using a beast with the status tag could result in a third level status condition on your opponent.

The first level of a condition reduces a beast's effectiveness. If your beast has the first level of a condition, then all of that beast's actions have reduced effect. If an opponent's beast has the first level of a condition, then all actions made against that beast have an improved position. If your beast has the second level of a condition, then all of that beast's actions use -1 die. If an opponent's beast has the second level of a condition, then all actions made against that beast use +1 die. If your beast has the third level of a condition, then it is helpless and cannot act without pushing yourself. If your opponent's beast has the third level of a condition, then it is helpless and all actions made against it succeed. Status conditions are removed automatically at the end of an adventure, but certain items or tags might allow status conditions to be cleared in battle.

Here's an example of status conditions in action. Jan's handler, Robin, was locked in battle with a wild Ivyhead, a three-headed snake made out of vines. Robin's Psychuck attempted to clobber the snake, but a failed risky roll meant that the Ivyhead rubbed its toxins all over Psychuck instead. This applied two levels of status on Psychuck, and on Robin's next action, she had to roll with one less dice. Psychuck only had a Skill of 1, so she rolled 2d6 and took the lowest, resulting in another failed roll. It was a real uphill battle for her and Psychuck.

Here's another example of status conditions in action. Daniel's handler, Hawk, challenged another handler to a battle just for fun. They agreed, and Hawk chose his Vulpage to lead his team in the fight against the other handler's Lobspire, a powerful, vampiric lobster. His first roll was a complete success, and since Vulpage has the Status tag, he chose to apply a level of status on Lobspire to give him the advantage going forward. Vulpage stunned Lobspire with its electricity, making it less effective in combat. In his next roll, Hawk had improved position because of the status on Lobspire, so he was in a controlled position, and he decided to take advantage of that and attack Lobspire again, this time looking to do damage. The result was a partial success, so while Vulpage took some damage, it dealt more than it took thanks to the status on Lobspire.

Befriending or Capturing Beasts

Wild or unbonded beasts have an extra stat.

If your game revolves around befriending beasts, then unbonded beasts have the befriend quality stat. **Befriend quality** determines the quality that you must roll in order to befriend the beast. When interacting with the beast, you can make an attempt to befriend that beast by demonstrating that quality and then making a befriend roll. A befriend roll functions like an action roll but without the GM choosing effect and position. On a **6 or a crit**, the beast is befriended and joins your team. On a **4-5**, the beast recognizes you and if you are engaged in battle with it you can choose to end the battle immediately, or it will offer to help you temporarily. On a **1-3**, the beast flees or attacks you. You cannot attempt to befriend the same beast twice on an adventure, though other players can attempt to befriend a beast that another player failed to befriend.

If your game revolves around capturing beasts, then wild beasts have the capture score stat. **Capture score** ranges from 1 to 6 and determines the difficulty of capture with a capture device. During a battle you can attempt to capture a wild beast. Expend a use of your capture device and roll 1d6. If the result equals or exceeds the beast's capture score, then you've captured the beast. If the result is lower than the capture score, then the beast breaks free and attacks you. You can attempt to capture a wild beast repeatedly as long as you have uses of your capture device remaining.

When you first befriend or capture a beast, their bond is set to 0 unless a move says otherwise.

Sharing and Trading Beasts

A beast can only benefit from a bond with one handler at a time. However, under specific circumstances, a handler can attempt to command a beast that is not bonded with them. When a wild beast is friendly to a handler, when the handler bonded with a beast is unable to act in some way, or when the handler bonded with a beast is okay with someone else commanding their beast, you can make an action roll with a beast, treating its skill as if it were 1 less. If its skill is 0 already, then the action has reduced effect instead.

It is also possible to permanently trade or give away beasts. If you trade a beast with someone else, both beasts reset their bonds to 0 and their skill is reduced by 1. This also happens to any beast you give away. A bond with a beast is very powerful, so do not trade or give away beasts lightly.

Beast Transformations

In some settings, beasts can transform into other forms. Depending on the beast, this transformation can be temporary or permanent.

Temporary transformations happen and then the beast changes back. If a beast can temporarily transform, it will include it and the prerequisites for transforming in the beast's tags.

Permanent transformations are tied to handler advancements. When you advance, if a beast has at least 1 bond with you, you can choose to permanently transform it into its next form rather than increase its bond by 1. There may be other prerequisites to permanently transform. If there are, they will be included in the beast's tags.

Example Beasts



Vulpage

The sparks that fly off this fox's tail often leave behind a trail of electrical fires.

Type: Fire/Spark

Tier: 2, Befriend Quality: Drive

Tags: Burning, Status



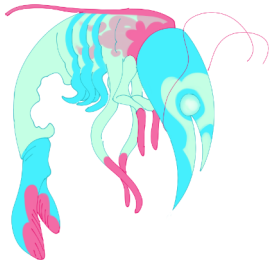
Georode

These leafy creatures can cause massive rockslides when they search for a new fertile patch of soil to sleep in.

Type: Earth/Plant

Tier: 3, Befriend Quality: Drive

Tags: Burrow, Carry



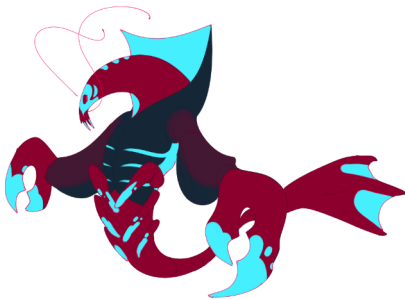
Shrimpil

This small crustacean escapes from predators by cursing the water it swims through, slowing down anything that pursues it.

Type: Water/Curse

Tier: 1, Befriend Quality: Cunning

Tags: Swim, Permanent transformation (Lobspire), Permanent transformation (Prawnlight, must have Bond of 3)



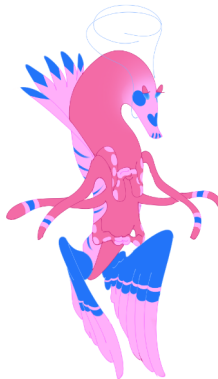
Lobspire

It emits a blue glow to lure prey to its lair, then creates a cloud of shadow before draining the life from its prey.

Type: Shadow/Curse

Tier 3, Befriend Quality: Cunning

Tags, Carry, Swim



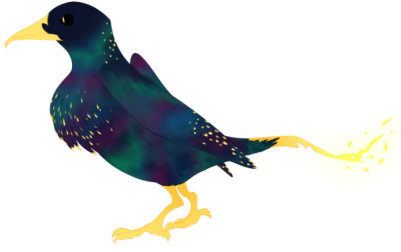
Prawnlight

When pursued by predators, sea creatures flee to Prawnlight because they know they will be safe in its glow.

Type: Water/Light

Tier 4, Befriend Quality: Heart

Tags: Carry, Swim



Starbright

This bird leaves trails of solid light as it soars through the air. Swarms of them can create temporary flight hazards.

Type: Light

Tier: 1, Befriend Quality: Drive

Tags: Flight, Permanent transformation (Ravenglow, must have Skill of 1 or higher)



Ravenglow

Though usually peaceful scavengers, predators know to avoid Ravenglow and their deadly light missiles.

Type: Light

Tier: 3, Befriend Quality: Drive

Tags: Carry, Flight, Tracking

no art yet, sorry

Psichuck

These brawny ground squirrels channel psychic energy when they're preparing to kick some tail.

Type: Brawl/Psion

Tier: 2, Befriend Quality: Heart

Tags: Telekinesis

GAME MASTERS

The Game Master is in charge of presenting players with interesting choices and scenarios, and using an existing beast dream as the backdrop for your game, or creating your own dream.

Running the Game

As the GM, you are responsible for running the game. That means knowing the rules and making judgement calls, but it also means having a conversation with your players and letting that conversation lead the game. Just because you are the GM doesn't mean that you are in charge of the game. Beast Dream is a conversation between the players and the GM, and while that places you in a position of some authority, it is extremely important that you listen to your players and respect their wishes. A "GM versus the players" mentality is toxic and leads to bad games and hurt feelings that bleed outside of the game. While it is your responsibility to create obstacles for your players, do so in a way that leads to fun and exciting situations, instead of trying to crush them or force them down a set path that you have planned.

When you run the game, there are a few things you must do.

Ask questions. Asking questions is the single most important tool a GM can use. Ask establishing questions to set the scene. Where are you? What are you doing? How do you feel about this? These questions get the players bought into the scene and allow you to shape the scene in a way that's most impactful and fun. Ask more questions. If there's a character you forgot to name, ask a player and ask how they know them. That saves you the trouble of having to come up with a name (I'm terrible at naming on the fly), and it gets your player invested in the character immediately.

Provide opportunities. Without your input, your players' handlers exist in a vacuum. Come up with opportunities for your players to pursue. This can be as simple as saying that they see a beast wandering past looking confused, or it could be a whispered hint that an evil organization is preparing to execute a plan. Don't force your players to engage with all the opportunities you provide, but if your players refuse to engage with any of your opportunities, pause the game and talk to your players to figure out why. Provide more opportunities as the game goes on, like mentioning a chandelier that bridges a gap or a beast that seems distracted. The more opportunities you provide, the richer the world will feel and the more interesting choices your players will face.

Follow their lead. After presenting opportunities, let your players decide what happens next and what course they take. Don't try to force them down a particular path. If the players are determined to do something, let them do it, or at least attempt it. If a player asks a leading question, consider providing an opportunity for them, or let them roll to see what they find. If a player is trapped in a room and they ask if there is a way out, tell them if there are any obvious ways out, have them roll a fortune roll to determine if there is a way out, or have them roll an action roll to determine if they can find the way out.

Cut to the action. When players tell you what they want to do, cut to the part where they're doing that, don't run them through every step to get there. If your party wants to brave a stretch of wilderness, start them out in the wilderness and ask them what they want to do next. If your party wants to challenge a gauntlet of powerful monsters, jump to them at the gate, or even better, with them engaging with the first monster. Don't waste time in transitions unless they have importance to the scene, like a getaway or something similar.

Foreshadow consequences. This applies to big and small consequences. Smaller consequences can have tells; for example, a snarling beast foreshadows the consequence that it might strike if the players fail to calm it down. Similarly, larger consequences have even more obvious tells. Foreshadowing shouldn't give away everything though. Hint at what can happen, don't give away everything that will happen.

Follow through. When a consequence has been foreshadowed and the players fail a roll or ignore the foreshadowing, it's your job to follow through with the consequence. However, the severity and the details are up to your discretion. Also, always allow handlers to resist consequences. Tell them the consequences and then let them decide if they want to resist the consequences. Let them know how much of the consequence will be resisted before they roll. You can choose to only allow them to resist some but not all of the consequences, or ask them to make multiple resistance rolls if they want to resist every kind of consequence. Resisting a consequence is stressful to player characters, and this is where characters will most often stress out, so have a plan in mind for what happens if they do.

Mark a track. Sometimes consequences can be indirect or building to something. Instead of immediately causing problems, foreshadow something coming and mark a consequence track. These function exactly like progress tracks, except that they increase based on failure or inaction by the players rather than success. When a consequence track fills, something bad happens. The position of a failed or partial action roll determines how much the track fills. The results of a consequence track filling should be big. Perhaps a powerful enemy shows up that the players must defeat, or the cave collapses and they can no longer explore in that direction. Handlers can still resist the consequences of a consequence track, but instead of negating or reducing the consequence on a resistance roll, unmark a box or two; the consequence will still happen if they don't act fast.

Diversity and Inclusion

As a GM, it's your job to make your game diverse and inclusive. There is no one kind of person that enjoys games, and everyone that comes to your table deserves to be welcomed and respected if they welcome and respect you and everyone else at the table. Ensure that the worlds of your games include people that are marginalized in the real world so that everyone feels like they can be a part of your world. Do everything in your power to accommodate marginalized people at your table. Don't just invite cis straight white abled men into your gaming groups, and make everyone feel comfortable at your table. Normalize asking for pronouns before addressing someone, normalize asking if anyone needs any accommodations on account of any disabilities or trauma (especially without singling out anyone), and normalize safety tools such as the [X-Card](#) and lines and veils. If you do these things, you'll be so much better off than many gaming groups.

Dreams

A **dream** is the agendas, principles, setting, themes, characters, items, moves, beasts, and more that inform the game you are playing. This game is built to give you as much freedom as possible with how you want to play the game, so individual dreams are what provide specific content and provide a narrower focus for your games.

Agendas

Agendas are the driving goals of your games. Everything you say and do should accomplish your agendas. Agendas only exist if they are important enough to shape the entirety of a dream. Take agendas to heart and figure out how to best include them into your game. The most common agenda is **play to find out what happens**, which means that you allow the rules and events of the game to guide what happens with the story rather than railroading and creating grand plans ahead of time. Do not come up with a grand storyline you want to run your players through, but instead come up with a few ideas but let the actions of your players and the results of the rolls steer the story.

If you feel like an agenda works against the game you want to run, then feel free to discard it, but make sure to give some thought first. Agendas usually shape every other element of a dream, so make sure the dream still works without it.

Principles

Principles are a set of statements that guide how you run the game and present the world. While they might seem similar to agendas, principles are more specific and are things you should do rather than things you must do. My favorite principle is **be a fan of the players**, which means you are not playing against the players, but rather you are putting situations and challenges in front of them to give them a chance to shine. You don't want your players to fail, instead you want them to struggle and ultimately succeed, or if they fail, fail in a fun way. It's no fun to play in a game where the GM has decided that there's no way for you to win, so don't be that GM.

Themes

Themes are ideas you want to explore in your dream. These often influence the tone of the dream, based on how serious or tragic the themes are. Themes tie into the stories you try to tell. For example, if a theme you want to explore is "the consequences of corporate greed," then you could introduce a character or organization that's driven by profit and have them harm everything around them in their search for profit. You don't have to be subtle with your themes. This is a game, so nobody expects a brilliantly crafted narrative anyways.

Settings

Settings are the building blocks of the worlds your dream takes place in. Settings are made in tiers, with the region encompassing the entire setting of the dream, then areas, dividing the region into more distinct segments, and finally locations that provide specific places to visit. If a region is described as arid, then generally anywhere in that entire setting would be arid, unless an area or location says otherwise. If an area is described as mountainous, then generally anywhere in that area would be mountainous, unless a location says otherwise. Regions and areas paint with a broad brush, so there's plenty of room for exceptions inside them. As a Game Master, it is up to you to interpret a setting and bring the details to life.

Characters

Characters inhabit the setting of your dream. Usually, only the most important characters are included in any detail, so it's up to GMs to create and characterize the majority of characters in their games. Don't stress coming up with a detailed backstory and motivation for every character in your game, but keep characters consistent and when a character becomes important, take the time to flesh them out in your mind so that they can be believable or memorable.

Unique Rules

Sometimes to make a dream's setting or themes make sense, unique rules have to be added on top of Beast Dream's core rules. Some unique rules are presented as optional, while others are core to making a dream work. Either way, if a unique rule contradicts a core rule, then the unique rule overrides the core rule. Be careful about using too many optional rules or requiring overly complex unique rules or else the game can be difficult to keep up with for you or your players.

Beasts

Beasts are perhaps the most important element of any game of Beast Dream. As the GM, you are in charge of bringing beasts to life and deciding which beast to use at what time. Carefully consider the list of beasts you are using and try to pick beasts that make sense in the situation (a fish beast would not make much sense to be at the top of a mountain), and don't overwhelm the party with extremely strong beasts if they aren't prepared to deal with them. By default, wild beasts are happy to ignore people and other beasts unless they threaten them or inconvenience them in some way, so don't just throw beasts at your players unless there's an in-game justification for it. Beasts are animals, but they're more expressive than real animals, so play up their personalities and quirks. Keep in mind a beast's tags and consider how that might influence their moment to moment actions.

Adventures

As the GM, it's your responsibility to come up with adventures for your players to undertake. Adventures can take many forms, but they should take the handlers out of a comfortable position and put them in some sort of danger, while also expanding or changing the world in some significant way. An adventure could be as simple as an expedition into the wilderness to reach the next town, but it could be as monumental as defeating a revived beast god that threatens to destroy the ecosystem if left unchecked. Adventures should always be presented to your players rather than forced upon them. However, you should make the adventures urgent and the consequences of avoiding them apparent.

Though there is not a set format for adventures, the following are basic frameworks for adventures that can easily be adapted to fit any world and story:

- Travel through dangerous territory in order to make it to your destination.
- Protect a beast from being captured by villainy.
- Explore a supposedly abandoned building that's rumored to be a hideout for criminals.
- Seek out an elusive and powerful beast that's capable of stopping a coming disaster.

BUILDING A DREAM

Many GMs want to do more than run a game using existing dreams. If you're like me, you'll want to build your own dreams. While everyone has their own creative process, there are a few guidelines that should help you build your own dreams.

Dreams and Creative Commons

As stated in the credits, *Beast Dream* is released under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 license, which means that anyone is free to share and edit the game as long as you credit the original writer (Tyler Magruder), and you release your work under the same license. There's no restriction on commercializing work using *Beast Dream*, so you are free to sell your dreams or release them for free for the public to use. I highly encourage all creatives to charge money for their work, because creative work is real work and deserves to be rewarded.

Building Your Dream

Putting your own personal stamp on this game is the biggest reason for building a dream. To build a dream, start by thinking about what you would want to see in your game. What would it require to have that? Figure out what kind of content you need to create to see your dream made real, and then do your best to make it.

It is important for creators to give thought to what you create, to ensure that your work is not hurtful. Thoughtless stereotypes, misrepresentation of other cultures, and uncritical gender roles are common issues in tabletop games, and often drive away marginalized people.

Building Agendas and Principles

To create the agendas for your dream, start by asking what are the goals of your dream. This can be difficult to figure out initially, so it's ok to come back to this later once you understand what you want from your dream. It's useful, but not necessary, to look at the agendas of similar games and dreams, if they have them, and borrow what makes sense for your dream. You should only make something an agenda if it is absolutely necessary for the experience you are trying to create with your dream.

Principles are more direct instructions on how to run your dream. If you want your dream to be whimsical in a specific kind of way, one of your principles could be to "paint your world in pastels" and provide more details on what that means. If you want the beasts to seem more naturalistic and violent, one of your principles could be to "give each beast a spot on the food chain." Be intentional with your principles.

Building Themes and Settings

To create themes, come up with questions that you want to ask with your dream. Are cats better than dogs? What's the best way to solve climate change? Is experience all it's cracked up to be? Is capitalism an inherently harmful system? (YES) Some of these questions you'll only want to ask with your dream, while others you'll want to convey an answer. These questions form the themes of your dream, so keep them in mind when creating the narrative elements.

When you create the setting, draw from whatever inspires you. Whether it's a town you live in, a city you visited, a park you've explored, or a fictional place you only know from stories, they can all provide ideas for your setting. Your setting should complement your themes and provide a space for you to ask the thematic questions.

Building a Beast

Beasts are my favorite thing to create when making a dream. Ideally, a beast begins with a simple concept that exists outside the bounds of real creatures. For example, I had the idea of a giant hermit crab that has an earthy shell and shrubbery growing out of its shell. It's not something you'll see in real life, but it draws from it. This concept should give you a good idea of what the creature does, and from there you can figure out the rest of the details of the beast.

Building a Beast: Types

Before you choose a type for your beast, you should have a set of types prepared. The Commonwealth setting has a list of types that you can use if you want to use that, or you can create your own types or add on to an existing set of types. Once you have a list of types, figure out which ones your beast represents.

My crab concept fits both the Earth type and the Plant type. It burrows through the ground and has a shell of earth so it has an affinity for Earth type, and it also has shrubbery growing out of it so it has an affinity for Plant type.

Building a Beast: Tier

Tier will always be relative depending on the set of beasts you are using for your game, so figure out where your beast sits on the food chain and ecosystem, as well as its raw power. Unless you are creating a beast that exceeds the ecosystem in power, such as a legendary beast, a beast's tier should never exceed 4.

I imagined my crab beast to be fairly powerful, but not a legendary beast. A tier of 3 or 4 would fit well, so I go with 3.

Building a Beast: Tags

Tags are essentially shorthand descriptors of what the beast can do. Tags should only represent the exceptional abilities of a beast. Beasts that can walk do not need a Walk tag, but beasts that can fly or swim with ease should have a Flight or Swim tag unless that is an assumed ability in your setting. Tags can affect how a beast moves, like Burrow means that a beast can move easily through the ground. Tags can affect how a beast fights, like Tracking means that a beast's attacks track its target. Tags can affect how a beast interacts with its handler, like Carry means that a beast can carry a handler on its back. Tags also explain how a beast transforms, if it can.

My crab beast has a significant amount of room on its back, so it has the Carry tag. It can also dig through the ground swiftly, so it has the Burrow tag.

Building a Bestiary

Once you've built a beast, you can make more and more. You can turn your collection of beasts into a bestiary for your dream. Bestiaries provide more than just the statistics needed to run the beasts in your game, but also provide information about how the beasts fit into the world. As you make your beasts, look for ecological roles in your setting that are currently empty, and also keep track of the types and type combinations present in your existing beasts. Fill in blank spaces. If you have the talent, inclination, or money to pay someone to do it for you, create illustrations of the beasts to make your bestiary that much more vibrant. Illustrations are not necessary for any dream, but they are nice.

Building Unique Rules

Sometimes you build something into your dream that requires unique rules outside the bounds of the Beast Dream core rules. Like with agendas, it is useful to look at the rules of other, similar games. In some cases you can simply borrow your rules from them (always be sure to give credit). In other cases, you have to figure out the rules yourself. I can't tell you any surefire way to make unique rules, but most of the time keeping the rules simple is the way to go.

Building Adventures

Play to find out what happens. That means letting the players, dice, and rules guide you rather than telling a story from a pre-written adventure. However, that does not mean that you can't write adventures for your dream, but the focus should be on setup and preparing potential consequences.

Give your adventures a hook to draw in players. This should draw their attention and make them want to follow through on your adventure. This could be as simple as a poster advertising a battle tournament, or more complex, like repeated run-ins with non-local beasts.

Give your adventures a promise to the players. Once the players have experienced the hook, promise them something from the adventure. Often adventures promise material rewards, but they should also promise more abstract things, like a tournament adventure promises battle and a wilderness adventure promises the chance to explore part of the world.

Give your adventures obstacles. The players need challenges to overcome, so plan a few out. Don't extensively plan encounters, but come up with ideas that will allow anyone using your adventure to present fun challenges to their players.

Give your adventures consequences. What happens if the players fail or make the wrong choice? Keep the consequences in line with the tone of the dream. Consequences that mirror real life can be upsetting for players who want a whimsical experience.

Leave the rest up to the GM. This provides a framework for adventure while allowing the group to tell their own stories.

CREDITS

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This game is still in development. Please be patient as I work on further updates, and thank you for your support.