

Introduction

This game is for a **Monster Master** (MM) and one or more players. Beast Dream allows players to experience the heart of the journeys seen in Pokemon, 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 MMs, 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 an MM and any amount of players
- Encourage the building of bonds between players, characters, and monsters
- Remove physical harm and trauma as consequences for failure
- Create modular systems that encourage designers and players to express themselves in the world, monsters, and moves they create
- Capture the magic I felt playing my favorite video games as a child

Contents

Players

[Rolling the Dice](#)

[Action Rolls](#)

[Group Actions](#)

[Fortune Rolls](#)

[Push and Stress](#)

[Coin and Gear](#)

[Player Moves](#)

[Optional: Advanced Moves](#)

Monsters

[Monster Battles](#)

[Monster Tags](#)

[Befriending or Capturing Monsters](#)

[Monster Transformation](#)

[Example Monsters](#)

Monster Masters

[Example Principles](#)

[The World](#)

[Adventures](#)

[Building a Bestiary](#)

[Diversity and Inclusion](#)

Credits

Players

Players create a character that will go on a fantastical journey in a world of monsters. 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 character takes is influenced by one of these three qualities. Then you pick a move from the player move list. The first move you pick is your specialty, and you will keep this move forever. Once you've made your character, you then pick your first monster, either by creating it yourself or choosing a monster from the MM's bestiary. More information can be found in the Monsters section. Though you will be collecting more monsters throughout the game, your first monster is special. You have a special bond with your monster. Your first monster begins with a bond of 1. Nicknaming your first monster is important but not necessary. It's up to the MM whether you begin the game with your first monster or if you have to accomplish some small task to get it. Once you are bonded with your first monster, your adventure can begin in earnest. Talk back and forth with the MM, narrating or describing your character's actions and reactions. When your actions are difficult or create conflict, the MM 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. At the end of the session, ask yourself these questions and mark Potential for each question 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 monster?

After you answer these questions, if you have marked Potential equal to 3 + the number of Moves you have, you earn an advancement. Unmark all of your Potential, learn a new Move, and increase the Bond of one of your monsters by 1. When you earn an advancement you have the option of changing your specialty to another move you already have instead of learning a new move. Your new specialty cannot be an advanced move.

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 bad outcome. 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 "collapse" back down to 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 MM's discretion.

Action Rolls

When you take an action that poses significant danger or risk, you make an **action roll**. The MM determines the appropriate position, you choose which quality you are rolling, then the MM determines the appropriate effect. You can roll any quality you want, but the MM 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.

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 PC 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 character leading the group action takes 1 stress for each PC 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 character doesn't get the effects of the action.

Fortune Rolls

Sometimes you take an action that has a chance of failure but without much risk or danger involved. When that happens, the MM 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.

Push and Stress

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

Before you roll, you may choose to spend one Push to roll an additional die (or roll a single die if the roll is using your weakness) or to increase the effect (from not very effective to standard or from standard to super effective). You can also resist consequences by describing how you resist it and then rolling 1d6. You spend Push equal to 6 minus the result of this roll. If there are more than one players, it costs two Push to add an additional die to your own rolls, but you can also spend one Push to help another player and add an additional die to theirs. Teamwork is important!

Pushing yourself 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 are feeling overwhelmed and it takes a toll on you. Lose one of your Moves or reduce your Bond with one of your monsters by 1. You cannot lose your Specialty. Describe how your partner monsters 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.

Coin and Gear

Player characters shouldn't travel with just their monster companions and the clothes on their backs. Gear and the coin to buy it with are important for any adventurer.

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.

Player Moves

Here are some basic player moves. Monster 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 monsters. Spend one push to treat a monster's capture score as if it were 1 less.

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

Type Hunter: Choose a type. Your first attack in a battle against a monster 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 Monster 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 monsters you capture or befriend begin with a bond of 2.

Monsters

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

Monsters only have two numbered stats. **Bond** represents the trust and history between the player character and the monster. The highest bond a monster can have is 3. **Tier** represents how powerful the monster is in battle. Tier ranges from 1 to 4 (in special instances such as enhanced or legendary monsters this number can go higher). Monsters also all have a type, which represents their elemental affinity and their strength and weakness to other types. A monster has at least one type, and can have up to two. Finally, a monster has a set of **tags** that describe its special abilities. For example, a monster with the Swim tag might be able to ferry people across the water, or a monster with the Strength tag might be able to lift boulders or smash walls.

Like player characters, monsters can make action rolls when they perform dangerous actions under the direction of their player. The action roll uses the player character's chosen quality, and the MM takes into account the monster's tier and tags to determine effect. For example, a monster with the Swim tag would have improved effect when trying to swim through dangerous rapids. You can resist the consequences of a monster's action roll as normal, and you can also choose to **spend the monster's bond in place of push**. Often, the consequences of a failure or partial success impact the monster performing the action roll rather than the player character. A monster recovers bond whenever their player character recovers push.

Monster Battles

Monsters 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 a racing battle clock.

A **battle clock** is a special clock that represents the vitality of the monster currently in battle versus the vitality of the opponent's monster. A monster's battle clock has a number of ticks on it equal to twice its tier.. For example, a tier 2 monster has four ticks, and a tier 3 monster has 6 ticks. When you

battle, you choose the action your monster takes and roll an action roll. On a miss, you fill ticks on your monster's battle clock based on the position of the roll (3 for desperate, 2 for standard, 1 for controlled). On a success, you fill ticks on your opponent's clock based on the effect (3 for super effective, 2 for standard, 1 for not very effective). On a partial success, you fill ticks on both clocks. When your monster's battle clock fills completely, that monster is knocked unconscious and you choose your next monster to battle. The same goes for your opponent. If you fill all of your monsters' battle clocks, you lose the battle. If you fill all of your opponent's battle clocks, you win the battle. If you both fill your clocks at the same time, then the MM decides the winner using whatever method they want.

During a battle using a battle clock, a monster can **permanently expend one of their bond** to unfill a number of ticks on your opponent's battle clock equal to its tier to represent it giving its all. This bond can be regained during an advancement.

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

Monster Tags

Monsters come with a selection of tags that are meant to give the players an idea of the special abilities the monster has. A monster is assumed to have combat abilities using their type, so those are not included among its tags.

Befriending or Capturing Monsters

Wild or unbonded monsters have an extra stat.

If your game revolves around befriending monsters, then unbonded monsters have the befriend quality stat. **Befriend quality** determines the quality that you must roll in order to befriend the monster. When interacting with the monster, you can make an attempt to befriend that monster by demonstrating that quality and then making a befriend roll. A befriend roll functions like an action roll but without the MM choosing effect and position. On a **6 or a crit**, the monster is befriended and joins your team. On a **4-5**, the monster 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 monster flees or attacks you. You cannot attempt to befriend

the same monster twice on an adventure, though other players can attempt to befriend a monster that another player failed to befriend.

If your game revolves around capturing monsters, then wild monsters 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 monster. Expend a use of your capture device and roll 1d6. If the result equals or exceeds the monster's capture score, then you've captured the monster. If the result is lower than the capture score, then the monster breaks free and attacks you. You can attempt to capture a wild monster repeatedly as long as you have uses of your capture device remaining.

Monster Transformation

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

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

Permanent transformations are tied to player character advancements.

When you advance, if a monster 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 monster's tags.

Example Monsters

Flareshock

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

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 3, Befriend Quality: Heart

Tags: Carry, Swim

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

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)

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

Monster Masters

The Monster Master is in charge of presenting players with interesting choices and scenarios, and if you aren't using a premade bestiary, making your own.

Each game should have a set of MM principles. Principles are a set of statements that guide how you run the game and present the world.

Example Principles

Make the monsters friendly but dangerous

Give every monster life

Name every person and monster

Make battles fun and frenetic

The World

The setting of your game is as important as any character. If you are not using an existing setting, it is up to you to create the world. It is incredibly helpful to get ideas from your players when you're creating the world, both to ease the burden of world creation and to get the players bought into the world more.

Adventures

As the MM, it's your responsibility to come up with adventures for your players to undertake. Adventures can take many forms, but they should take the player characters 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 monster 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.

Building a Bestiary

Creating your own bestiary is a lot of work, but it can be very rewarding to populate your world with monsters of your own creation. The first step to building a bestiary is deciding what kind of world these monsters will inhabit. Think about the kinds of creatures that would live in that world. When you have a general idea of what this world looks like, create a monster or two in

your mind. Think about what abilities they'd have and how they fit into the world. Use them as a springboard for ideas. Look at monsters in media: games, movies, books, etc. When you have a handful of monsters thought up, figure out what determines their type. Are they elementally powered? Is there a natural order that determines what creature is weak to another? When you have this figured out, create a type weakness chart. This should be broad enough that at least one type can apply to any monster you'll want to create in your world, and no one type should be much stronger or weaker than another. Make sure each type has a handful of weaknesses and a handful of strengths. With this in hand, you can begin applying types to the monsters you've imagined. Come up with names. This is one aspect I can't really help you with, I'm terrible at names (you've seen the example monster list). What abilities do your monsters have? Create tags based on these abilities so you can easily and clearly communicate them to your players. Do your monsters transform? Create transformations that feel natural or at least logical. Don't have a dog transform into a bus or a bee transform into a snake, unless there's some logical reasoning behind that. Transformations should usually increase a monster's tier; if not, there should be a significant change to the monster's type or tags to justify the transformation. I would suggest clearly outlining which monsters make good first monsters. First monsters should all be the same tier (I would recommend tier 1, with transformations to tiers 2 and 3). Having imbalanced first monsters makes it less fun for players that end up picking the weaker monsters. Finally, decide if monsters in your world are captured, befriended, or both. The befriend quality can tell a lot about a monster's personality. Monsters of higher tier should generally have a higher capture score. When you have a bunch of monsters, you should have more of an idea about how this world works. Now is a perfect time to begin planning player moves that are specific to your world. Each ability should provide a significant benefit, but do your best to ensure that no one player move is significantly more powerful than any other.

Diversity and Inclusion

As a MM, 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, 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.

Credits

Design by Tyler Magruder

Art by Cole Riz

Logo by Cole Riz and Tyler Magruder

Special thanks to Jamila R. Nedjadi for the use of their description of SWORD DREAM

Inspiration for the logo from Lusunati

This work is based on Blades in the Dark (found at

<http://www.bladesinthedark.com/>), product of One Seven Design, developed and authored by John Harper, and licensed for our use under the Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported license

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[Support me on Patreon](#) to get the latest versions and news on this game and others

What's Next?

Later versions of the game will include more information about running the game, including expanded guidelines for creating adventures and advice for structuring your campaigns. I plan on reworking a lot of the text that I borrowed from the Blades in the Dark SRD so that it's more in line with the theme of the game. I'm also planning on expanding the Commonwealth setting, including important locations, NPCs, and more monsters. Finally, I hope to add more support for actions and adventures that do not revolve around combat.

Beyond that, your feedback can help shape the game. If you have any ideas, feel free to reach out to me on Twitter @sorryjzargo.

All future versions of Beast Dream will be paid, but buying any of the playtest versions will get you access to all of the playtest versions and the final finished version.