



Beast
An Adventure for
Cthulhu Dark

BEAST



Beast is a non-Mythos adventure for Graham Walmsley's *Cthulhu Dark*. The PDF includes a slightly modified version of the rules and a scenario wherein a small band of investigators find themselves facing a specter that has been haunting the children of a small town.

Character Creation

Pick an occupation and write a short thumbnail description of your character.

Actions

When the outcome of an action is unclear the player rolls to see how well her character did. Roll 1d6 for basic activities, or roll 2d6 and keep the higher number if your occupation gives you an edge. The result shows how well the character did, with one

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representing barely scraping by and a six marking a critical success. When looking for information, a one gives the character the bare minimum needed to advance the plot while a six represents a stunning breakthrough.

For example, a social studies teacher has gone to the library to find information about an old murder. Rolling a one, he finds that he had the wrong address for the murder site. On a four he learns that one of the detectives who investigated the crime still lives in the area. Rolling a six, he uncovers a previously unnoticed connection between the murder and the strange fire that burned Old Man Cutright's barn.

A player can roll an additional die if she is willing to risk her character's sanity and safety to succeed. The insanity die should be a different color than the other dice. If it rolls the highest number, make an Insanity roll as described below.

If you're not happy with the outcome of a character's action you can reroll the dice, adding the Insanity die to the new attempt.

Characters can also help one another. When cooperating, the players roll all of the dice they normally would for an action and the Keeper interprets the highest die.

Complications and Competition

If the Keeper (or another player) thinks the story would be more interesting if your character failed she describes how your character fails and rolls one die. If the number beats your best roll your character suffers the fate she described. The Keeper can veto a failure roll if it would completely stall the adventure.

If two characters are competing, the higher roll wins. If there is a tie, the character with the higher Insanity wins.

Insanity, Fear, and Awareness

Insanity represents the stress and fear experienced by your character as well as her connection to the Beast—her ability to perceive it and its awareness of her actions.

Your character's Insanity starts at one. Roll a die if you see experience something disturbing. If the number is higher than your current Insanity add one to your score and roleplay your character's terror.

As your character's Insanity score grows she is more likely to see the Beast directly and to feel that it is stalking her. If a character's Insanity score reaches six the Beast destroys her—snatching her away from the others and leaving grisly remains to be discovered later.

Players can try to reduce their characters' Insanity by suppressing knowledge of the Beast. If an investigator's Insanity reaches five, the character can try to hide evidence or throw the investigation off-track in order to shield the world from the horror stalking Pine Grove. Each time a character tries to suppress knowledge roll a die. If the number is less than the character's current Insanity the score drops by one point.

The Town

Pine Grove (5500 population, incorporated 1852) is a small town in north central West Virginia or southwestern Pennsylvania. The county seat of Moebius County, the town sits on rolling hills with a river running along the eastern and northern edges; steep forested hills dominate the surrounding area.

Small businesses line Main Street and the Four Winds Bar, the town's only tavern, occupies an abandoned theater. Visitors flock to Pine Grove for the annual Riding Mower Festival (second weekend in May) and Apple Days (second weekend in September). The county historical society has an archive and exhibit space above the old dime store and on special occasions has been known to display the strange warm stone Colonel Bradley found when he built his cabin in 1792. Lessard College, a small private liberal arts school, attracts students from around the region. According to local lore the doors in the college's chapel don't always open into the same rooms and books in the library sometimes contain unsettling messages for unsuspecting readers.

Several smaller towns spring up along the two-lane highways leading out of Pine Grove. Lawrence Run lies about four miles to the west along Route 17. Saint Alfonzo's Methodist Church overlooks the post office and two dozen houses from a rounded hill, and a gravel quarry sits hidden about a half mile north of the town. Visitors to the small cemetery nestled behind the church have noted that stars seem to be different colors when viewed from the site. One mile farther west travelers will find Stubbs Mountain, a tor rising above the surrounding hills. Narrow trails wind up and down the summit, created by generations of wandering hunters and a logging company that briefly operated in the area in the 1940s.

Traveling about two miles south from Pine Grove along Route 22, visitors will find Trenton and the county's only high school, home to the state champion backgammon team (1990-1992, 2008). Houses and odd businesses pop up along the roads leading to Lawrence Run and Trenton. Farther to the south the hills become rougher and houses fewer and farther between. Small logging and mining towns dot the southernmost part of the county, although their operations ended many years ago. Some residents of these towns don't like going out after dark, and avoid damaging the dandelions that grow in their yards.

A Visit to Midian School

Carla Bannister, a friend of one of the characters, teaches third grade at Midian School. She asks the investigators if they can meet her at the school one evening in mid-October after a parent-teacher conference. Bannister waits until the families leave and the other teachers turn off the lights in their classrooms and head home for the night before beginning her tale.

Bannister explains that her students started acting oddly in late September. They seemed to crowd away from the windows in her classroom and begged her to close the blinds one overcast day, and seemed reluctant to take the twisting rear staircase that students at Midian had used as a shortcut to the cafeteria for decades. During recess some of them huddled in small groups, glancing nervously at the houses near the playground and across the street at the trees dotting the campus of Lessard College. She has picked up passing references to “the Beast,” but has met with nervous silence when she’s tried to question students directly.

At first she thought it was some weird game, but two incidents have caused her to worry. An animal attacked Sasha Andrews, a student at Pine Grove High School. Sasha is a close friend of the older brother of Danny Oldaker, a student in Bannister’s class, and the attack has caused Oldaker to become more nervous about the Beast. He has been discussing his fears with other students, giving the story new life.

The second episode had a more direct effect on Carla’s class. One overcast morning a student in her second-floor classroom glanced at the window and started shrieking. Bannister sent the student to the school nurse, who learned that he had seen a pallid face peering eagerly through the window. The rest of the students were terrified. Remembering that the school gym had no windows, she quickly moved her class there and spent the rest of the day reading to her students to get their minds off the incident.

She has already tried to address the problem. At first she explained to the students that the Beast was only a game or a story, and that games couldn’t hurt them. As her students became more fearful and obsessed, however, she decided to try working with the children’s imaginations to counter the threat. She planned to pick up shiny new pennies at the bank and handed them out in class, telling the students that they would be safe from the Beast as long as they carried them. The school’s principal learned about the plan, however. Claiming that this would only feed the delusion, she prevented Bannister from handing out the coins. Even though the fear has spread to other grades, the other teachers have written it off as a weird fad that will be forgotten after Thanksgiving break.

She leads the investigators around the empty school as she explains the odd events. Bannister points out the window where the face was spotted, which looks out on an old

oak tree and a street light in front of the school, and takes them to the dark playground where clouds hide the moon as she describes the students' nervous actions. The school seems oddly menacing to the investigators during the tour. Pools of light look garish, shadows appear to flicker and shift, and faint sounds echo in the stairwells.

Despite the obvious fear she has seen in her classroom she is firmly convinced that the Beast is merely a bogymen that the children created and that now the game has gotten out of hand. She disagrees with the idea that the Beast will fade during Thanksgiving when students will have less opportunity to keep the story going among themselves. Many people in the area go hunting during the break, and Bannister believes that the notion of parents and elder siblings wandering the creature-haunted hills will only spark more fear.

Bannister has called the investigators to the school to see if they have any suggestions. She is open to any ideas, and will give the characters the contact information of other adults who are concerned about the fad if they agree to be discrete in their inquiries.

Fleeting Glimpses

Bannister provides a list of four adults whom she feels will be willing to speak to the investigators and mentions that she is going to try to talk to some others about the fad.

Alvin Roberts and Delma Chambers, bus drivers for the school system, have similar stories. Roberts describes how students are especially nervous during the morning ride to school in his route south of Trenton. They crouch in their seats and avoid looking through windows. When the flu kept a fourth-grade student away from school, the driver heard someone whisper, "Beast got her," as he pulled away from the empty stop. Chambers spotted a deer running behind a row of trees one rainy morning as she drove past Lawrence Run. A student shouted, "It's in the trees! I can see it!" and the other students immediately dropped as low as possible or even tried to crawl under their seats. She had to stop the bus and spend twenty minutes trying to calm them.

Larry Meade, the father of a second grader at Midian, explains that his son had invited two friends over for a sleepover. Meade saw them darting behind furniture to stay out of sight of windows, but assumed they were playing a game of some sort. One of the boys started to cry when a cyclist rode down the street in front of the house a little before 10:00 pm, however, and the next morning Meade found that the three had pulled their sleeping bags into a hallway that wasn't exposed to any windows.

Rachel Muir had driven her fourth-grade daughter and a friend to the mall about twenty-five miles away in Clarkston. Returning after dark, the two girls peppered her with odd questions during the drive. They wanted to know if the car could outrun an animal like a cougar and if sleeping with a Bible offered any protection (among other

queries). She felt the questions were strange and unfocused, and sensed that the two were definitely anxious.

Trying to get information from local authorities will lead to a dead end. School administrators will go so far as to threaten the investigators legally if they push the issue. Local police are vaguely aware of the stories, but will warn the investigators against doing anything that will harm students or cause them distress. Any questions about Sasha Andrews will be met with silence.

A quick glance at back issues of the *Pine Grove Picayune* reveals two odd stories that might be connected to the case. In 1905 a professor at Lessard College left the community after presenting a series of slides to a group of children during the fall festival. The images showed something slowing making its way up a hollow to a lonely house, and the professor's strange narration mesmerized his audience. The children had horrific nightmares after the show. In 1985 a fifth-grade student at Midian died mysteriously when he stayed up late to watch the old horror movie *The Star Lurker*. His parents found his corpse completely drained of water the next morning.

In the meantime Bannister has spoken to the school's counselor, the head of the local 4H, and the director of a youth center. All had picked up on the Beast story, although they feel that the kids are claiming to have encountered the creature to gain popularity or attention. Many children have sensed the creature's presence and caught fleeting glimpses but their descriptions vary dramatically. Some have seen a person with an animalistic face and a lithe flicking tail; others describe a strange loping wolf that can rise to its hind legs; one or two have seen an alien creature behind the fangs and claws.

The First Victim

Police have released very few details about the attack on Sasha Andrews, only noting that he is in the local hospital for observation and that they are working with the state Department of Natural Resources to explore the possibility that some sort of wild animal was involved.

Some persuasive prying or the right connections will reveal a little more information. Sasha had gone to the high school with three friends, and the teens had separated in the wooded cross-country trails behind the school. When the other three found Sasha again he was unconscious. He had one deep claw wound, but his clothing was not torn although it looked dirty and rumpled as if he had been struggling with someone. When Sasha regained consciousness he had no idea what had happened and only has vague memories of the time after the group arrived at the high school.

Police questioned Sasha's friends, but none saw anything unusual until they found Sasha. The four are part of the self-proclaimed "Fiend Club" and spend their spare time

talking about science fiction books, playing roleplaying games, and watching old horror movies hosted by the Commodore, a public-access personality who sometimes addresses sleepy viewers by name and who maintains a cryptic one-sided dialogue with an unseen companion named Mister Stumpy.

Ren Oldaker, a sixteen-year old, lives about half a mile from the the high school. Sasha and the others were staying at Ren's house overnight on the Saturday of the attack, and had slipped out a little after one o'clock Sunday morning. Danny, Ren's younger brother, has told the Fiend Club about the Beast. The other two members of the club, fifteen-year-old fraternal twins Sarah and Liam Mead, live near Lessard College.

Sarah and Liam's parents will prevent the investigators from speaking to the twins, although the two will try to arrange a nighttime meeting somewhere at the college to tell their story. Ren's parents are concerned that the authorities may try to blame their son for the incident, but are open to him meeting with the investigators.

Talking to Ren will prove fairly straightforward. He will meet with the characters in the recroom in his family's house. With his dad lurking on a couch to keep an eye on the conversation Ren will settle down at a table and explain what he saw that night. Rulebooks for a fantasy roleplaying game called *The Tree of Aellyx* and some old maps litter the table. If asked, Ren will explain that he has been running a campaign based on the legend of Pellinore and the Questing Beast, an Arthurian legend about a king who spent his life tracking an elusive magical creature.

As Ren tells the tale his father remains silent but fidgets in his chair, looking around the room uncomfortably and quickly turning his head to catch half-heard sounds. Even though the room feels cozy when the investigators first enter it becomes more menacing as the teen talks, feeling oddly isolated and vulnerable especially if the interview takes place after dark.

If the characters meet Sarah and Liam at Lessard College the meeting will be fearful and furtive. The twins use walking the family corgi as an excuse for leaving the house at night, and will not meet up with the PCs until between 10:00 and 10:30 at night. They will walk around a large green quad as they talk, moving between the pools of light cast by streetlights. During the conversation the twins will keep glancing at the shadows and nervously keep an eye on rows of bushes or clumps of trees. The investigators will start to have an uneasy feeling as well. Fallen leaves will rustle in the distance, shadows will seem to move, and a sense of some sort of presence will gnaw at the PCs. The Keeper should play this as ambiguously as possible though. The wind could be moving branches, the characters could be picking up some of the kids' fears, or there could be something stalking them as they stroll through the darkness.

All three tell the same story. Over the past few weeks Sasha had taken an interest in Danny's stories about the Beast. On the night of the attack the group had met at Ren's house to play *The Tree of Aellyx*. Liam or Sarah joked about seeing the Beast running alongside their parents' car when they were driving over, and Ren joined in by saying that the Beast was peeping through windows at them while they talked. Sarah, Liam, and Ren all remember Sasha being agitated that evening, but they thought at the time that he was annoyed that they weren't playing the game. Even though they were joking all three say that they started to feel a little odd when they talked about the creature and eventually the group started watching TV to get their minds off the idea of something lurking outside.

The group left Ren's house a little after midnight to play spotlight in the trails behind the high school. Sasha was anxious during the walk to the school, saying at one point that he thought someone was hiding in the trees and asking Ren if he had seen "red eyes," but the others thought he was making a belated joke. The others lost sight of him when they split up to start the game. After playing for about half an hour they realized Sasha was missing and began searching the area. The teens found him unconscious in an entryway to the football stadium where he had apparently tried to find shelter.

Even though they didn't take the stories about the Beast seriously all three have had odd experiences since the attack. Ren found a jacket that had been in his closet dragged halfway under his bed and the curtains opened in his bedroom after slipping to the kitchen for a late night snack. He also thought he saw someone crouched in the back of the garage when he went to find a light bulb one night, but the shape vanished before he could see it clearly. If pressed, Sarah and Liam will tell the investigators that the night before their interview they had gone to the grocery store with their mom. When driving home they heard an ominous, satisfied sigh from the back of the SUV. Later the same night they heard something running across the roof of their house. All feel that they are being watched, but the sensation seems to be stronger for Liam and Sarah, who have taken to sleeping in their family's living room in order to avoid being alone at night.

The Scene of the Crime

Sasha's injury is the first tangible proof that something is stalking Pine Grove. Local police and school officials want to cover up the attack in order to prevent students from panicking and to give state wildlife officials time to find a rational explanation for what happened. They will strongly discourage the investigators from speaking to other students and the high school will call the police if they find the characters snooping around the woods where the attack took place.

The characters can still search the area, though they will find themselves either visiting at night or on a weekend when no students or community members are around the

school. They can also park near Ren's house and reach the trails through the woods. If she feels that word won't reach the school Bannister will join the investigators when they explore the area. The parents of the Ren, Liam, and Sarah will vigorously object to any of the teens revisiting the woods. Because of his location Ren can slip away from his house and guide the party; it will be almost impossible for Sarah and Liam to join.

The trails run almost a mile from the school to a church with a small graveyard. During the day the trails are disorienting. Even with the school and the old church as landmarks the investigators find that the larger paths twist and intersect with one another in odd ways, and the smaller trails that branch into the trees turn the area into a maze. Leaves rustle away from the trail, branches block the investigators' way, and skittish deer occasionally burst from the trees.

The trails are claustrophobic at night. Flashlights highlight pale bare trees and illuminate only about ten feet of the trail at a time. Shadows sometimes flicker and twist in unexpected ways, and the woods conceal the moon. The forest seems too quiet, making any conversation or sound made by the investigators feel like it will draw unwanted attention.

Following the trail to its end, the investigators find themselves in the parking lot of a small white clapboard church (a narrow gravel drive connects the church to Route 22). Under other circumstances it would look rustic and quaint, but during the visit the investigators will feel tense, as if something were circling just beyond the tree line waiting for the them to leave the sanctuary provided by the building. A cemetery stands behind the church. A dirt path runs between the graves, which are surrounded by pine trees, and leads to a hill topped by a twisted sycamore tree. The most recent graves in the cemetery date to the early 1970s. The stones are mostly in good repair, although a few show damage from misguided efforts to clean them, and flowers dot a few of the graves.

If Ren is with the investigators he will explain that the Fiend Club sometimes visited the cemetery to tell ghost stories and try to see shooting stars. The last time they set foot there was about a week before any of them first heard of the Beast.

A lone grave occupies the top of the hill behind the church. A slab of sandstone lies flat on the ground with only the year 1773 crudely carved into its face. The investigators find a couple of burned-out tealight candles on the the marker along with some scribbled notes wedged under the edge of the stone. Most have the same depth as a yearbook greeting, but one reading "Stumpy says the call is coming from inside the house" seems to have dried blood smeared on the paper.

The hilltop is 600 feet from the church parking lot and its lone dusk-to-dawn light. Woods surround the hill on three sides, and the south side of the hill slopes to the rest

of the cemetery. If the investigators poke around the hill at night something crashes from the forest and runs in the direction of the old Methodist church. A roll of a five or a six gives a character a glimpse of the creature as it rushes by (players are more than welcome to roll Insanity dice if they want to see the creature), but even successful rolls only give a quick impression of darkness, twisted sinews, and claws. It darts past the investigators and down the hill to the main body of the graveyard, where the party can catch hints of movement behind gravestones and bushes.

The investigators can move into the trees and working their way back to the trail. The Beast will vanish, although the characters will have no way of knowing this. They will stumble over twisted roots and branches and startle a raccoon as they scramble through the dense trees.

Trying to reach the trail by going back through the cemetery keeps the investigators in the open and is faster, but it takes them closer to the Beast. They see movement in their peripheral vision as they move down the slope, but the movements don't make sense. The creature appears on one side of the cemetery only to flit into view on the other; dark shapes vanish behind tiny stones; a wisp flies across the moon. While they strain to catch sight of the Beast their other senses come into play. Something lightly brushes against an investigator's cheek. Another hears panting or a strange cooing. Someone might smell rotting flesh. They experience suggestions of the Beast's presence, and their perceptions will be confused and contradictory.

If the investigators search the area during the day there is a chance they will see what looks like a large grey dog running around the church while they look at the graveyard. Anyone rolling a five or six will see the shape in the distance, although it runs behind the church if the party approaches. Anyone who used an Insanity die during the roll will hear strange gibbering speech when they pass the old building even if the Insanity die wasn't the highest number rolled.

Any overly curious investigators who break into the old church will find little to reward their efforts. Beyond the usual furnishings and a small library of about fifty books the building is empty. The lights work, as does the plumbing in the modest restroom, but the church has no phone. As the investigators search a bird hits a window near the old choir stall.

The Presence

During the first few days of the investigation the characters notice that Bannister looks tired. She has been having trouble sleeping, she explains, due to the stress of worrying about her students. Bannister goes on to explain that odd dreams wake her several times during the night--generally vague nightmares about strange sounds echoing in

her house. On one occasion she had a more vivid nightmare in which a large cat was running around her yard while she was trapped in her house.

As they spend more time working on the case, the characters begin having similar experiences: glimpses of fast fluid movement at night, a sense of being chased while riding in a car, the sound of something crawling on the roof as the wind whips fallen leaves across the lawn. The Beast becomes more real to the investigators as they spend more time thinking about it.

Sarah and Liam face the same problem. Their hushed conversations about the attack on Sasha and their sensitivity to one another's feelings has made them more susceptible to the Beast. Although Ren has had some of the same weird experiences since that night he doesn't have someone to reinforce the fear he feels.

For the most part these encounters are limited to quick glimpses of movement, half-heard sounds, and a sense that something is lurking just outside of the investigators' peripheral vision. The first direct contact comes a few days after the characters visit the trails above the school and the old church. The Beast attacks one of the investigators during the night. During the fight the victim never gets a clear view of the creature – only an impression of claws and fangs along with a fleeting image of a tail whipping back and forth.

The next night all of the investigators are together the Beast lays siege to them. The details can vary dramatically depending on where they have gathered and how the Keeper wants to play the scene. Maybe the Beast traps them in a small doughnut shop just outside of town, the other patrons growing in awareness as the investigators look for a way out. The creature could attack them in a car at night. It could corner them in a lonely house (Carla Bannister lives on an isolated road outside of town), leaving them trapped until dawn. The first signs of the Beast's presence will be subtle: a scratching at the window, a dog barking outside only to suddenly go silent.

Atmosphere is key. The Keeper should play up the way small sounds and events build to the Beast's arrival and emphasize the confusion felt by the investigators. The experience should mostly rattle the characters, although if one of the investigators or an NPC is separated from everyone else while afraid he or she will be attacked. If an investigators Sanity score has crept too high during the course of the adventure this would be a good time for the Beast to make a dramatic direct attack: lunging through a window to grab the screaming character or dragging them into another room.

Banishing the Beast

The speed and confusion of the attack should be an indication to the PCs that they cannot fight the Beast directly – it manifests in such an elusive manner that a physical

confrontation is impossible. Based on the creature's ability to become more real and more menacing as belief spreads, the investigators will need to find a creative solution.

A couple of possible ways of facing the beast have emerged from the investigation. Carla Bannister thought of one solution, although she never had an opportunity to use it. Her plan to use pennies as protective talismans has potential, although students will be reluctant to accept shiny new coins as magical artifacts. The investigators and Bannister must work to convince them. Using less common coins—such as old wheat pennies or bicentennial quarters—will make the task easier.

The investigators can also work through the older children to find a solution. The Fiend Club accidentally summoned the Beast. Now that they've experienced the creature and the reality of their fantasy they can try to summon Pellinore to confront the Beast.

The Keeper should let the players run with any other ideas they have. Anything that gives the children of Pine Grove a sense of protection from the Beast or that diverts their attention from the folktale will weaken the creature. Because the Beast will fade away, there will not be a climatic confrontation unless the investigators have summoned Pellinore. The monster will simply disappear from the lore of the schoolyard, letting the town return to normal as the leaves begin to fall and nights lengthen.

Inspirations

Beast grew out of series childhood games. In first grade we played “Bloody Murder” on bright warm afternoons at Patrick Frame’s house. One person counted “One o’clock, two o’clock . . . eleven o’clock, twelve o’clock midnight! Bloody murder!” and chased the other players. The count was so scary that the game usually ended after a few seconds when people ran screaming into walls or froze in terror. A few years later Jason Kalafat and I would pretend a huge cat was chasing us—staying just out of sight but always a few paces away.

Tales of the Abaguchie—a cat-like local monster—were popular when I was in high school, inspiring discussions in the hallways and odd speculation in the local paper.

The inspiration for Midian School closed about ten years ago. An abandoned church near the school terrified us. A rumor started that if you looked through one of the basement windows you could see a body wrapped in a tarp. A congregation bought the building and refurbished it, but I still feel vaguely uncomfortable passing the building when I visit my hometown.

A gaming group that William Bradley, Matt Haas, and Larry McNeely, and I created in high school inspired the Fiend Club. The fictional club’s name comes from a song by the Misfits.