

Beastwalkers

This is a setting module for use with NUGGET, a trimmed-down version of the LODE system, available for download from www.silverbranch.co.uk. It's a sort of modern-day fantasy supernatural thingy. This module may evolve over time: this is version 1.0.

Werewolves? Pah! Sometimes you don't know whether to be angry that the humans have forgotten the rest of you, or glad that it gives you the breathing room to get on with your job.

You are a member of a strange breed, the Children of the Moon, the Beastwalkers; part human, part animal, part spirit, yet different from all. Your kind has always lived among humans - helping, harming, guiding, tricking, watching. Once you were better known. Now, in "civilised" places, both sides are happier if your existence is unsuspected.

The game takes place in a world and time more or less like our own.

Faces

You do not shapeshift, technically, though it appears that way. You have a human face, a hybrid face and a beast face - they are all you all the time, but you only present one to the visible world and your abilities reflect it. With an effort of will you can turn a different face to the light.

That light gives you a default form - it's harder to leave that form, and easier to revert back to it. The Sun, light of safe reason, strengthens the human face. The Moon, goddess of illusions and paradox, draws her children to show their truth and strengthens the hybrid face. The Moon doesn't have to be visible for its presence to be felt, just up. When she is full, it becomes hard to hold a human form.

In game terms, any change takes a Full action but a change to the default is automatic and a change away from it requires a Will roll, BD 2. Also, you can only move one step away from the default - so in the day you can be human or hybrid but at night you can also become an animal.

Character creation

Make a human character as normal using the Nugget rules. Your character has a normal occupation, though it's often on the fringes of society and hardly ever in a position of public scrutiny. You don't fit in that well.

Now do the special stuff. Pick the animal whose nature you share. It can be pretty much anything with qualities you think you can show well in play. Werewolves are possible, but there are also stories of people who turned into seals, tricksters who were ravens or hares, and animal-headed demons. An original creation is fine.

Now identify three special abilities linked to the animal's nature. One should be perceptual, like Keen Hearing or Seeing at Night. One should be physical, like Leaping, Climbing, Sprinting, Feats of Strength or Resist Poison. The third can be anything: perceptual, physical, or even mental, like Cunning or Adaptable. When you're being human you get an extra Advantage when one of those abilities applies to a task. You can apply more than one. Also, although rolls are normally "lid-on", 6's can be re-rolled for possible extra successes when you're using these abilities. When you're being hybrid you get two Advantages for these, and one extra ability tied to your physical form, which might just let you do something rather than giving an Advantage: often Teeth and Claws (+1 damage), but possibly Large, Small or other stuff. The flipside of this is that relationships with humans tend to suffer from freaking out, hunting down and destroying. Your fellows may slap you down for this, because it can affect them too. When you're being an animal you also get the 2 Advantages, and might be overlooked by humans in some situations, but it becomes difficult to interact with the human world.

Other rules

Size will come into play quite a lot in the different forms. As humans everyone is Medium, with no modifiers. **Small** comes in two levels, small dog size and mouse size. These are Advantages for dodging and stealth, but add on to incoming damage. **Large** (less common) also comes in two levels, bear/horse size and rhino/elephant size. These subtract from incoming damage but are Disadvantages for dodging and stealth.

Human weapons are only partially real to Beastwalkers, so they all get an extra Advantage for physical Resistance. However, the moon metal silver is totally real to them and bypasses this bonus.

Deathwalkers

These are your enemies. They are humans who hide their heart in something, which makes them hard to hurt or kill. They use those around them to experience normal feelings vicariously when the mood strikes them, leave a wake of trampled lives and tend to cause similar attitudes in others - they are like a spreading sickness.

More specifically, they focus all their emotions into a single thing (the Vessel) and gradually kill off emotions related to anything else. The Vessel could be an organisation, a prized object, another person - anything that can be worked for and built up. Family, friends, employees, art, leisure, philanthropy - the Deathwalker may spend time on these things, and even value them to a degree, but will abandon them without remorse if the well-being of the Vessel demands it. You know that there's a shadowy group of powerful Deathwalkers known as the Illuminati (what a sick joke). You're also

aware that they don't analyse their condition in the same way you do, because they're basically ignorant humans.

A Deathwalker is an ordinary human character apart from two things. First, they tend to have lots of mundane resources like money, henchmen, contacts in high places and so on. Second, they have a **Vessel rating** from 1 to 5 which measures their power. At 1, it might be a son who's successful in his career or a painting they own that's regarded as a great work. These people are not far removed from ordinary folks; some Deathwalker henchmen are like this. At 5, the Vessel might be a globally powerful company or a country that's active in world affairs. This extends their lifespan: in general they can live $90 + [\text{Vessel} \times 10]$ years. They do age, but remain pretty active and keep a sharp (though warped) mind. They also add their Vessel rating as Advantages for Resistance rolls. Physical and mental shock might knock them down, but they tend to bounce back up again. Even if they're "dead" they'll eventually recover to reappear in a later story (perhaps through medical minions or a lucky escape), unless their body is deliberately destroyed beyond hope of recovery.

The way to take down a Deathwalker is to attack its Vessel. The permanent rating is fixed, but the temporary rating may be reduced by mishaps, like a new product flopping abysmally, a political scandal or maybe even physical damage. Each point on the scale is a big deal, and will probably regenerate given enough time. A reduced rating makes them more vulnerable; if the Vessel is destroyed completely they are as vulnerable as any other human, and might even die outright.

Other opponents

There are **rogue Beastwalkers**, who change their agendas to pursue personal advantage or due to madness from too much exposure to urban blight. In any case, not all Beastwalkers have the same goals, and those seeking to guard humans may come into conflict with those wishing to harm them, trick them, or just guide them in a different direction.

Hungry ghosts draw on the vitality of the living, causing listlessness, sickness and possibly death. They are often tied to a particular place, person or thing and Very Very Cross about some factor of their earthly life - but these are predators sustaining themselves, not victims pleading for freedom. Their statistics are those of an ordinary person. They are normally invisible, but must appear to feed. They have a Drain Vitality skill, so you can scale their power - it's used with Will, BD 2, applying successes as physical damage. They're almost entirely insubstantial, able to pass through small openings and with 5 extra Advantages against physical attacks. However, when the Moon is visible a Beastwalker in non-human form can reduce this to 2 Advantages.

Magicians have learned supernatural abilities of some sort. They have a Magic skill, 1-4 so you can scale their power - normally used with Will at BD 2. Give them 3 general magical abilities to reflect what they can do, for instance Summon Elemental, Make Zombie, Green Lightning Blast, Mind Control. I'm not going to suggest restrictions on what they might be, because a

Beastwalkers game could have a range of styles from kung fu special effects to mystery and horror. Think about the style of yours and plan magic so as not to break it. What you leave out is probably more important than what you leave in. I do suggest keeping some sort of dreamlike quality and avoiding pinning things down too much, even if the magical style itself appears precise. Magicians could range from benevolent shamans helping their people to live in harmony with the spirits to deranged occultists seeking ultimate power. Or vice versa.

Human stupidity. Toxic dumps, criminal operations, political corruption, school bullying - all this sort of stuff is good for heroes to do something about from time to time. Let's also shoehorn into this category human attempts to find out about things they should really leave alone. That would be you. (Though it might also be dangerous science experiments.)