

Keep Going

When a pet dies, their soul must go to the garden of the Rainbow Bridge, a pet paradise where they can eat, run, and play while they wait for their human to pass away and take them across the bridge to heaven. Things don't always work out as expected, though, and sometimes critter souls can't make it to the garden without guides, old souls of pets who have made the impossible choice to leave the garden before their humans arrive to help those newly deceased pets who can't make it to the garden on their own.

Creating a critter

1. **Choose your critter's attributes.** The attributes are split into three pairs: **size/stealth**, **toughness/speed**, and **skittish/trusting**. Each pair must sum to 8, and no attribute can be lower than 3 or higher than 5.
 - Size 3 is anything the size of a housecat or smaller. Size 5 is anything larger than a large dog. Size 4 is everything else.
 - Speed 5 is anything like a rabbit that's faster than other critters its size. Toughness 5 is anything with a shell or extra thick fur.
 - Skittish critters are more aware of their surroundings. Trusting ones are better able to make friends with other animals.

2. **Choose your critter's gift.** Choose one attribute and increase it by 1. This cannot take it above 5.
3. **Choose how long your critter has been in the afterlife.** Divide 2 points between **memories** and **experience**. Newly deceased critters have 2 memories and 0 experience. Critters who have done a few rescue runs have 1 and 1. Critters who have been in the afterlife so long they've nearly forgotten their past life have 0 memories and 2 experience. **At least one critter in the party must be newly deceased**, but it can be controlled by the GM.
4. **Choose your critter's species.** If your species can **climb** or **jump** well enough to not need to test, reduce your toughness by 1 (this gives both climbing *and* jumping). If your species can **fly**, reduce your toughness and size by 1 (flying does not include climbing and jumping). These reductions can reduce skill values below 3. Do not increase the corresponding skill in the pair.
5. **Record your critter's life.** Name your critter and your human(s). If you have any points of memories, write down your **happiest memory** with your humans. If you have any points of experience, write down **what inspired your critter** to risk helping other pets.

Overcoming challenges

To overcome a challenge, the GM first sets the **difficulty** of the challenge, which ranges from 2 (trivial) to 6 (very difficult), then tells the critter which attribute they'll have to roll. The critter grabs a number of d6 equal to the attribute value plus any helping dice, chooses whether to invoke a memory (see **Memories and experience** below), then rolls them all. Every die that's **4 or higher is a success**, and every **6 allows you to immediately roll an additional die**. These dice can chain, and new dice they add can chain, and so on.

If the number of **successes equals or exceeds the difficulty**, the roll is a **success** and the challenge is overcome. If the number of **successes is less than the difficulty**, the critter **fails in an interesting way** that moves the plot in a surprising direction. Experience can be spent after a roll fails.

To **help** another critter, make your own **roll at a difficulty one less** than that of the challenge you're attempting to help with. **If you succeed**, the critter you're helping gets **+1 die**. If you fail, no effect. Helping must happen before the main challenge's roll. The base difficulty of 4 is very unlikely for a single critter to achieve without using memories or experience, so make sure to help often! And remember, failed rolls aren't the end of the world, just a fork in the road.

Memories and experience

Memories are how closely the critter is tied to their previous life, while experience is how much they've learned during their time in the afterlife.

Spend up to 1 point of **memories** before a roll to **add two more dice**. Spend up to 1 point of **experience** after a failed roll to **reroll all 1s**. Those new dice must be kept, even if they roll 1s again.

Players are encouraged to explain how memories tie into their critter's life and how experience ties into their afterlife when spending them, but it's not required, especially if they're dealing with the recent loss of a pet.

Running the game

The game begins with the newly deceased critters (those with no experience) waking up immediately after death and realizing that they're in the afterlife. Once the guide critters (those with an experience of 1 or higher) explain how things work to the newly deceased, they must all journey through the interconnected worlds of the afterlife on their way to the garden of the Rainbow Bridge, with the session ending once they arrive in the garden.

What is the afterlife like?

The afterlife isn't really *like* any one thing. The shallows are layered directly over the real world, so you can see, smell, and otherwise experience it, but you can't interact with it. Some parts are shadows of the human world, with cars, cities, and machinery that can injure critters. Some parts are wilds, full of the lost spirits of wild animals going through the motions they performed in life (including hunting, but not eating).

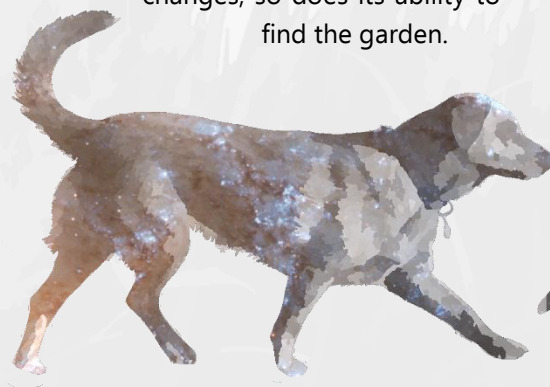
Parts of the afterlife are grounded directly in the physics of the real world,

while others are completely abstract and surreal. Think of how dreams work: every part of a dream is completely normal, especially the parts that aren't.

While animal spirits can't die again in the afterlife, they're at risk of giving in to despair. When that happens, they lose their physical form, becoming a small orb of cold blue flame known as a *wisp*. Wisps can't move or interact with anything on their own, but they can still observe and communicate. The only way to heal a wisp is to carry them to the garden of the Rainbow Bridge, and allow them to recover over time. Player critters don't need to worry about despair.

How do they know where to go?

Every animal spirit that would be happier in an afterlife with people in it instinctively knows which direction the garden is in through The Call, while animal spirits that would be happier in a world without people do not. Sometimes a critter that never had a human can go to the garden, and sometimes a critter that was loved its whole life can't! It all comes down to what the animal wants, and if what it wants changes, so does its ability to find the garden.



Adoption Record

Name _____

Human _____

Species _____

Happy memory _____

Reason for guiding _____

Attributes ->

Size _____ Stealth

Climb/jump

Toughness _____ Speed

Fly

Skittish _____ Trusting

Memories Experience

© 2023 by Julia Pitts, text released under CC BY 4.0. This game is dedicated to Batman, Rico, Snowball, Sapphire, Fiona, Odin, Shiloh, Tater Tot, and every pet that journeys to the Rainbow Bridge before their time.

Photos by szfphy, juergenbalbach65, AlbaneyColley, and NASA.